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Exploring the sinfulness of homosexuality

Pat Perriello | Jan. 16, 2013 NCR Today

Is homosexuality a sin? David Gibson explores this question in a Religion News Service article [1].

A few points might be worth considering.

First of all, it is worth noting that Catholic teaching does not consider homosexuality to be a sin. It is only homosexual acts that are seen as sinful. Thus, the implication is that if you are homosexual, you must have been born that way. The expectation, however, is that you must live a celibate life because homosexual acts are thought to be unnatural and disordered. It seems strange that God would create disordered creatures and then condemn them to a life of celibacy.

A second issue involves the supposed condemnations of homosexuality in the Bible. In this case, one's position is determined by how one views the Bible. The Bible was written by men -- inspired by God, but written by men who were limited by their culturally impacted understanding of the world they lived in. When Paul says women must cover their heads in church, everyone understands this as conditioned by societal expectations of first-century Palestine. It is, of course, not always easy to determine what can be considered culturally determined and what must be seen as binding for all time.

This, then, seems to be the core issue. How confident can we be that we always know the mind of God and that our understanding is always accurate and certain? For Catholics, the answer is that the pope and the bishops tell us with certainty what is truth. Protestants tend to see whatever the Bible says as binding. Yet we know that the Bible often says different and even contradictory things in different books. Slavery was acceptable within the biblical documents. As for the church hierarchy, they too have often preached different truths in different eras. The sin of usury or the charging of interest is just one example.

Is it possible that all of us might have to admit that we don't always know God's will perfectly? Even Paul told us that now we see through a glass darkly, but then we will see face-to-face. Perhaps humility might be a good virtue for all to embrace. It would not hurt for all of us, including the hierarchy, to be a little less judgmental.

I also find it interesting that Gibson mentions evangelicals, Catholics, Mormons and Muslims as strongly believing homosexuality to be a sin. He worries how one deals with this large population of believers. Truly, this is a large group, and considerably more than the one-third of the population that the survey suggests holds this position. In fact, it seems that there must be quite a few evangelicals, Catholics, Mormons and Muslims who don't consider homosexuality to be a sin.

How can this be? The real impetus for change in attitudes is coming not from religion, but from mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, friends and their experiences with those around them. As people have more and more one-on-one contact with gays and lesbians and know them as friends and family members, their perceptions change. They no longer find a litany of do's and don'ts satisfying. They recognize that these proscriptions do not do justice to the loved ones that are important in their lives.

As the real world and the people living in it impinge on our lives, we find it necessary to open our hearts and bring them into our community. I have no doubt that our God is big enough and loving enough to embrace all of his creation. The real question is what it will take for the leaders of our church to be as open and generous to all of creation as our Lord who died for us all.

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