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WHY ARE HOMOSEXUAL ACTS WRONG?

by Brian W. Harrison

Since the beginning of the third millennium, along with the upsurge in Western society of legislation elevating same-sex relationships to the civil status of “marriage”, it seems that those defending the traditional understanding of the family and sexual relationships – in various fields such as law, philosophy, theology and political organization and lobbying – have focused their attention mainly on the nature and definition of marriage itself. This endeavor is necessary, and indeed, a matter of pressing urgency. Confronted by today’s barrage of fallacious but plausible media propaganda in favor of ‘gay marriage’, we need to cogently articulate and widely disseminate solid arguments that uphold the true definition of this natural institution and explain why homosexual alliances can never meet that definition. This publication has made its own contribution to the contemporary campaign in defense of true marriage.¹

However, this emphasis on clarifying *what marriage is* needs to be complemented by argument at a more fundamental ethical level. We need to explain not only why homosexual acts are *non-marital*, but why they are *immoral*. Much recent argumentation in the public square against same-sex ‘marriage’ prescind altogether from the question of whether homosexual activity is in itself morally reprehensible. Other apologists for authentic marriage sometimes leave the impression that homosexual acts are morally wrong *precisely insofar as* they are non-marital, i.e., that their sinful character flows logically and ontologically from the prior definition of what marriage is, and from the exclusion by both natural and divine positive law of all sexual activity outside of marital intimacy. Based on the truth (knowable both from philosophy and revelation) that marriage is essentially the union of a man and a woman, the argument can be expressed summarily as follows:

Major: All sexual acts other than marital acts are immoral.

Minor: No sexual act between same-sex couples is a marital act.

Conclusion: All sexual acts between same-sex couples are immoral.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with this syllogism as far as it goes. Both premises are doctrinally true and the conclusion follows logically from them. But such an argument is incomplete and inadequate. Morally speaking, it by no means tells the whole story. For on this basis alone, homosexual acts would be essentially no worse than simple male-female fornication (“pre-marital sex”, in modern parlance). And such acts would presumably be less morally objectionable than adultery insofar as they do not violate any solemn vows of exclusive fidelity.

Such an evaluation of homosexual activity fails to fully do justice to the witness of Scripture, Tradition and the Western *philosophia perennis* regarding the exigencies of the natural moral law. Sodomy is, but fornication is not,

¹ Cf. M. Buckley, “The Reason and Purpose of Matrimony”, *Living Tradition*, no. 144, January 2010, pp. 1-10. Accessible online at www.rtforum.org/lt/lt144.html.

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denounced in the Bible and Catholic tradition as one of the four “sins that cry to heaven for vengeance”² In his classic treatment of this question, St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that the kinds of sexual acts from which generation can never follow are “the most grave and shameful” of the various types of lust, because “they transgress that which has been determined by nature with regard to the use of venereal actions”.³

In other words, the first and most basic thing we learn and understand about our own genital organs is that they are designed by the Creator for the kinds of acts that can sometimes procreate children. That purpose is inscribed in their very nature and is naturally understood from their very design, use and biological operation, without the need for further reasoning processes. Aquinas continues, “With regard to the other species of lust [i.e., the kinds of genital acts which, although sinful, do not *per se* render procreation impossible], they imply a transgression merely of that which is determined by right reason, on the presupposition, however, of natural principles”.⁴ In other words, the ethical bond between sexual activity and marriage is established and known, at the level of natural law, by a *process of reasoning*: reasoning, that is, based on experiential, practical knowledge of what sort of male-female relationship provides the best and most stable protective environment for raising a number of offspring who each need about two decades to reach maturity. St. Thomas, while recognizing, of course, that all sin offends God, argues that the sins which rule out the basic good of procreation – a purpose known immediately from nature itself – are a *direct* affront to God as Creator, and are thus analogous to sacrilege. But this, he says, is not true of those sins of lust which directly violate only right reason. The latter are sins against our neighbor, like those prohibited in the last seven commandments of the Decalogue, while unnatural (anti-procreative) sex acts are *per se* similar to the first three commandments: sins against God rather than our neighbor. Indeed, Aquinas says such acts are *worse* than sacrilege because, being unnatural, they more directly and obviously offend God than the latter sin (which consists in the irreverent treatment of a person, place or thing specially consecrated to God). For, as in the moral evaluation of adultery and fornication, a secondary reasoning process – in this case about what is or is not fitting in matters related to the worship of God – is also necessary in order to establish and understand the malice of sacrilege:

