



THE DIGNITY AND VOCATION OF HOMOSEXUAL PERSONS

A Pastoral Response to the Acceptance of Homosexual Lifestyle And the Legalization of Homosexual Unions

The Nature of Marriage in the Divine Plan

The creation narratives at the beginning of Sacred Scripture reveal that God made human beings in His image and likeness. He created them male and female, equal in dignity but not identical nor interchangeable.

He made one explicitly for the other – “It is not good that the man should be alone” (*RSV*, Gen. 2:18)¹ – equal as persons, not alike but complementary. So that in relating to each other, as male and female, one would complete the other as two halves coming together to be whole.

This complementarity between man and woman, as St. Pope John Paul II has pointed out, is observed and affirmed at the biological, emotional, psychological, and spiritual levels. But it is most manifest primarily in and through the union of two complementary bodies, male and female.

“The body, which through its own masculinity or femininity right from the beginning helps both (man and woman) to find themselves in communion of persons, becomes, in a particular way, the constituent element of their union, when they become husband and wife.”²

Simply put, human beings, created by God as either male or female, are meant to complement each other in a union of the two intended from their creation. And human sexuality, characterized as distinctly masculine or feminine, is ordered by nature towards that union, of one specifically with the other.

Having created man and woman, Scripture continues, God instituted marriage as the form of life in which the complementarity of man and woman would be fulfilled and perfected. “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (*Gen.* 2:24).

And as it is ordered or directed to the union of man and woman, human sexuality is also ordered towards the procreation and education of children. It is in and through the conjugal union that God has willed to give man and woman a share in His work of creation: “Be fruitful and multiply” (*Gen.* 1:28).

In the Creator’s plan we see, therefore, that sexual complementarity and fruitfulness belong to the very nature of marriage. In other words, marriage by its very nature and intention is unitive and procreative.

Marriage is also the form of life best suited for the flourishing of children. As St. Thomas Aquinas explained, human children need, not only nourishment for their bodies, but also education for their souls. This they acquire best, according to St. Thomas, when they have both parents – father and mother, male and female – as their teachers and role models.³

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: “The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws. . . . God himself is the author of marriage.”⁴

In sum, the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is the institution established by God for the foundation of the family: “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of

the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”⁵

In other words, God created human beings as male and female, complementary and specifically for each other, and ordered or directed towards union and procreation that are intended to be fulfilled and perfected in marriage.

The Nature of Homosexuality in the Created Order

Created either male or female, and by their masculine or feminine sexuality thus directed towards union with the other who complements them, men and women are naturally drawn and relate to each other in this order.

There are some men and women, however, often through no fault of their own, who find themselves sexually attracted to individuals of the same sex.⁶

A comprehensive explanation for same-sex attraction or homosexual tendencies and inclinations remains elusive to this day, but research undertaken within various branches of science and medicine at various levels indicate that male and female homosexuality, though different in character, have both biological and environmental causes.

Sexual attraction towards the same sex is not a sin. But it is, in the light of our understanding of marriage, objectively disordered – in the sense that it is not ordered towards the union of male and female in a relationship of natural complementarity.

Homosexual acts or practices that may arise from such attraction, although they may proceed from and be motivated by genuine affection between two persons of the same sex, are similarly not ordered to the union of the two persons and to the procreation of children.

Because they are not unitive and procreative – the distinct qualities of a complementary union of man and woman in marriage – homosexual acts or practices are “contrary to the natural law”⁷. Hence, they are, from the perspective of natural law, gravely disordered and considered “sins gravely contrary to chastity”⁸.

The Catholic Church acknowledges that the number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies could be more than we think and that this inclination “constitutes for most of them, a trial.”⁹

The Catholic Church looks at her children who have deep seated homosexual attraction with motherly compassion and paternal love, even as she reminds them that in cultures that have lost sight of the richness and diversity of friendships that enhance the human condition, those who struggle with homosexuality are called to witness to the life-giving nature of virtue-based friendships not ordered to sexual acts.

Those who find themselves sexually attracted to others of the same sex are called to develop chaste friendships with both men and women.

The Church certainly recognizes that like all growth in virtue, this challenge is a difficult one that will require a robust supernatural life that is radically open to the grace and mercy of God. Frequent recourse to the sacraments of penance and the Holy Eucharist is a necessary condition for growth in holiness.

The Social Reality of Homosexual Unions

Over the past few years, in an increasing number of countries, including traditionally Catholic countries, homosexual unions have been granted legal recognition equal to that of marriage.

In our understanding of God's creation of man and woman in complementarity and in His establishment of marriage, however, there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and the family.¹⁰ A homosexual union is not and can never be a marriage as properly understood and so-called.

