



Homosexuality: The Evidence for the Ethics

from the Philadelphia Guild of the Catholic Medical Association (<http://www.cathmedphila.org/>)

Then purpose of this piece is to explain some of the scientific evidence that supports the Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality. The view of society on homosexuality has altered greatly in the past several decades, but Catholic teaching has remained true to basic principles. While this topic is widely discussed, it is important to understand the scientific facts in order to develop a properly formed opinion.

Q: What is the Church's teaching on homosexuality?

A: As noted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC:2357-2359):

“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 that "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 complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

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.

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.”

Calling homosexual acts “intrinsically disordered” is in stark contrast to many in society who consider homosexuality merely an alternative lifestyle that should be fully accepted by society. But what does the evidence show us? Here are some of the scientific facts.

Q: What is the cause of homosexuality?

A: There has been a lot of publicity recently about the existence of a “gay gene”, and the media has widely reported scientific papers that suggest that there might be a genetic predisposition to homosexuality. However, a careful reading of these papers indicates that they not prove the existence of a gay gene, and in fact the papers do not even contain such claims. Those who have carefully examined this evidence, including scientists who have tried to replicate studies implicating a genetic basis for homosexuality, have concluded that at this time there is no clear genetic basis for homosexuality (see <http://www.trueorigin.org/gaygene01.asp>). Instead, numerous studies suggest a psychological and developmental basis for homosexuality. These include factors such as: lack of acceptance and intense loneliness in same sex peer relationships; absence of close same sex friendships early in life; an emotionally distant father relationship in males; excessive fear of the father in females; alienation from the father in early childhood because the father was perceived as hostile or distant; a controlling, angry or emotionally distant mother, a poor body image, sexual abuse; parental loss through death or divorce; separation from parent during critical developmental stages. For review of the evidence and additional factors, see the Catholic Medical Associations publication, “Homosexuality and Hope” available on <http://www.cathmed.org/publications/homosexuality.htm>.

Q: Even if homosexuality isn't genetic, isn't it still a fixed orientation or can it change?

A: It is common for adolescents to have transient homosexual attractions, and then outgrow them. This can be a normal part of development. Even for individuals who have experienced same sex attraction for many years, change is possible with appropriate therapy. This was recently demonstrated in a study of such individuals documenting changes in sexual orientation (Spitzer, RL, "Can Some Gay Men and Lesbians Change Their Sexual Orientation?," *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 32:403-417, 2003). While such change occurs in a minority of individuals, it is incorrect to state that sexual orientation is a fixed, immutable characteristic of personality.

Q: Does the homosexual lifestyle have any consequences?

A: Unfortunately, homosexuals are at risk for a number of medical and psychological disorders. These include an extremely high risk for infection with sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, significantly higher rates of psychological disorders including depression, anxiety disorders, excessive anger, substance abuse problems, suicidal ideation and partner abuse than the general public. These problems do not appear to be induced by societal prejudice as they are just as prevalent in extremely tolerant countries toward homosexuality. They may be the result of a number of factors including rampant promiscuity, lack of sexual fidelity and commitment. Additional scientific information can be found at: http://www.mercatornet.com/articles/facts_not_flattery_about_same_sex_attraction/.

Q: Are there resources for someone with homosexual attraction who wants to live in accordance with the teachings of the Church?

A: Yes, there are several. One excellent resource is the organization Courage, which is an apostolate of the Roman Catholic Church that ministers to those with same-sex attractions and their loved ones. Their website is <http://couragerc.net/>. Another resource is the National Organization for the Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH), located on the web at <http://www.narth.com/>. They have several educational resources about homosexuality as well as therapists who treat homosexuality. A Catholic therapist can be located at <http://www.catholictherapists.com/>. They offer referrals to professionally qualified psychotherapists who incorporate the truths and teachings of Roman Catholicism into their practice.

Q: Shouldn't homosexuals have the same right to marry as heterosexuals?

A: Marriage, as taught by the Church, is between one man and one woman. Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition both support marriage between one man and one woman as the only morally acceptable way to form a family ("...the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'") Mt 19:4-5. The Church teaches that traditional marriage is good for the spouses, good for families, and good for society. Children reared in intact, married households are twice as likely to graduate high school, have half the risk of suffering from suicide attempts, drug and alcohol abuse and serious psychiatric illness. In fact family structure is more important than poverty in predicting psychological and behavioral health of children. Married couples are more likely to accumulate wealth, have longer lives, less illness, greater happiness and lower levels of substance abuse and depression than unmarried or cohabitating adults. Children have the emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual needs for and right to a father and a mother. Given the extensive literature on the damage done to children through father or mother absence, it is likely that purposely and premeditatedly depriving a child of a mother or a father will have serious negative consequences for that child. When Pope Benedict directed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he wrote that to deliberately deprive a child of a father or a mother was an act of violence against that child. For more information on the marriage benefits, check out the Witherspoon Institute at <http://www.winst.org/>, the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy at <http://www.marriagedebate.com/> and The National Marriage Project at <http://www.marriage.rutgers.edu/>, and the Catholic Education Resource Center at www.catholiceducation.org/articles/homosexuality/ho0067.html.