

The Church and Homosexuality: Part II

By Greg Witherow

In our first essay we reviewed sexual trends that have moved homosexuality to the center stage of the American agenda. In doing so it was demonstrated that Christendom struggled to be relevant in the last half of the 20th century. To many Catholics after Vatican II, the Church no longer appeared to take her historical dogmas seriously - so neither did the American public. Dogmas (and even architecture) were downplayed or tempered in order to appease the popular culture. But in trying to please the public the Church only bored (or confused) them. People stopped listening because the Church wasn't saying anything Oprah Winfrey couldn't say better.

But the Church of today is not the Church of the 1970's. A number of significant events caused this. The pontificate of John Paul II began a period of renewal that inspired young orthodox men to enter the priesthood. These priests revitalized many parishes. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) was published in 1993, making Church teaching accessible to the laity. In the United States Mother Angelica launched EWTN broadcasting reverent Masses, traditional prayers like the rosary and teaching in line with the Magisterium. And finally, Presbyterian minister Scott Hahn converted to Catholicism in 1986, bringing in his wake over 300 Protestant ministers and a large number of laity.

In a sad way, the priest sex abuse scandal was an important component of Church reforms. It made the Church face up to her sins and to confront the issue of gay men in the priesthood. Beginning in September 2005 investigators appointed by the Vatican visited 229 seminaries in the United States. As a result of the sex abuse scandal, Rome wanted to review how seminary candidates were screened for admission and trained for the priesthood. Amongst other things, the "Apostolic Visitations" looked for evidence of homosexuality and for faculty members who dissent from Church teaching. Catholics are waiting for what, if any, actions are set in motion as the result of the visitations. But the Bishops have learned that those who dissent from Church teaching, or who take a "don't-ask-don't-tell" tact toward seminarians are putting dioceses at risk spiritually, financially and even criminally. Dissent on gay men in the priesthood is now a high-risk gamble.

While much is yet to be done, it's undeniable the Church is undergoing a nascent renewal (at glacial speed) in the United States. But many Catholics still need to be informed (and convinced) of historical teaching on sexuality. With decades of catechetical neglect, this will not be easy. In this essay we will start to review Church teaching on homosexuality.

Homosexual Acts

The CCC devotes a separate section on our topic entitled "Chastity and Homosexuality". The first paragraphs speak directly to homosexual acts.

"2357 Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in

different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts **as acts of grave depravity**, tradition has always declared, ‘homosexual acts **are intrinsically disordered**.’ They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarities. **Under no circumstances can they be approved.**”

Here the CCC affirms homosexual acts are depraved and intrinsically disordered. Such acts can never be deemed acceptable and to engage in them is a mortal (grave) sin.

Homosexual Inclinations

But can a person with homosexual *inclinations* live a Christian life? The answer is yes.

“**2358** The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This **inclination**, which **is objectively disordered**, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, **to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.**”

“**2359** Homosexual persons **are called to chastity**. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.”

Original Sin causes each of us to be dysfunctional (to some degree) in moral judgments. For some, the effect of Original Sin is to develop a homosexual inclination. Whether this attraction is from birth or is learned is much debated. But regardless, God seeks to free people through **repentance** of sin and **conversion**¹. *Repentant* people who struggle with sexually impure inclinations (of any ilk) can live holy and chaste lives too.

The Question of a Homosexual Priesthood

While it is clear that a non-celibate homosexual man cannot be ordained into a celibate Catholic priesthood, what about a celibate homosexual? After all, vows of chastity are part of ordination. If a man seeks God's grace to keep those vows, despite deep-seated homosexual tendencies, does he qualify for the priesthood? The answer is no.

In November 2005 the Congregation for Catholic Education published an instruction entitled, “Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders”². It states (emphasis mine),

¹ For example, *some* studies link pedophilia with brain structure. But regardless, pedophilia is always a sin.
² See the US Council of Catholic Bishops web site for the full article: <http://www.usccb.org/instruction.pdf>

“In the light of such teaching, this dicastery, in accord with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, believes it necessary to state clearly that the Church, while profoundly respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who **practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies OR support the so-called “gay culture”**”.

Such persons, in fact, find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women. One must in no way overlook the negative consequences that can derive from the ordination of persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies.

Different, however, would be the case in which one were dealing with homosexual tendencies that were only the expression of a transitory problem - for example, that of an adolescence not yet superseded. Nevertheless, such tendencies must be clearly overcome at least three years before ordination to the diaconate.”

The 2005 instruction merely expanded on existing Church policy. The instruction Religiosorum Institutio dated February 2, 1961 stated the following.

“Advantage to **religious vows and ordination should be barred** to those who are afflicted with evil tendencies to homosexuality or pederasty, since for them the common life and the priestly ministry would constitute serious dangers.”³

Men with deep-seated homosexual tendencies **or even an affinity for the “gay culture”** are banned from the priesthood. But it is painfully apparent the 1961 instruction was ignored for decades. Those in charge will be judged accordingly. While most homosexual men are not pedophiles, the abuse scandal centered on men committing acts against boys. Minus gays in the priesthood, no widespread abuse would have occurred.

Summary

The **Contraceptive Mindset** has unleashed a Sexual Revolution that has yet to fully play itself out. It is not hard to imagine polygamy, legalized prostitution, unlimited abortions (think F.O.C.A.⁴) or school curriculums teaching the normalcy of the gay lifestyle as far off. There is always a next step. And public opposition to such things may someday be labeled a Hate Crime. But there is a **real** Right And Wrong authored by God, not Man. Ignoring it inevitably wounds people, families, communities and nations. The Church must again be the Church Militant, confronting society with the gospel. But before we can expect society to heed our message, the Church must first live it. Dissenters must be expunged from their influential positions in the Church, especially in our schools and universities where the faith of our young is often undermined. Tolerating dissent has shipwrecked many souls. It is time for some intolerance. (Next: Gay marriage)

³ Religiosorum Institutio is found here: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/John23/j23religios.htm>

⁴ Freedom Of Choice Act removes all limits on abortion. Candidate Obama promised to make it a priority.