Just as the ordering of right reason proceeds from man, so the order of nature is from God Himself: wherefore in sins contrary to nature, whereby the very order of nature is violated, an injury is done to God, the Author of nature. Hence Augustine says (Conf. iii, 8), “Those foul offenses that are against nature should be everywhere and at all times detested and punished, such as were those of the people of Sodom . . .” [As with sacrilege], vices against nature are also against God, as stated above, and are so much more grievous than the depravity of sacrilege, as the order impressed upon human nature is prior to and more firm than any subsequently established order.⁵

In contrast to our previous syllogism, St. Thomas’ answer to the question posed in the title of this article could be summed up in the following alternate argument. It does not in any way depend on – or even mention – marriage; for it appeals to an even more fundamental ethical criterion:

Major: Genital acts that *per se* exclude the possibility of procreation⁶ are a direct affront to God, the Author of nature.

Minor: Homosexual acts are among those genital acts that *per se* exclude the possibility of procreation.

Conclusion: Homosexual acts are a direct affront to God, the Author of nature.

² Cf. Gen 18: 20; 19:13, CCC #1867. According to the fashionable interpretation of many modern exegetes, the sin of the men of Sodom is seen by the Genesis author as consisting merely in their ‘lack of hospitality’ toward Lot’s guests, and not in the vice that has been named after their city. In reply to this objection, it will be sufficient for present purposes to point out that it is refuted by the Bible itself. The Letter of St. Jude tells us (v. 7) that Sodom was punished for its “unnatural vice” (in the Vulgate, *abeuntis post carnem alteram*, “going astray after other flesh”, i.e., “other” than what God and nature have ordained).

³ *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, Q. 154, art 12, c.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, ad 1 & ad 2.

⁶ It is worth noting here the importance of the qualification “*per se*”. These two words mean that we are talking here about sex acts which, *by their own very structure* are the type of act which could never under any circumstances result in procreation: that is, all acts wherein orgasm is attained in a way that does not involve depositing semen in the female genital tract. Such acts are being carefully distinguished in the above major premise from normal uncontracepted male-female vaginal intercourse which, because of the biological condition or defective fertility of either partner, cannot result in conception. Thus, for example, an act of normal intercourse when the wife has passed the age of child-bearing is not an act “which *per se* excludes the possibility of procreation”. For in that situation it is not the act itself, but rather, the independent biological circumstance in which it is carried out, that excludes that possibility.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in its own answer to our question, implies the above Thomistic approach. Marriage is not mentioned once in the whole section (## 2357-2359) dealing with this topic. Rather, the immorality of homosexual acts is explained as follows:

Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity (Gen. 19:1-2; Rom. 1:24-27; I Cor. 6:10; I Tim. 1:10), tradition has always declared that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered”. *They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.*⁷

In the rest of this article we shall consider the most commonly urged objections to this traditional Christian understanding of why homosexual acts are gravely immoral.

Objection 1: “For those of homosexual orientation, there is nothing ‘unnatural’ or ‘contrary to nature’ in homosexual acts; therefore, it is unreasonable to condemn all such acts as immoral.”

A common objection to that Catholic doctrine which reflects the teaching of Romans 1: 24-27 (and of many great philosophers beginning with Plato⁸), is that there is nothing “unnatural” about homosexual behavior for homosexually-oriented persons themselves. Such persons, so it is said, *experience* genital activity with someone of the same sex as entirely ‘natural’, and indeed, find repugnant and ‘unnatural’ *for themselves* the prospect of intimacy with someone of the opposite sex.

However, by speaking of what is ‘natural’ in this context, the Church does not mean any satisfaction-seeking desire or urge whatever which may be experienced spontaneously and subjectively by a given person. A distinction needs to be made here. In speaking of ‘natural law’ in general, Catholic teaching refers to the entire range of moral norms — precepts and prohibitions — which are in principle discernible by the natural light of human reason, as distinct from those norms which are knowable only through the supernatural light of divine revelation. (Among the latter, for instance, are the duty to receive sacraments such as Baptism and the Eucharist). However, among the many kinds of actions which our human minds by themselves can discern as wrong, and therefore as contrary to natural law in this broad or general sense, a small group of vices — namely, those kinds of voluntary and completed sexual actions which could never under any circumstances result in procreation — have traditionally been classed as ‘unnatural’ or ‘against nature’ (*contra naturam*) in a more specific sense.⁹ Homosexual activity is spoken of by St. Paul in Romans 1: 24-27 as being ‘against nature’ in this more specific sense. In this case, the moral unreasonableness of such activity can be discerned immediately and spontaneously by reflection on certain very basic finalities which are inscribed by the Creator in that biological nature which we share with the lower animals.