In response to this emerging social reality and for the guidance of the faithful, therefore, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith instructs:

*In those situations where homosexual unions have been legally recognized or have been given the legal status and rights belonging to marriage, clear and emphatic opposition is a duty. One must refrain from any kind of formal cooperation in the enactment or application of such gravely unjust laws and, as far as possible, from material cooperation on the level of their application. In this area, everyone can exercise the right to conscientious objection.*¹¹

Concretely, this means that Catholics cannot participate in any way or even attend religious or legal ceremonies that celebrate and legitimize homosexual unions. Understandably, this will be a particularly heavy cross for families that have been touched by homosexuality. The Church reaches out with compassion to these families whose loved ones have entered into such unions.

In countries where homosexual unions have not been legalized – a vast majority of countries worldwide, including the Philippines – Catholics are called to give witness to the whole moral truth about human sexuality, which is contradicted “both by approval of homosexual acts and the unjust discrimination against homosexual persons.”¹²

Moreover, Catholics are called to resist all attempts to normalize homosexual behavior and homosexual unions in their culture.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also recommends the following actions that may be effective in societies that may begin to manifest an inclination to legalize homosexual unions:

- *Unmasking the way in which such tolerance [of homosexual unions] might be exploited or used in the service of ideology;*
- *Stating clearly the immoral nature of these unions;*
- *Reminding the government of the need to contain the phenomenon within certain limits so as to safeguard public morality and, above all, to avoid exposing young people to erroneous ideas about sexuality and marriage that would deprive them of their necessary defenses and contribute to the spread of the phenomenon.*¹³

Catholics are called to oppose all gravely unjust laws that contravene both divine law and natural law – including all laws that legalize homosexual unions – because these unjust laws pervert and undermine the common good.

They are at the same time called, perhaps even more so in societies that legally recognize homosexual unions, to be charitable to every single homosexual person they know.

In particular, families with members who struggle with homosexuality are called to love them unconditionally, thereby outlasting all their other same-sex loves. This love, however, must be a love in truth that avoids praising, consenting to, or defending the so-called “homosexual lifestyle.”

Finally, given their unique vocation, Catholic politicians are obliged to oppose the legal recognition of homosexual unions in a particularly vigorous way. When legislation in favor of this recognition is first proposed, the Catholic lawmaker has a moral duty to express his opposition clearly and publicly and to vote against it. “To vote in favor of a law so harmful to the common good is gravely immoral.”¹⁴

And, in countries where legislation in favor of homosexual unions is already in force, the Catholic lawmaker must try to obtain at least the partial repeal of the unjust law when its total abrogation is not possible at the moment.¹⁵

Arguments Against the Legalization of Homosexual Unions

Marriage is a social institution that has been granted privileges and benefits by the state because it is an institution of the natural law that contributes to the common good in a way that no other relationship can, i.e., the procreation and education of children.

Marriage binds a man and a woman together for life so that the offspring of their union would have the experience and benefit of the complementary male and female presence in their total development.

Homosexual unions, on the other hand, do not have the basic biological and anthropological elements of marriage and family. They are not able to contribute in a proper way to the procreation and survival of the human race¹⁶, and thus it would be an injustice to grant them legal recognition along with the same benefits and privileges accorded to marriage.

Neither can this injustice be mitigated by allowing homosexual couples to either adopt children or use artificial reproductive technologies to engender them. Such actions would intentionally deprive these children of the experience of fatherhood or of motherhood that they would need to develop and flourish, not only as human persons, but as persons living in a gendered society where socialization involves the learning of gendered social norms.

This too would be a grave injustice, especially in light of the principle, “recognized by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that the best interests of the child, as the weaker and more vulnerable party, are to be the paramount consideration in every case.”¹⁷

It would likewise be unjust if homosexual unions were granted privileges and benefits identical to those of marriages because this act would redefine marriage, making it “an institution devoid of essential reference to factors [that are necessarily] linked to heterosexuality; for example, procreation and raising children.”¹⁸

Responding to Arguments for the Legalization of Homosexual Unions

In any debate that runs current to a proposal to legalize homosexual unions, four major arguments have been and will continue to be advanced.

The following enumeration and discussion is presented for the understanding and enlightenment of Catholics seeking appropriate responses to such arguments.

1. *To deny homosexual unions the legal status of marriage is to unjustly discriminate against homosexual persons who simply wish to express their love and commitment to their same-sex partners as heterosexual spouses do.*

The Catholic response: Distinguishing between persons or refusing social recognition or benefits to specific individuals or groups of individuals is immoral only when it is contrary to justice. Marriage is more than just the mutual affirmation one’s love and commitment to a beloved. This is why the state regulates and licenses marriage in a way that it does not regulate other types of friendship, which to some degree, all involve the mutual affirmation of love and commitment between and among friends – because only marriage can naturally and directly contribute children and a stable environment for the raising of those children, to the common good.

