Book Review

Living the Truth in Love: Pastoral Approaches to Same-Sex Attraction. Edited by Janet Smith and Fr. Paul Check. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2015. 355 pp. \$24.95.

In August 2015, a conference titled “Welcoming and Accompanying Our Brothers and Sisters with Same-Sex Attraction” was held in Plymouth, Michigan. The conference was sponsored by the Archdiocese of Detroit and Courage International, with support from *Our Sunday Visitor* and the Catholic Medical Association. Janet Smith, one of the organizers, explained that the goal was to help Catholics find appropriate ways to show their love for those living with same-sex attraction (SSA).

The book *Living the Truth in Love: Pastoral Approaches to Same-Sex Attraction* contains essays by some of the conference speakers along with others. It was designed to spread the message of the conference. This collection of essays presents theoretical, testimonial, and pastoral approaches to the question of SSA. As I read this book, I thought we needed this twenty years ago. We should not have started our political defense of marriage before we established a comprehensive pastoral approach to care for persons with SSA and their families, but better late than never.

The Catholic community compromised its witness by not listening to men and women with SSA, not understanding their suffering, not walking with them as friends in good times and bad, and not providing a loving home for them in our churches. Persons with SSA are victims of the sexual revolution, but by no means the only ones. In fact, the majority of damage done by sins against the sanctity of marriage and life has not been done by

persons with SSA, but by those with other-sex attraction. Too often, we have ignored the 2×4 in our own eye while trying to remove the speck from our brothers. As one of the contributors put it: “The Church should be urging those who do and do not suffer from SSAs to join in binding the wounds we have all inflicted on chastity” (128).

Too many of the faithful have acted as though sex between two persons of the same sex is a different category of sin, and those caught up in it are guiltier than adulterers or fornicators, when we should have seen the SSA as wounded children. Timothy Lock, one of the contributors, encourages treating “same-sex attractions as a symptom of a broken heart” (244). Ashamed of unacceptable desires they did not choose and do not understand, rejected and alienated, the SSA found acceptance among people who were similarly wounded. Angry and resentful, they identified themselves as gay or lesbian. They rejected the society and the churches that rejected them. They acted out privately and publically.

It is not that no one tried to reach out. In 1980, Servant of God Cardinal Cooke decided his diocese needed a ministry directed toward helping persons with SSA live chastely according to the teachings of the Church. The cardinal asked Fr. John Harvey, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, who was then sixty-nine, to take up the task. A humble, pastoral priest, Fr. Harvey founded Courage and worked unceasingly until his death at age ninety-two to spread

the message of hope, patiently enduring slights from those who rejected the Courage message that chastity was possible. In 2008, Fr. Paul Check took over the directorship, but Fr. Harvey continued his involvement until his death in 2010. Perhaps now is the time to fulfill Fr. Harvey's dream that every diocese would have a Courage chapter and every priest know where to refer those in need.

Same-sex sexual acts are contrary to God's plan for love, but what then is God's plan for those with SSA? Natural law arguments are true, but hearts are moved by love. This volume can help the faithful understand how to love persons with SSA. The testimonies of those with SSA who live chastity, show that condemnation does not lead to conversion. Chastity does not come first. Grace comes first.

No one is born with SSA. Several contributors explain the various experiences commonly found in the histories of person with SSA. SSA rarely begins with lust. For some the sexual temptations are often only the obvious symptom of deeper problems. Many persons with SSA have been deeply wounded by childhood traumas, neglect, or sexual abuse. They need the Christian gift of freedom through forgiveness.

Some start by envying and coveting. David Prosen, one of the contributors, has an all too typical story: childhood abuse from an alcoholic father, confusion about his masculinity, sexual abuse, marijuana and alcohol abuse, acting out at gay bars, trying and failing to change. Eventually, he found answers:

I learned that the attraction I had toward males was actually an admiration of those who had masculine or physical traits that I felt I lacked as a child. In puberty, this admiration became sexualized. In addition, I learned that when I was living

the homosexual life style, I was coveting what other men possessed. (197)

Eve Tushnet, who calls herself a gay Catholic, offers her testimony. She remembers how the lesbian community to which she belonged felt like home, but there came a time when she knew that she needed the body and blood of Jesus. She could not explain the Church's teaching on homosexuality, but she knew that "since Jesus is the Way, I trusted the Church who gave me Jesus in the Eucharist to also hand on to me a way of life: an ethic, including a sexual ethic" (188). Yet she still feels a connection to those she left behind. Eve asks two very important questions: "How is God calling gay or same-sex attracted people to pour out our lives in love?" and "How can we make our churches refuges for *all* the exiles?" (194).

As Christians we are all called to love every one, and that includes persons with SSAs, even if they see us as their enemies and think we hate them. While the world acts as though love and sex must go together, as Catholics we know many people who live full joyous celibate lives. The Church does not call those with SSA to live without love. Janet Smith, co-editor, points out that, "there are many kinds of love and that only one kind of love should be expressed sexually" (325).

A substantial portion of the book focuses on how persons with SSA can establish healthy friendships. J. Budziszewski, a professor of philosophy, points out that "the issue is not whether two people of the same sex can be loving friends; the issue is whether sexual intercourse improves every kind of love...Of course not, rather it introduces an alien distorting element into those relationships" (126).

Several of the included authors suggested that we stop using the word "homosexuality," or for that matter

“heterosexuality,” neither should we label human persons “homosexual,” “gay” or “lesbian.” These terms are all of recent invention. Words can create the illusion of reality, in this case, they can support the myth that persons are born with unchangeable SSA. The preferable term is persons with SSAs. Human beings are not divided into two classes by their attractions, rather these are persons, whose healthy and natural desire for a relationship with their same-sex parent, relative, friend, or mentor, has been sexualized. Change has been documented, and even if a person living chastely has occasional SSAs these do not define his or her personhood.

Healthcare professionals, those in ministry, and the faithful need to understand the issue; and this volume is a good place to start. If, as Pope Francis has suggested, the Church is a field hospital (Spadaro 2013), this is surely where the work of healing should begin.

REFERENCE

Spadaro, Antonio. 2013. A big heart open to God. *America* (September 30). <http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview>.

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