It is true that simple biological facts — for instance, the fact that male and female genital organs complement each other, or that only by the union of those organs can offspring be generated, or that human beings are endowed with a powerful instinct seeking sexual gratification — are not a sufficient rational basis for any *moral* judgment if they are considered in isolation.¹⁰ However, those facts just mentioned demonstrate to every reasonable person¹¹ that the Creator, who is supremely wise and good, has *purposefully designed* the bodies of men and women with a view to both mutual heterosexual union and also (in many cases of such union) the procreation of new members of the human family. It follows clearly and immediately (i.e., before our reasoning reaches recognition of the nature and necessity of marriage) that there must be some circumstances in which it is reasonable, good, and in accordance with the will of God, for men

⁷ CCC, #2357, emphasis added.

⁸ See *Laws*, Books I, 3 and VIII, 836-841.

⁹ See our foregoing discussion of St. Thomas Aquinas’ classical treatment of these “sins against nature” in *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIæ, Q. 154, arts. 11 and 12. In the first of these two articles, St. Thomas mentions two ways in which actions can involve the sin of lust: “First, through being contrary to right reason, and this is common to all lustful vices; secondly, because, in addition, it is contrary to the natural order of the venereal act as becoming to the human race: and this is called ‘the unnatural vice.’”

¹⁰ Nor, for that matter, can simple *psychological* facts constitute such a basis. For that reason it is illogical for homosexually-oriented persons to argue: “My desire for same-sex gratification is deep, unfeigned and spontaneous; therefore my seeking and attaining such gratification cannot, in itself, be immoral”.

¹¹ Our argument here assumes the premise that atheism is not a reasonable belief. As the Scriptures teach us, God’s existence has been knowable “ever since the creation of the world”, for “his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made” (Rom. 1: 19-20).

and women to attain the satisfaction of their sexual instinct, and indeed, to attain it by means of heterosexual union. For the contrary hypothesis, namely, that *all* genital satisfaction is always forbidden by God as immoral¹² would clearly be incompatible with the divine wisdom and goodness.¹³

However, it is clear that no similar process of reflection on the nature of God's creation, as manifested in our bodies, can provide any argument whatsoever which would demonstrate that *homosexual* acts could ever be morally legitimate. For it is evident that the male and female genital organs are designed to complement each other anatomically in a way that cannot occur in any kind of bodily contact between two men or two women.

Why are these unnatural sexual acts also profoundly unreasonable from the moral standpoint, that is, morally wrong? Before answering that question we should note that in order to know *that* they are wrong, it is not necessary to be able to offer a reasoned, reflective explanation of *why* they are wrong. For their wrongness itself is usually discerned in an immediate, intuitive way by an upright conscience. Common human experience shows that everyone with sufficient use of reason to understand the heterosexual finality of his or her genital functions, and whose mind has not been prejudiced already by homosexual example, propaganda, or practice, discerns by the God-given light of conscience that any kind of voluntary sexual act apart from normal (vaginal) intercourse between a man and a woman is disordered; for this is part of the "law written in our hearts" (cf. Rom. 2: 15). Thus it is that every decent, rational and pure-minded person can also sense or understand, for instance, that masturbation is wrong; and it is even more obvious that such depravities as sadomasochistic behaviour and sexual acts with animals are wrong — and grievously so. But the militant homosexual who insists that there is nothing morally wrong in carnal acts with persons of the same sex is left with no persuasive argument for condemning even these very gross perversions of the sexual faculty.¹⁴ The natural moral law against homosexual acts is thus shown more clearly when we reflect on the further logical consequences of bestowing moral approval on them.

Let us return to the question posed above: *Why is it* that an upright conscience spontaneously discerns all such unnatural actions as morally wrong? It is not merely any supposed inviolability of biological finalities *as such* that provides an answer to this question.¹⁵ Rather, the dignity of human nature and of each individual human person, endowed as he is with a share in his Creator's attributes of intelligence and free will, is the key factor. This inestimable dignity — so much emphasized in recent documents of the Church's magisterium — means that new human life is, as such, *far more valuable* than the transient physical and emotional gratification experienced in the act which generates it, namely, the voluntary attainment of sexual climax or release (orgasm).¹⁶ Hence, independently of their conscious motivation or intentions, all those who seek that gratification in the context of acts which exclude *by their very nature* all possibility of procreation behave in a way which objectively expresses a radical inversion of this true order of values, and which thus perverts the use of their genital faculty. Their 'body language' in such acts asserts the falsehood that sexual gratification is more important and valuable than new human life.

