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The Church and Homosexuality

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Why is it, exactly, that Jesus hates gays? Why has God seen it fit to introduce natural disasters, like hurricane Katrina, to wipe out the modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah? If you are a Christian and have ever seriously asked yourself one of these questions, or one similar, you do not understand Christianity and should probably not go anywhere near a public stage. It is questions like these and the people that ask them with a straight face that have given a bad name to Christianity and Jesus Christ. What is the Church's relation to homosexuals and vice versa then? This is the question that I wish to explore in this paper."



Peter J. Santandreu

The Church and Homosexuality

Why is it, exactly, that Jesus hates gays? Why has God seen it fit to introduce natural disasters, like hurricane Katrina, to wipe out the modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah? If you are a Christian and have ever seriously asked yourself one of these questions, or one similar, you do not understand Christianity and should probably not go anywhere near a public stage. It is questions like these and the people that ask them with a straight face that have given a bad name to Christianity and Jesus Christ. What is the Church's relation to homosexuals and vice versa then? This is the question that I wish to explore in this paper.

First we need to begin by dispelling any false myths that popular society has placed on both homosexuals and the Church. We will begin with homosexuals. All homosexuals are not sexually active, i.e. every gay couple is not necessarily engaging in sexual activities. When one sees a heterosexual couple, one does not automatically assume that they have sex; the same should be true for a homosexual couple. This kind of behavior (judging others) is the Christian's worst enemy. Paul is so against this action that he does not even pass judgment on himself (1 Cor. 4-5). Judging others is probably one of the easiest things to do as a human being. We do it all the time: "that bum on the street corner should just go get a job, I hope this thug walking my way doesn't rob me, maybe someday all those devil worshipers who spend all day at the bar will go be with their families". Statements like these stink of judging and should not be the temperament of Christian persons, or anyone for that matter. The Council of Catholic Bishops speaks to this point when they say, "our total personhood is more encompassing than sexual orientation. Human beings see the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart (cf. 1 Sm 16:7).

On a more obvious note, being gay does not mean that one is a sex-maniac. This may have been the popular view at one point but today I think it has pretty much fallen by the way side. But for all of you who still might think this way, don't worry, it is ok to take a shower in the locker room (you're probably not that attractive anyway).

Moving on to the Church's view, it is here important to state that for this essay we will be working within the context of the Roman Catholic Church. That being said, this quote from the media release section of usccb.org will show the Church's sincere efforts to become more welcoming to homosexual persons: "Galveston-Houston Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/U.S. Catholic Conference, called on School Sister of Notre Dame Jeannine Gramick and Salvatorian Father Robert Nugent to 'find the way to express their acceptance of the Church's

teaching on homosexuality, as sought by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.”²⁸ With that in mind, we will now turn our attention to the great advances that the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have made in recent times with their document titled *Always Our Children*. The main purpose of this document is to help parents cope with the coming out of a son or daughter but it also gives great insight into where Catholic theology is today with regard to homosexuality.

The prevailing view has always been the one outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). The CCC uses language like “intrinsically disordered” and “great depravity” when talking specifically about homosexual acts but makes it very explicit that “They [homosexuals] must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.”²⁹ *Always Our Children* works with the CCC as a starting point but takes pains to greater realize modern discoveries and point out that homosexuality is not intrinsically evil. It states, “Generally, homosexual orientation is experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen. By itself, therefore, a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful, for morality presumes the freedom to choose. It also strives to utilize more inclusive language and terms. This is one of the first documents (if not *the* first) to use “homosexual orientation” instead of “tendencies” as explicitly stated here: “The meaning and implications of the term homosexual orientation are not universally agreed upon. Church teaching acknowledges a distinction between a homosexual “tendency,” which proves to be “transitory,” and “homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct”(Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, 1975, no. 8).”³⁰

The document goes on to affirm that one’s sexuality is a deep and powerful part of their humanity. This is essential to understanding one’s personhood and greater grasping what it means to be human.

In light of this possibility, therefore, it seems appropriate to understand sexual orientation (heterosexual or homosexual) as a deep-seated dimension of one's personality and to recognize its relative stability in a person. A homosexual orientation produces a stronger emotional and sexual attraction toward individuals of the same sex, rather than toward those of the opposite sex. It does not totally rule out interest in, care for, and attraction toward members of the opposite sex. Having a homosexual orientation does not necessarily mean a person will engage in homosexual activity.³¹

After all, the definition of chastity is “The moral virtue which, under the cardinal virtue of temperance, provides for the successful integration of sexuality within the person leading to the inner unity of the bodily and spiritual being (2337).”³² If one is gay, it is just as much her responsibility, assuming she is Christian, to incorporate her homosexuality into her life as it is for a heterosexual

²⁸ Usccb.org, United States Council of Catholic Bishops web site, 2009.
<<http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/1999/99-171.shtml>>

²⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997) 2357-8, 566.

³⁰ Usccb.org, <<http://www.usccb.org/laity/always.shtml>>

³¹ Ibid.

³² CCC, 870.

woman. This all comes from a theology of the body that unites it with the spirit and does not participate in any sort of Platonic dualism.

When we look at our fellow human we should strive to see the good; to see him or her as the temple of the Holy Spirit that he or she is. Sexual orientation is a large part of human life and it needs to be respected as such. Homosexuality is not inherently evil, people are not inherently evil, and this must be foremost in our minds. Whether or not homosexual intercourse is “disordered” or not is the topic for another time. The point is that we are not to judge, we are not to hate, and we are not to assume things that we do not know. If a person can do this, then she or he will be one step closer to living as *alter Christus*.

