

# Fortunate Families

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## Frequently Asked Questions-- and Relevant Responses -- Concerning Homosexuality and the Roman Catholic Church

**Fortunate Families**  
Casey Lopata

### 1. What is sexual orientation?

*Sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to another person.... [that is] easily distinguished from other components of sexuality including, biological sex, gender identity (the psychological sense of being male or female) and the social gender role (adherence to cultural norms for feminine or masculine behavior).*

-- American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*, July 1998

*Sexual orientation exists along a continuum that ranges from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality and includes various forms of bisexuality.... Psychologists, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals agree that homosexuality is not an illness, mental disorder or an emotional problem.*

-- American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*, July 1998

*A homosexual orientation produces a stronger emotional and sexual attraction toward members of the same sex, rather than those of the opposite sex. It does not totally rule out interest in, care for, and attraction toward members of the opposite sex. Having a homosexual orientation does not necessarily mean a person will engage in homosexual activity.*

-- *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, Third Printing, Revised, June 1998

### 2. Is sexual orientation is a choice?

*[H]uman beings cannot choose to be either gay or straight. Sexual orientation emerges for most people in early adolescence without any prior sexual experience. Although we can choose whether or not to act on our feelings, psychologists do not consider sexual orientation to be a conscious choice that can be voluntarily changed.*

-- American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*, July 1998

*Some persons find themselves through no fault of their own to have a homosexual orientation.*

-- US Bishops' Pastoral Letter, *To Live In Christ Jesus*, 1976

*Generally, homosexual orientation is experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen.*

-- *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, Third Printing, Revised, June 1998

*The number of people who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible.*

-- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2358

*Sexuality...is a fundamental dimension of every human being. It is reflected physiologically, psychologically, and relationally in a person's gender identity as well as in one's primary sexual orientation and behavior. For some young men and women, that means a discovery that one is homosexual....*

-- U.S. Catholic Conference, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, 1990, p.54

### **3. What causes homosexuality?**

*[M]ost scientists today agree that sexual orientation is most likely the result of a complex interaction of environmental, cognitive and biological factors. In most people, it is shaped at an early age. There is also considerable recent evidence to suggest that biology, including genetic or inborn hormonal factors, play a significant role in a person's sexuality....*

-- American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*, July 1998

*There seems to be no single cause of a homosexual orientation. A common opinion of experts is that there are multiple factors—genetic, hormonal, psychological—that may give rise to it.*

-- *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, Third Printing, Revised, June 1998

### **4. Why do some people discriminate against people with a homosexual orientation?**

*[F]alse, erroneous "myths" that foster discrimination against homosexual people:*

1. *Gay and lesbian people sustain certain common traits: e.g., certain “gay” names, voices, mannerisms and demeanors....*
2. *Homosexuality is caused by sinfulness....*
3. *Homosexuality is caused by mental illness....*
4. *Homosexuality is caused by an ingrained fear or dislike of the opposite sex.*
5. *Homosexuality is caused by recruitment: i.e., homosexuality- through-seduction....*
6. *All homosexual people are sexual addicts....*
7. *Homosexual people are unproductive and untrustworthy....*  
     -- Gerald D. Coleman, *Homosexuality: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice* [with Imprimatur], 1995, p. 133-4.

*Over 35 years of objective, well-designed scientific research has shown that homosexuality, in and of itself, is not associated with mental disorders or emotional or social problems.... There is no evidence to suggest that homosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to molest children.*

- American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*, July 1998

## **5. Can a homosexual orientation be changed?**

*[H]omosexuality is not an illness. It does not require treatment and is not changeable.*

- American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions About Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*, July 1998

*There is no published scientific evidence supporting the efficacy of “reparative therapy” as a treatment to change one’s sexual orientation....*

- American Psychiatric Association, *Statement*, Dec. 11, 1998

*[We] oppose any psychiatric treatment, such as “reparative” or “conversion” therapy which is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based on the a priori assumption that the patient should change his/her homosexual orientation.*

- American Medical Association, *Resolution*, 2000

*[I]t seems appropriate to understand sexual orientation (heterosexual or homosexual) as a deep-seated dimension of one’s personality and to recognize its relative stability in a person.*

- *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, Third Printing, Revised, June 1998

The United States Catholic Conference (USCC) talks of “those persons for whom homosexuality is a permanent, seemingly irreversible sexual orientation.”