Such intrinsically sterile types of sexual act are thus seen as constituting a grave abuse of the gift of sexuality, and therefore a grave offence against the Creator who has bestowed that gift upon us. Recalling St. Thomas's teaching that likens unnatural sex acts to sacrilege, we can see the 'gay life-style' as being analogous to an imaginary situation in which the rector of a parish church, in preparing a Christmas banquet, chooses to place all the chalices from his sacristy —

¹² In fact, this belief has been sustained at times by certain religious sects, such as the 'Shakers' of North America, and those ancient Manichæan groups whose ideas are condemned in Scripture as coming from "deceitful spirits and demonic instructions" (cf. I Tim. 4: 1-3).

¹³ It would, of course, be unreasonable to draw from the fact of this divine approval of heterosexual union, discernible on the basis of our biological finalities, the conclusion that every individual person is *morally obliged* to enter into that kind of union. Our own human experience of *gifts* helps us to see this. A wealthy and generous man, for instance, might well decide to give thousands of people copies of a book which he thinks is particularly good, while at the same time not wanting to impose on individual recipients any kind of moral obligation to actually read it. And as regards our use of the divine gift of our generative faculties, we know from God's own word in Scripture that a commitment to celibacy or virginity can for some men and women be not only permissible, but positively praiseworthy, if undertaken "for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven" (cf. Mt. 19: 12). Still less would it be reasonable to infer, from the mere fact that biological finalities help demonstrate to us that *some* heterosexual acts must be morally good, that therefore *all* such acts — even adultery, rape, and so on — must deserve the same approval.

¹⁴ Indeed, most contemporary apologists for the homosexual ideology now make little or no attempt to argue seriously against other unnatural practices; rather, they commonly adopt the position summed up in the vulgar slogan, "If it feels good, do it!" That is, they maintain that provided it is free and voluntary on the part of the person or persons who engage in it, any pleasurable form of sexual activity is, in itself, morally unobjectionable.

¹⁵ It would be absurdly unreasonable to argue, for instance, that it is morally wrong for us to shave, to cut our hair, to block our ears against a disagreeable noise, or to hold our noses against a bad smell, on the grounds that such actions prevent some natural bodily process from attaining its biological finality.

¹⁶ In the case of the male, the attainment of this climax is *necessary* for procreation to occur, while in the female, even though not necessary, it is physically and psychologically *most fitting*, according to the will of our Creator, as is clearly discernible through the nature and healthy functioning of the female organs.

vessels specifically consecrated for the consecration of Christ's blood in the Holy Eucharist — on the rectory dining table for the consumption of beer or soft drinks by his guests. Let us suppose he is subjectively well-intentioned, reasoning that the special beauty of these vessels, and the value of their precious metals, will add lustre to the happy occasion. Nevertheless, his guests, if they are Catholics of normal spiritual sensibility, will be immediately shocked and repelled at the sight of these consecrated chalices lined up on the dinner table alongside the Christmas ham and plum pudding. They will sense that their host's decision — regardless of his possible good intentions — abuses the sacred vessels: it insults the priceless gift of the Eucharist by subordinating its value (at least temporarily) to values of an objectively far inferior order, namely, the purely material and aesthetic values of these vessels which have been destined for the celebration of that Sacrament. Just as these devout guests will immediately (and rightly) intuit that “chalices are not meant for *that!*”, so every morally upright and reasonable human being intuitively (and rightly) that the gift of sexuality “is not meant for” homosexual acts, or for any other intrinsically sterile methods of attaining sexual gratification. In short, as we noted above, homosexual acts are wrong insofar as they “close the sexual act to the gift of life” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2357). And this constitutes the fundamental reason why marriage, by its very nature, can only be constituted by the union of man and woman, and never by unions of any sort between persons of the same sex.

Objection 2. “Homosexual acts between mutually consenting adults do no harm to anybody; therefore they cannot be immoral”.

In answer to this objection, it is first worth recalling that the offence given to God, rather than the harm caused to human beings, is the gravest evil in sin. Just as the first and greatest commandment, according to the teaching of both Old and New Testaments, is to love God above all things, so sin is, in the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

. . . an offense against God: ‘Against you, you alone have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight’ (Psalm 51: 4). Sin sets itself against God’s love for us and turns our hearts away from it. [It consists in] an offense against reason, truth and right conscience; it is a failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods” (CCC, ##1849-1850).

