Introduction

Special issue on same-sex attraction: An overview

REV. PHILIP BOCHANSKI

Courage International, Norwalk, CT, USA

As a priest who serves full-time in ministry to persons who are experiencing same-sex attraction and to those who love and care for them, I am pleased to be involved with and to present this special issue of *The Linacre Quarterly*, dedicated to issues associated with homosexuality and transgenderism. It could not be more timely, given the prominence of the discussion of these issues both in the Church and in secular society.

The Catholic Church has long welcomed and encouraged the cooperation of professionals, both researchers and clinicians, whose expertise can deepen our understanding of the real-life situations of those for whom same-sex attraction is a daily reality. In its 1986 *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith urged bishops to use “the means at their disposal” to provide them authentic pastoral care, including “the assistance of the psychological, sociological and medical sciences, in full accord with the teaching of the Church.”¹

I should note that I am writing here on behalf of fellow guest editors whose professional positions and licensure have been threatened in recent years by gay activists. They have asked to remain unnamed so as

not to draw further attention from those who would attempt to silence them.

In our first article, Father James McTavish provides a valuable reflection on pastoral care and spiritual support for people experiencing same-sex attractions. He writes from the unique position of being both a moral theologian, a missionary priest, and a physician involved in the care of people with HIV/AIDS. He is thus able not only to speak candidly about the spiritual and physical dangers inherent in homosexual acts and relationships, but also to provide a perspective on pastoral care that attends to the needs of the whole person. His emphasis on “spiritual accompaniment” responds well to the urging of Pope Francis in regard to care for homosexual persons. “In life, God accompanies persons,” the Holy Father told an interviewer in 2013, “and we must accompany them, starting from their situation. It is necessary to accompany them with mercy.”²

The remaining articles provide thoughtful reflection and serious research that challenge the prevailing cultural narrative in response to current questions: “How do children fare in same-sex households?” “Is surgery the right way to deal with gender dysphoria?” “Isn’t it harmful for a person

to try to diminish unwanted same-sex attractions?" "Isn't homosexuality just a natural variant of human sexual expression that the Catholic Church happens not to like?" Many in secular society tend to consider all of these questions settled, so much so that their conclusions could be used to provide a veneer of scientific justification for the majority decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court case that made same-sex marriage the law of the land in the United States. The important contributions of these authors, who write from four continents, reveal that these questions are not as cut-and-dried as the justices and the activists would have us believe.

The observations and conclusions of these articles will clearly run afoul of the conventional wisdom on the topics of homosexuality and transgenderism. But when the research is solid, men and women of faith, whether entrusted with medical care or pastoral care, need not fear to confront the culture as they strive to "speak the truth in love" as Saint Paul urged us to do (cf. Eph 4:15). Engaging in such a discussion is rarely easy. As the late Archbishop of Chicago, Cardinal Francis George, pointed out in a 2003 letter, "the Church speaks, in moral and doctrinal issues, a philosophical and theological language in a society that understands, at best, only psychological and political terms."³ Because so much of the supposedly "settled" science has been co-opted into the current political debate, it is essential to have articles like these to address opponents of the Church's teaching on their own terms. Good science can re-open closed doors and closed minds, thus providing an opportunity for philosophy and theology to have their say as well.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concedes that the "psychological genesis" of homosexuality "remains largely unexplained."⁴ This does not imply, however,

that it is entirely and permanently unexplainable, much less that psychology and medicine have nothing to say about the lived experience of those who are experiencing such attractions. On the contrary, my encounters with those who are trying to understand the place of same-sex attractions in their lives, or in the lives of those they love, convince me that they will welcome insights and data that help to place those attractions in a context, that situate and illuminate them within the broader reality of the human person, his body, soul, and spirit. Research like this helps them to formulate an answer to those in society who would call their striving for chastity (which "means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being"⁵) a hopeless effort or even a betrayal of their "true identity." It likewise gives them a perspective on themselves and their desires that allows them to love authentically, with joy, peace and real freedom. On their behalf, and in the name of all who minister to them, I wish to express deep gratitude to the authors of the articles in this issue, and to all who welcome patients who experience same-sex attractions and accompany them along the road to holiness.

NOTES

1. N. 17.
2. Antonio Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God," *America* 209:8 (September 30, 2013), 26.
3. "Response from Cardinal George to 23 Chicago Priests," December 30, 2014. <http://209.157.64.201/focus/religion/1058750/posts?page=51>. Accessed October 1, 2015.
4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2357.
5. *Ibid.*, n. 2337.