ON HOMOSEXUALITY

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How frequent is homosexuality?

“A 2017 Gallup poll concluded that 4.5% of adult Americans identified as LGBT with 5.1% of women identifying as LGBT, compared with 3.9% of men.” (“Demographics”)

“In May of 2018, A Gallup poll showed that 4.5% of Americans identify as being LGTB, or lesbian, gay, transgender, or bisexual. This is more than 11 million people . . .” (“What Percentage of the Population is Gay 2021.” *WorldPopulationReview*.*com*. 2021. 7 Feb. 2021. Web.)

In a 2016 literature review, researchers stated that “there is no persuasive evidence that the demographics of sexual orientation have varied much across time or place.” (“Demographics”)

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The Diocese of Marquette, Michigan, has published a document, *Created in the Image and Likeness of God*: *An Instruction on Some Aspects of the Pastoral Care of Persons with Same‐Sex Attraction and Gender Dysphoria*. The document directs priests to bar homosexuals and transgenders from the sacraments unless they have “renounced their gender affirmation treatment or relationship.” (Sandoli)

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Here are 6 ideas that have occurred to me concerning LGBTQ issues.

(1) Is the Catholic Church’s teaching on homosexuality a changeable teaching?

According to ecclesiologist Francis A. Sullivan, “It does not seem that any moral truth has actually been defined as a dogma [i.e., as infallible].” (Sullivan, Francis A., SJ. *Creative Fidelity*: *Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium*. New York: Paulist, 1996. Rpt. Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003. 81.)

Sometimes teachings that seem unchangeable turn out to be changeable. An example is the Church’s teaching on limbo: that was the universal teaching of the Church for 17 centuries (c. 400-2000 CE), but now it isn’t. Another example is the Church’s teaching on usury. Another is the Church’s teaching on church-state separation (pre- and post-Vatican II).

The problem with knowing whether a Church teaching is unchangeable or not is that one can only discover that it is changeable if it changes. Until then, it is presumed unchangeable. Only when it changes do we say, “Oh, so it was changeable all along.” You cannot know it is changeable until change proves it not to have been unchangeable.

(2) If an LGBTQ person believes, in good conscience, that he or she should be sexually active within a committed relationship, then he or she would not sin by doing so.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* § 1790: “A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience. [This sentence is repeated in § 1800.] Yet it can happen that moral conscience remains in ignorance . . .”

§ 1793: “If . . . the ignorance is invincible, or the moral subject is not responsible for his erroneous judgment, the evil committed by the person cannot be imputed to him.”

§ 1801: “Conscience can remain in ignorance or make erroneous judgments. Such ignorance and errors are not always free of guilt.” (“Not always free of guilt” is a wording which suggests that, in the majority of cases, ignorance is free of guilt. Compare “not always free of guilt” to “sometimes free of guilt,” “not often free of guilt,” “not necessarily free of guilt,” etc.)

Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI): “one’s own conscience . . . must be obeyed before all else, if necessary even against the requirement of ecclesiastical authority. Conscience confronts [one] with a supreme and ultimate tribunal, and one which in the last resort is beyond the claim of external social groups, even of the official church.” (Ratzinger)

(3) Dissent is possible, yet Church teaching should be respected.

Just because the Church’s teaching on some matter is not declared to be infallible does not mean it can be blithely ignored. We Catholics believe that one of the ways God speaks is through the magisterium of the Church. The Church’s teachings deserve our profoundest respect and consideration, especially when we are considering dissenting from them. We humans have a profound ability to rationalize any action we want to do, even hiding from ourselves the fact that we are rationalizing.

(4) What about homosexuality as a violation of natural law?

Here is a typical quotation: “could the Church ever change its position and allow homosexuals to marry? . . . no. [Homosexual acts] are contrary to natural design. . . . some people have desires that are not in accord with nature. When these desires are acted upon, the result is an unnatural and immoral act. The Church cannot change its teaching on marriage, which is grounded in natural law. Under natural law a man can marry only whom he was designed to marry: a woman. He cannot validly marry another man any more than he could an animal or a plant. Any attempted marriage between a man and another man would be invalid by definition. It might be recognized by the state as a legitimate marriage, but it would not be so before God.” (Blackburn 53.)

Now imagine that five people are facing you, and each has a penny. All five flip their coins simultaneously, and you write down the result (say, head tail tail head tail). The five flip their pennies simultaneously another 10,000 times. The result is a bell curve. The height of the curve in the center is mixed results, and the tails are the few instances of five heads on one side and five tails on the other.

This is an analogy: if God created nature in such a way that unique and unusual patterns occur at the tails of bell curves, might he not have created human sexual nature in such a way that unique and unusual patterns occur at the tails? In other words, can we really be so sure that LGBTQs are “unnatural”?

Could the application of natural law to human sexuality be a doctrine in need of development? People in the ancient and medieval worlds saw that penises protrude and vaginas intrude: they are obviously designed to work together; hence they concluded that anything else is unnatural. But isn’t that simplistic? What about the prevalence of homosexual behavior among bonobos (one of the two species of chimpanzee)? (Bonobos “are fully bisexual: both males and females engage in hetero- and homosexual behavior . . ., including between juveniles and adults. Roughly 60% of all bonobo sexual activity occurs between two or more females.” [“Homosexual Behavior in Animals.” *Wikipedia*. 5 Dec. 2021.])

(5) What if, in fact, homosexuality is a *positive* thing—and intended by God to exist as a positive thing?

My anecdotal evidence (gays and lesbians I have known) suggests that homosexual males tend to be more caring, compassionate, and nurturing than males in general. (My anecdotal evidence suggests the same may be true of priests.) For example, there seem to be more homosexual male nurses than the proportion of homosexuals in the general population. (Male homosexuals and bisexuals are around 4% of the general population [1 in 25]. I don’t know the percentage of non-heterosexual male nurses, but my anecdotal evidence suggests something closer to 10%.) That could be because nursing has traditionally been a woman’s vocation, and male homosexuals may enjoy a feminine role. Or it could be because nursing is a caring profession, and so draws male homosexuals because they tend to be more compassionate than males in general.

Also, homosexuality seems to correlate with greater-than-average verbal ability and also to correlate with greater-than-average creativity. (Da Vinci was homosexual, Michaelangelo may have been, etc.) What if homosexuality is a naturally-occurring exceptional state which God intends as a way to further enrich human culture?

Obviously, we need rigorous studies to convert these anecdotal possibilities, if they exist, into statistical probabilities. But if they exist, then they may indicate a role for homosexuality. Perhaps, just as God’s creative plenitude has resulted in thousands of species of fish, it has also resulted in the varieties of human sexuality—so that they would be *intended* by God.

(6) Humanity in the early twenty-first century simply does not know enough about homosexuality—or human sexuality, for that matter—to make doctrinaire declarations one way or the other. Hopefully, a hundred years from now, we will have learned much more.