As we have argued above in answering Objection 1, homosexual acts abuse the Creator's gift of human sexuality, thereby contradicting His will. God's will for the way we should live, however, is not capricious or arbitrary, and we believe that every time we commit acts that offend God, they will in fact cause harm in some way – to ourselves if not to our neighbor. Catholic Christianity, unlike Sunni Islam and certain other religions, does not teach the voluntarist, positivist and nominalist doctrine that, when it comes to norms of natural law, God's mere will, expressed in authorizing, commanding or prohibiting certain actions, is, in itself, what *makes* those actions morally right or wrong.¹⁷ And since man's good consists principally in knowing the truth and living according to it, those who commit homosexual acts do indeed cause grave spiritual harm to themselves, whether they realize it or not: through actions which invert the true relative values of new human life and genital pleasure respectively, they darken their minds to the truth of those values, and dishonor their own bodies. Hence, while it is no doubt true that homosexual partners often have a real affection for each other, the acts that characterize their homosexual relationship as such are not acts of genuine love, but rather, of a mutual exploitation of each other's bodies for the sake of sensual gratification. As the *Catechism* teaches, homosexual acts “do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity” (#2357).

At least indirectly, harm is also done to society at large by the proliferation of active homosexual relationships; for precisely to the degree that these relationships become more common and well-publicized (‘out of the closet’), thereby gaining increasing social acceptance and approval in modern culture until finally they are given full legal recognition as “marriage”, they constitute (along with pre-marital heterosexual relations and ‘consensual’ unions) yet another powerful ‘competitor’, as it were, for the social honor and respect that should be accorded uniquely to *real* marriage – a noble and divinely-ordained institution.

Indeed, such social and legal acceptance insinuates the poison of impurity even into sound and faithful marriages; for if one or both spouses are led by today's powerful pro-homosexual propaganda to accept and approve in principle sodomitical and lesbian acts on the part of other persons outside their own marriage, then, both logically and psychologically, they will become insensitive and even blinded to the perversity and immorality of oral and anal intercourse as potential constituents of *their own* intimate life, if they should happen to find sensual gratification in such shameful practices. Once that point is reached, the immorality of masturbation and contraceptive practices become

¹⁷ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book III, Chapter 122.

practically impossible for such spouses to perceive. More and more, sensual pleasure as such, whether in natural or unnatural forms, comes to be seen as its own justification, so that resistance to the inevitable temptations to pre-marital and extra-marital relations is also progressively weakened and undermined. Homosexual acts are thus not only non-marital, but *anti*-marital: precisely in the measure that society accepts and endorses them, they do great harm by contributing to the further weakening of marriage and family life, with all the attendant social ills that this brings in its train.

Finally, it must be remembered that (as we have explained in the previous section) homosexual acts truly and objectively, even if at times unintentionally, manifest a grave lack of respect for the inestimable value of new human life, by perversely placing that value at a lower level than the value of physical and emotional gratification as such. This too has gravely harmful implications for society, inasmuch as the diffusion and social acceptance of homosexual conduct thus helps to constitute and reinforce that malaise of modern Western society which Blessed Pope John Paul II branded “the culture of death”. It is indeed no accident that modern apologists for same-sex “marriage” and the ‘gay lifestyle’ (active and open homosexuality) are nearly always firm supporters of the supposed ‘right’ of women to ‘choose’ to abort an ‘unwanted’ unborn child.

Thus, it must be concluded that homosexual activity does indeed cause serious harm: to those who engage in it, and to the common good of society, which requires the greatest possible social respect for the sanctity of marriage and of human life as such. These considerations constitute further reasons why homosexual acts are contrary to the natural moral law.

Objection 3. “Homosexuals have inherited genetically a predetermined, innate sexual orientation to those of the same gender; therefore it cannot be immoral for them engage in homosexual acts prompted by this inherited orientation.”

To begin with, the conclusion of this commonly articulated argument by no means follows logically from the stated premise. It depends also on another unstated minor premise, namely, “It cannot be immoral to engage in acts prompted by a genetically inherited disposition.” But this premise is itself by no means self-evidently true, and in fact is open to serious objections.

First, it assumes that a conclusion about moral good or evil can validly be based on nothing more than a statement of mere biological or psychological fact; and as we have already pointed out, this is a false, illogical inference. Secondly, this minor premise would imply that if further genetic research were also to establish that certain people inherit an immutable innate disposition or orientation towards such behavior such as violent aggression, racial hatred, drug or alcohol abuse, or theft (‘kleptomania’), then the corresponding acts prompted by these innate dispositions could not be classed as objectively immoral. But no person endowed with normal common sense would find such conclusions credible; indeed, they seem implicitly to deny man’s free will and his consequent moral responsibility for his actions. Thirdly, this premise fails to take account of original sin — a mysterious truth which Christians know from divine revelation. In a world affected profoundly by sin and the power of Satan, not every specific inclination inherited by every individual can be presumed without further ado to be ordered toward activity that is good and right. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that while human nature has not been totally corrupted by original sin, nevertheless “it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin — an inclination to evil that is called ‘concupiscence’” (#405). Therefore, even if it were to be proved that homosexual orientation is immutably determined by genetically inherited causes, this would no more entitle anyone to justify his or her homosexual acts with the slogan, “God made me this way!” than our inherited concupiscence in general entitles us to justify other forms of sinful behavior.