- U.S. Catholic Conference, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, 1990, p.54-55

## **6. Is homosexuality a sin?**

*[H]omosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct... must certainly be treated with understanding and sustained... Their culpability will be judged with prudence.*

-- Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, 1975

*Although the particular inclination of a homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder."*

-- Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986, #3

*Generally, homosexual orientation is experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen. By itself, therefore, a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful, for morality presumes the freedom to choose.*

-- *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, Third Printing, Revised, June 1998

*[H]omosexual acts cannot be fit objects for deliberate moral choice because they are always "disordered" in the scholastic or Thomistic sense [inconsistent with the end of the venereal act [intercourse], i.e., the begetting of children.].... Archbishop John R. Quinn explains...: "[Objective disorder] is philosophical language. The inclination is a disorder because it is directed to an object [homosexual acts] that is disordered.... [T]he letter does not say that the homosexual person is disordered. The inclination, not the person, is described as disordered.... The document affirms the spiritual and human dignity of the homosexual person while placing a negative moral judgment on homosexual acts and a negative philosophical judgment on the homosexual inclination or orientation, which it clearly states is not a sin or moral evil."*

-- Gerald D. Coleman, *Homosexuality: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice* [with Imprimatur], 1995], p.94.

*I will say what the church teaches--that to be actively homosexual is wrong. But every one of us has to come to terms with church teaching and apply it to our own lives in light of our own conscience with the guidance of the church. I don't make judgments about a gay person's conscience any more than about the military man at a SAC air base or on a Trident submarine who would fire a nuclear weapon if ordered to. I think in some ways the church teaching on that is clearer than on homosexuality. Any act of war that would destroy an entire city indiscriminately is an abomination. That is what nuclear weapons are all about. Anybody who has the intention of using such weapons is, in my judgment, in a situation that is drastically evil. And yet I cannot judge another person's conscience. If that person comes to communion, I cannot refuse.*

-- Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, *National Catholic Reporter*, Nov. 4, 1994, p.6

*In fact, circumstances may exist... which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual [engaged in homosexual activity] in a given instance.*

-- Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986, #11

## **7. Does the Bible condemn homosexuality?**

The 1986 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Letter claims six scriptural passages say "homosexual behavior" is immoral (Gn 19:1-11; Lev 18:22, 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:9-10; Rom 1:26-27). But this is disputed by a number of biblical scholars and theologians.

Key points made by biblical scholars such as Derrick Bailey, Victor Paul Furnish, James P. Hanigan, Daniel Helminiak, H. Darrell Lance, and Robin Scroggs include:

- 1) There are translation difficulties. For example, it was 1946 before the term "homosexual" first appeared in an English translation (1946 Revised Standard Version).
- 2) Homosexuality is not a prominent biblical concern. The prophets, the gospels, and Jesus say nothing about homosexuality.
- 3) These six scriptural texts are not in passages dealing with moral principles, but appear in contexts where the focus is something else. For example, most biblical scholars believe the primary sin of Sodom is inhospitality. Jesus implies that in Lk 10:8-12 (If not welcomed in town, wipe dust of feet in protest. "I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town."). None of the 21 later Hebrew Scripture references to Sodom even mention homosexual acts.
- 4) The biblical writers had no concept of homosexual orientation. Scientists first began to understand homosexuality as an orientation in the mid-to-late 1800's. To biblical writers same-sex sexual activity was probably considered the distorted acts of heterosexual people.

-- Summarized by Casey Lopata, *Fortunate Families*

*[T]he Bible takes no direct stand on the morality of homogenital acts as such nor on the morality of gay and lesbian relationships as we conceive them today.... That is all that can be said about biblical teaching on homosexuality. If people would still seek to know if gay and lesbian sex in itself is good or evil, if homogenital acts per se are right or wrong, they will have to look elsewhere for an answer. For the fact of the matter is simple enough. The Bible never addresses that question. More than that, the Bible seems deliberately unconcerned about it.*

-- Theologian Daniel Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*, April 2000, p.132-33

*While the Scriptures... yield at most a strong presumptive bias against homosexual acts, the texts alone... do not settle the issue of morality of homosexual behavior and relationships beyond all question. One is forced to agree, at least in a qualified way, with [Union Theological Seminary scripture scholar Robin] Scroggs' conclusion that "Biblical judgments against homosexuality are not relevant to today's debate. They should no longer be used in... discussions about homosexuality... not because the Bible is not authoritative, but simply because it does not address the issues involved."*

- Duquesne moral theologian James P. Hanigan, *The Test Case for Christian Social Ethics*, 1987, summing up the conclusions of a number of scholars, p.41