Denying homosexual unions the social and legal status of marriage simply affirms that these unions, as well as other non-marital unions similar to them, are not equivalent to marriage because they cannot give society what marriages can give. This is not opposed to justice. On the contrary, justice demands it.¹⁹

2. *Homosexual unions should be legally recognized because individuals, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, should have the right to do whatever they want to, if doing so does not hurt or impinge upon the freedom of others.*

The Catholic response: As the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explains, it is one thing for individual persons to freely engage in their private activities, and another very different thing for them to demand that the state sanction these activities, especially when they would harm the common good.

This would be the case if homosexual unions were legally recognized.²⁰

Rightly respecting individual autonomy does not mean that society has to do everything that an autonomous individual demands that it do.

3. *Homosexual unions should be legally recognized because they are occasions for virtue, and as such, are good for society. There are many instances where same-sex couples have clearly grown in virtue, for example, the virtues of patience, forgiveness, and generosity, in and through their efforts to build a life together.*

The Catholic response: It may be true that homosexual unions, in certain cases, may be occasions for the growth of imperfect natural virtue. However, this alone would not be a reason for granting them the legal status of marriage, because they still do not and cannot contribute to the common good in the same way that marriages do.

Moreover, the Catholic Church has the obligation to remind same-sex couples that natural virtue is insufficient for salvation and for the eternal beatitude to which everyone is called. Only the supernatural virtues are salvific.

4. *Marriage as a social institution has evolved and changed numerous times over the course of human history to accommodate the needs of a particular society and culture. Thus, marriage should evolve once more to accommodate our contemporary notions of human sexuality that recognize the fluidity not only of gender identities but also of sexual orientations.*

The Catholic response: The truth about marriage, i.e., that it is a social institution ordered towards the life-long union of a man and a woman and the procreation and education of their children, is attainable by human reason.

However, given fallen human nature, especially given the interior disarray of our carnal desires that obscures our intellect, it is a truth that is often hard to grasp, and only after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors.

Not surprisingly, therefore, there has been and will continue to be throughout history, much confusion about the nature of marriage. Nonetheless, error is not a reason to abandon truth.

A Pastoral Response to the Legalization of Homosexual Unions

In societies that have legalized homosexual unions and in societies that are inclined to grant homosexual unions legal status, the Catholic Church is called, like her Lord did in his own time, to preach the good and saving news of marriage, by turning once again to God's plan "in the beginning," especially as it has been taught in the papal magisterium of Pope St. John Paul II in his *Theology of the Body*.

To the Catholic people and to other Christian believers, the Catholic Church is called to renew her efforts to catechize the faithful about the true nature of creation and marriage. This is especially urgent for our young people who may be led into error and doubt by those social movements that want to normalize homosexuality and to legalize homosexual unions.

For the Filipino people, we the Catholic bishops will be publishing a short catechism that specifically responds in simple language to the most common questions and objections raised by critics of the Church's teaching on marriage and homosexual unions. Notably, however, we also acknowledge that the confusion surrounding the true nature of marriage cannot be driven out of the culture without the penance, prayer, and fasting of God's holy people (cf. *Mk.* 9:29).

To families with members who struggle with homosexuality and who are tempted to ostracize their sons and daughters, the Catholic Church is called to preach mercy as her Lord did, without forgetting that the mercy of Jesus is always accompanied by his challenge to the woman caught in adultery that "from now on, do not sin again" (*Jn.* 8:11).

For the Filipino people, we the Catholic bishops consider addressing the familial shame that is experienced by Filipino families touched by homosexuality. It is a shame that needs to be redeemed in Christ through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God.

Finally, and most importantly, to homosexual individuals who are tempted either to pride or to despair, the Catholic Church is called to preach the power of grace through prayer and Holy Communion, and the mercy of Jesus Christ through the sacrament of penance.

It is Jesus Christ, and he alone, who can heal every broken human heart that yearns for unconditional love and authentic friendship. It is Jesus Christ, and he alone, who faithfully accompanies the homosexual person from grace unto glory.

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, August 28, 2015



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Endnotes:

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1605.

² Pope John Paul II, "Marriage, One and Indissoluble in the First Chapters of Genesis," General Audience, November 21, 1979, Vatican City.

³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III-II.122.8.

⁴ Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 48 §1. (cf. *CCC*, §1603)

⁵ *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 1055 § 1; cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 48 § 1.

⁶ In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2014 that 1.6% of the U.S. population identify themselves as gay, lesbian, and that 0.7% consider themselves bisexual. For details, see Ward et al., "Sexual Orientation and Health Among U.S. Adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2013," *National Health Statistics Reports* Number 77, July 15, 2014.

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2357.

⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons, June 3, 2003," §4.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2358.

¹⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons, June 3, 2003," §4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, §5.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, §10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, §7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, §8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*