Over and above the foregoing considerations, it needs to be said that there is no solid scientific evidence that the stated premise of this argument is true. That is, scientific research does not support the hypothesis that a homosexual orientation is genetically predetermined, or “created by God”. On the contrary, studies of the incidence of homosexuality among adult identical twins have thoroughly discredited this hypothesis.¹⁸ According to a growing consensus among serious investigators, inherited biological factors may indeed play some role in inclining certain individuals toward homosexual attraction and activity — as such factors undoubtedly do in regard to many other psychological and

¹⁸ These studies have shown that only around half of such persons, when homosexual in orientation, have twin siblings who are also homosexual. Since identical twins always have identical genetic codes, there would necessarily be a 100% identity of sexual orientation among such twins if the homosexual condition were simply determined by the genetic code, in the same way as hair, eye, and skin color (and countless other personal characteristics).

behavioral tendencies. But they are not in themselves the dominant cause, and much less an irresistible, determining cause, of the homosexual condition. Rather, the evidence shows that a variety of social and psychological causes originating during childhood development play a more decisive role in leading to this condition. Abundant studies of male homosexuals, for instance, reveal that in a very large proportion of the case histories of such men, their family environment during early childhood was one in which the boy's relationship with his father was defective or non-existent, while his mother was very close to him, with a strongly protective pattern of behavior.

Another common pattern is that of children and adolescents who have been seduced and abused sexually by older persons of the same sex. Such abuse, occurring either before puberty or shortly after it, during a delicate and susceptible phase in the adolescent's psycho-sexual development, can contribute powerfully to an experience of homosexual attraction; and repetition of homosexual activity will of course reinforce this attraction and lead before long to the formation of an entrenched habit. Attachment to both the attraction and its active expression is likely to be implanted still more deeply when such an adolescent is assured, in accordance with current homosexual ideology, that the experience of such attraction is simply the "discovery" of his or her "true sexual identity", which (so it is said) has always been latently homosexual and must now be accepted as permanent and unchangeable. In reality, experience shows that adolescents of both sexes not infrequently pass through a temporary phase of same-sex attraction which, provided it is not reinforced by homosexual ideology and/or activity, is gradually dissipated as the young person reaches greater maturity and gains more confidence in relating to those of the opposite gender.

Increasing recognition is now being given to the work of those psychologists and psychiatrists offering therapy to homosexuals who wish to modify their sexual orientation or control their unwanted behaviors and attractions. However, ideological hostility and attempted intimidation and professional censorship from militantly pro-homosexual groups has often rendered the work of such therapists difficult. In some jurisdictions (e.g., California) such treatment has already been prohibited by outrageously unjust laws. So far, the prohibition applies only in the case of those under 18; but as the 'gay' steamroller pushes relentlessly forward in Western society, this violation of a basic human right will probably become more and more extensive. While such therapy, undertaken by those whose inclination is predominantly homosexual, does not usually erase homosexual feelings completely, it very often succeeds in modifying them. A substantial change has come about in a significant minority of such cases.¹⁹ Indeed, therapy has been followed in not a few cases by a happy marriage and normal family life (even though this may well still include some intermittent homosexual temptation). The process involved in such therapy consists basically in diminishing one's homosexual inclination and developing one's heterosexual potential. Therapy can greatly assist many homosexuals to control their unwanted desires and, if heterosexual attraction does not develop, it can still be valuable in helping them to lead chaste lives. Moreover, experience shows that positive results are more likely when therapy is accompanied by faith-based support and counselling, including recourse to the spiritual remedies of prayer and the sacraments. Clearly, such changes in sexual orientation could not occur at all if homosexuality were just as genetically determined and fixed as the color of our eyes, hair, or skin.²⁰

Objection 4: "The Scriptures, understood correctly and scientifically in the light of the historical-critical method, provide no basis for condemning homosexual activity as such."

In recent decades, particularly in the English-speaking world, many authors claiming to speak from a Christian (and even Catholic) standpoint have made efforts to neutralize, explain away, or effectively nullify the strong Biblical teaching which, in both Old and New Testaments, clearly reprobates homosexual conduct.