## 8. Does a person commit a sin if he or she engages in sexual activity outside of marriage?

*Homosexual activity... as distinguished from homosexual orientation, is morally wrong. Like heterosexual persons, homosexuals are called to give witness to chastity, avoiding, with God's grace, behavior which is wrong for them, just as nonmarital sexual relations are wrong for heterosexuals. Nonetheless because heterosexuals can usually look forward to marriage, and homosexuals...might not, the Christian community should provide them a special degree of pastoral understanding and care.*

- US Bishops' Pastoral Letter, *To Live In Christ Jesus*, 1976

*In fact, circumstances may exist... which would reduce or remove the culpability of the individual [engaged in homosexual activity] in a given instance.*

- Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, 1986, #11

*For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: "Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."*

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1857

*Pastoral care does not consist simply in the rigid and automatic application of objective moral norms. It considers the individual in his (or her) actual situation, with all his (or her) strengths and weaknesses. The decision of conscience... can only be made after prudent consideration of the real situation as well as the moral norm... the pastoral counselling of homophile persons cannot ignore the objective morality of homosexual genital acts, but it is important to interpret them, to understand the pattern of life in which they take place, to appreciate the personal meaning which these acts have for different people...*

- Catholic Bishops of England and Wales Catholic Social Welfare Commission, *An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People*, 1979

*When one is dealing with people who are so predominately homosexual that they will be in serious personal and perhaps social trouble unless they attain a steady partnership within their homosexual lives, one can recommend them to seek such a partnership and one accepts this relationship as the best they can do in their present situation.*

- Fr. Jan Visser, co-author of the 1975 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics*, quoted by Sean O'Riordan, C.Ss.R., in *The 'Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics': A Discussion*, James McManus, C.Ss.R., Sean O'Riordan, CSs.R., and Henry Stratton, *The Clergy Review*, London, June 1976, v. 61, no. 6, p. 233.

*The pastor may distinguish between irresponsible, indiscriminate sexual activity and the permanent association between two homosexual persons, who feel incapable of enduring a solitary life devoid of sexual expression. This distinction may be borne in mind when offering pastoral advice and establishing the degree of responsibility....*

-- Catholic Bishops of England and Wales Catholic Social Welfare Commission, *An Introduction to the Pastoral Care of Homosexual People*, 1979

## 9. What about conscience?

*A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his [sic] conscience. If he were to deliberately act against it, he would condemn himself.*

-- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 1790

*If a man (sic) is admonished by his own conscience—even an erroneous conscience, but one whose voice appears to him as unquestionable—he must always listen to it. What is not permissible is that he culpably indulge in error without trying to reach the truth.*

-- John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 1994, p. 191

## 10. Can an openly gay person be a faithful Catholic?

*[Homosexual persons] have a right to respect, friendship and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community... [B]ecause heterosexuals can usually look forward to marriage, and homosexuals... might not, the Christian community should provide them a special degree of pastoral understanding and care.*

-- US Bishops' Pastoral Letter, *To Live In Christ Jesus*, 1976

*[A]ll homosexual persons have a right to be welcomed into the community, to hear the word of God, and to receive pastoral care. Homosexual persons living chaste lives should have opportunities to lead and serve the community.... Chastity means integrating one's thoughts, feelings, and actions, in the area of human sexuality, in a way that values and respects one's own dignity and that of others.*

-- *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, Third Printing, Revised, June 1998

*To our homosexual brothers and sisters.... We are called to become one body, one spirit, in Christ. We need one another if we are to "...grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love" (Eph 4:15-16).*

-- *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, Third Printing, Revised, June 1998

## 11. Are civil rights for homosexual people special rights?

*Homosexual [persons] have a right to respect, friendship and justice.*

- US Bishops' Pastoral Letter, *To Live In Christ Jesus*, 1976; and U.S. Catholic Conference, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, 1990, p.55

*The teaching of the church makes it clear that the fundamental human rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any form of injustice, oppression, or violence against them. It is not sufficient only to avoid unjust discrimination.... Nothing in the Bible or in Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.*

- *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, Third Printing, Revised, June 1998

*The number of people who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.*

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2358

*We call on all Christians and citizens of good will to confront their own fears about homosexuality and to curb the humor and discrimination that offend homosexual persons.*

- U.S. Catholic Conference, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, 1990, p.55

*Nothing in the Bible or in Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors.*

- *Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*, NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, Third Printing, Revised, June 1998

Seventeen states (CA, CT, HI IL, ME, MD, MA, MN, NV, NH, NJ, NY, RI, VT, WA, and WI) and the District of Columbia have laws that forbid discrimination against gay and lesbian people in housing, employment, credit and public accommodations. Except for MD, NV, NH, WI, and NY in some cases, they also forbid discrimination based on gender identity. In other states, employers can legally fire persons who simply self-identify as gay, regardless of job performance.