These 'revisionist' biblical commentators commonly claim, for instance, that the sin of the men of Sodom (cf. Gen. 19) was merely that of aggressive inhospitality toward strangers; and that the stern prohibitions of same-sex behavior found in Leviticus 18-20 are not permanent and universal moral laws, but mere historically-conditioned, cultic or 'ritualistic' norms which do not bind Christians any more than the many Pentateuchal prescriptions regarding ceremonies,

¹⁹ Cf. for example, Charles Socarides, *Homosexuality: A Freedom Too Far* (Phoenix, AZ: Adam Margrave Books, 1995), p. 149). Dr. Socarides reports here that, after thirty years of offering such therapy, he has had an overall success rate of about 35% among his homosexual clients who have sought a change in orientation. It should be added, however, that in the estimation of this psychiatrist, many cases of 'failure' have been due to the client's lack of will or motivation to persevere in the process of counseling and/or the corresponding personal effort required, rather than to any intrinsic or absolute impossibility of change. The commitment of each client's free will and a strong level of personal motivation appear to be necessary (though unfortunately not always sufficient) factors in bringing about successful change.

²⁰ For up-to-date scientific information on the treatment and changeability of homosexual orientation, see the website of the U.S. National Association for Research & Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) — (www.narth.com). See also the year 2001 Declaration of the Catholic Medical Association of the United States (www.cathmed.org), entitled "Homosexuality and Hope". A Spanish translation of this document ("Homosexualidad y esperanza") can be found on the Spanish-language website of Human Life International (www.vidahumana.org).

ritual purity, and dietary laws. With regard to the New Testament, it is often said that St Paul, like all his contemporaries, was unaware that such a thing as a “homosexual orientation” even exists, so that his condemnation of same-sex genital acts as “unnatural” in Romans 1 is now applicable (if at all) only to those heterosexual persons who, *against their own basic inclinations*, might happen to indulge in homosexual acts. It is also said that Paul’s teaching in I Cor. 6: 9 and I Tim. 1: 10 refers only to male prostitution or perhaps pederasty/pedophilia, so that these texts cannot be used (we are told) to condemn ‘loving’ and ‘committed’ homosexual relationships between consenting adults. Still other revisionists admit that St. Paul did believe and teach that any kind of homosexual behavior is immoral; but they claim that this teaching, too, is inapplicable to modern Christians because it is ‘historically conditioned’ by now outdated cultural presuppositions (like the same apostle’s insistence on women’s head-covering in church and his acquiescence in the existing institution of slavery).

These and other arguments based on novel interpretations of Sacred Scripture have, by their superficial plausibility, contributed to no little confusion among many Catholics and other Christians. They have, however, been soundly rebutted by recent critical biblical scholarship faithful to the authentic Judaeo-Christian tradition.²¹ The present essay is not the place to enter into detailed exegetical discussions of the relevant passages, but several brief comments will be in order, by way of summary and illustration.

One clear indication of the falsity of recent pro-homosexual exegesis is the still more extreme permissiveness which it logically implies. It would be plainly absurd to claim that Sacred Scripture censures such sins as adultery, idolatry, bestiality, incest, the sacrifice of children, bearing false witness, murder, drunkenness, contempt for parents, greed and robbery, only in the sense of depicting them as violations of merely human ‘disciplinary’ norms which were required in the distant past by a temporary, changeable, code of ‘ritual purity’. For the Bible constantly and clearly depicts such behavior as universally and intrinsically wicked. But such a patently implausible dilution and relativization of Scripture’s ethical teaching would in fact follow logically from the kind of exegesis which reduces the Bible’s condemnations of homosexual activity to this merely ‘disciplinary’, ‘time-bound’ or ‘ritual’ level. For these latter condemnations usually occur inseparably embedded within lists of other sins, such as those mentioned above, whose **universally** immoral character is so obvious — and so obviously taught by the Bible as a whole — that even pro-homosexual exegetes themselves generally do not wish to defend them. Their exegesis is thus revealed as partisan, inconsistent and scientifically indefensible, insofar as it fails to respect the literary context of the words being interpreted.