- Human Rights Campaign web site

## 12. Must a Catholic oppose gay rights legislation, such as legislation that permits civil marriage for same-sex couples or allows adoption by LGBT persons?

*The usages of society are to be the usages of freedom in their full range. These require that the freedom of the human person be respected as far as possible and curtailed only when and insofar as necessary.*

-- Vatican II *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, n.7

*It is not the direct function of the Church to create a social order, any more than it is the direct function of the state to save souls.*

-- John Courtney Murray, "The Problem of State Religion,"  
*Theological Studies*, 12, (1951)

*[T]here are studies which have had some success in demonstrating that the decriminalization of homosexuality and the adoption of gay and lesbian rights ordinances do not have an appreciable effect on the general population's willingness to enter into marriage, to raise families, and to do both of these without interference; nor do they entail more public solicitation, an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, or other 'negative consequences so often detailed in parliamentary debates and arguments of opponents' of the gay liberation movement. In light of this research, allowing oneself to be guided by the fear that gay rights legislation will sound the death knell for marriage and the family is at least as problematic as opposing the legal availability of contraceptives for the same reason.*

-- Richard Peddicord, *Gay & Lesbian Rights: A Question: Sexual Ethics or Social Justice?*, 1996, p.183

*If...one accepts that people have the right to follow their conscience on such an important matter as their religious affiliation and practice...it would follow that one should be free from societal and (or) governmental interference in terms of a conscientious decision to enter into an intimate relationship with a member of the same sex.*

-- Richard Peddicord, *Gay & Lesbian Rights: A Question: Sexual Ethics or Social Justice?*, 1996, p.184

*There is no moral obligation to enact public policy to prohibit an act simply because it is immoral. Rather, there is a moral obligation to prohibit an act only if 1) the act poses a real and serious threat to society, and 2) prohibition of the act doesn't result in greater harm to society.*

-- Paraphrase from John Tuohey, "The CDF and Homosexuals: Rewriting the Moral Tradition," *America*, September, 1992

*Support for gay and lesbian rights legislation and (or) municipal ordinances is well within the parameters of Catholic moral teaching.... [I]t is inconsistent for members of the American Catholic hierarchy to call for justice for gay people and then attempt to block the legislation which would serve to ensure this justice.*

-- Richard Peddicord, *Gay & Lesbian Rights: A Question: Sexual Ethics or Social Justice?*, 1996, p.185

### **13. Can Church teaching on homosexuality ever change?**

*No doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless it is clearly defined as such.*

-- *Code of Canon Law*, 1983, Canon 749 §3

*We need to learn more about this reality. I think the church's present disposition is based on a certain body of facts and experience that's to be honored and I intend to*

*honor it. But we need to continue learning from new facts and new experiences and I don't know with enormous clarity what tomorrow's church might say about the issue we're talking about today.*

-- Bishop Matthew H. Clark, *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, Feb. 19, 1997

*That development has occurred in the past is beyond dispute.... [T]hese five examples illustrate the development of moral values so that the impermissible becomes permissible (certain marriages, once classed as adulterous; lending with the intention to profit from the loan); the permissible becomes impermissible (slaveholding; the common use of the death penalty); and the obligatory becomes forbidden (the state repression of heresy). The developments depend, in part, on changes in social conditions. They also depend, in part, on change in perspective and theological analysis. For example, the developments on usury were facilitated by analyzing not the loan transaction but looking at the loan from the perspective of the lender. The developments on adultery were facilitated by discovering in the pope a power to dissolve certain marriages. The developments on the death penalty, religious liberty and slavery were facilitated by greater insight into the demands of human nature. In every instance, too, it may fairly be contended, the developments have reflected a deeper insight into the Gospel, a fuller realization of its message, a greater conformity to Christ.*

-- John T. Noonan Jr., "On the Development of Doctrine," *America*, April 3, 1999

*[T]he Church can combat the evil of prejudice against homosexuals by strongly proclaiming the gross evil of prejudicial attitudes and conduct toward lesbians and gays; by fostering legislation...to remove systemic prejudice; by making efforts to purify of all prejudice the manner in which it conveys its moral teaching on homosexuality; by encouraging empirical research on homosexuality and the ways to combat prejudice against lesbians and gays; and by fostering ongoing theological research and criticism, with regard to its own theological tradition on homosexuality, none of which is infallibly taught.*

-- Washington State Catholic Conference, *The Prejudice Against Homosexuals and the Ministry of the Church*, 1983, 2b