In the Old Testament, for instance, the clearest condemnations of homosexual acts (including those between consenting adults) occur within lists of other offences consisting almost entirely of various forms of incest, human sacrifice, adultery, and bestiality (cf. Leviticus 18 and 20). Turning to the New Testament, we find that St. Paul, in I Cor. 6: 9, condemns homosexual vice — that of “practicing homosexuals (whether active or passive)”²² — as one of a series of sins that also includes direct offences against no less than half of the Ten Commandments: idolatry, adultery, slander (bearing false witness), theft, and greed (covetousness). The Decalogue is of course the archetypal biblical revelation of universally binding ethical precepts. In I Timothy 1: 9-10, direct offenders against two more of its immutable norms — namely, those who refuse to honor their parents and to respect innocent human life — are also denounced in the same context as ‘practicing homosexuals’. Referring in this passage to those he excoriates globally as being “lawless and unruly, . . . unholy and profane”, St. Paul specifies: “. . . those who kill their fathers or mothers, murderers, the unchaste, *practicing homosexuals*, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is opposed to sound teaching.” Moreover, we never find in the New Testament that homosexual activity is censured in the same context as offences against mere transient, culturally-conditioned, disciplinary norms such as those regarding female head-covering or adornment. Nor are these latter infractions of church discipline ever said to exclude anyone from the kingdom of heaven, as is the case with

²¹ See for instance: Lynne C. Boughton, “Biblical Texts and Homosexuality: A Response to John Boswell” (*Irish Theological Quarterly*, 58 [1992], pp. 141-153); James B. De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in the Light of the Bible and other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 2000); Robert A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001); Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1998).

²² We have here replaced the *New American Bible*’s words, “nor boy prostitutes nor practicing homosexuals” by “nor practicing homosexuals (whether active or passive)”. This substitution reflects the traditional Christian and Catholic understanding of the words: the Vulgate rendition, in both ancient and modern versions, is “*neque molles neque masculorum concubitores*”, literally, “neither the effeminate nor the bed-companions of [other] males”. This traditional understanding is supported by sound contemporary scholarly exegesis. In this context, the Greek *malakoi* (Vulgate *molles*), following a usage dating back to Plato and Aristotle, refers to those males who, in acts of sodomy, simulate the receptive or ‘passive’ female role. There is no textual justification for the claim that the Apostle is limiting his condemnation to acts involving boys or prostitutes. The following word in the Greek text, *arsenokoitai* (Vulgate *masculorum concubitores*), appears to have been coined by Paul himself, and means (practicing) homosexuals in general, but especially those who take the ‘active’ or ‘male’ role of transmitting the seed. In the context of I Corinthians 6, coming directly after *malakoi*, the word clearly reflects Paul’s intention to condemn the ‘active’ role in sodomitical intercourse, just as much as the ‘passive’ (‘effeminate’) role. Again, the Apostle is *not* limiting his condemnation in these texts to pedophiles, or to those who copulate with, or are themselves, male prostitutes. Cf. the exhaustive exegetical treatment of the word *arsenokoitai* in De Young, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5, pp. 175-203.

the series of sins including sodomy set out in I Cor. 6: 9.

As regards the precise nature of the sin traditionally associated with Sodom by virtue of Gen. 19: 5-8, we have the assurance of inspired Scripture itself that it was in fact “unnatural vice”, not just inhospitality (cf. Jude 7). And there is no serious evidence for Paul’s supposed ignorance of “homosexual orientation” — an ignorance often alleged, as we have noted, as a pretext for relativizing or dismissing his denunciation of homosexual acts as “unnatural” (cf. Romans 1: 26-27). Of course, the vocabulary of modern behavioral sciences was not used in ancient times, and it is true that little if anything was then known about the origins (and corresponding treatment or prevention) of what is now called ‘homosexual orientation.’ But that Paul, like other ancient observers, was well aware of the essential reality now designated by that term, namely, a deep-seated inclination or desire in some individuals for same-sex genital activity, is evident from the very text of Romans 1. For the Apostle speaks of homosexual men and lesbian women as being “handed over to degrading passions” (v. 26), and of them “burning with lust for” those of the same sex. In fact, these expressions are plainly incompatible with the claim of modern pro-homosexual apologists that, in Paul’s view, the conduct of these sodomites and lesbians went against *their own* spontaneous desires and inclinations, and that he mistakenly branded their conduct “unnatural” for that reason.

Finally, as well as those texts which expressly deal with (and invariably reprobate) homosexual conduct, Sacred Scripture’s extensive positive teaching about marriage must be taken into account. The Bible’s constant emphasis on marriage as a covenant between man and woman *by its very nature and definition*, and the equally constant Scriptural witness to the effect that sexual relations are morally legitimate only within that covenant, provide further evidence — implicit but powerful — that homosexual conduct is irreconcilable with the overall biblical teaching on marriage and sexuality. In short, sound modern biblical scholarship vindicates the great Judaeo-Christian tradition affirming the grave immorality of homosexual acts, handed down with certainty since the patristic age and repeatedly vindicated by the Church’s magisterium, which for faithful Catholics is the final authoritative interpreter of Sacred Scripture.
