

## **ANTILLES EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE**

### **STATEMENT ON HOMOSEXUALITY AND HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR**

The contemporary political pressures to change legislation in order to decriminalize consensual homosexual activity are now present in the Caribbean Region. The discussions, already quite emotional, have raised two major issues for the Catholic Church. The first issue is that the people must understand the doctrinal/moral teaching of the Church on homosexuality. The second issue is that, in the context of the discussion to change legislation, the teaching of the Catholic Church on homosexuality must be communicated clearly, accurately and continually by the Church to the Caribbean Region.

Both issues are very important for the teaching mission of the Church, for the quality of life in society and for the pastoral care of homosexual people. Because of the experience of the Church following decisions, whether legislative or judicial, regarding policies on issues concerning life, the Church is keenly aware of the need for clear communication. Why? Because, unfortunately, sincere but uninformed people tend to operate on the assumption that what is legal is also moral. Consequently, the Church must publicly confront the educative dimensions of legislation and judicial decision in a respectful but thorough manner in the public forum.

We, the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference, are very aware of our obligation to offer guidance on doctrinal and ethical matters to the Catholic Community and to invite all people to consider Catholic Teaching, which is rooted in both revelation and in human reason. The Church must proclaim the truth no matter how strongly political pressure, public opinion and/or public morals oppose it.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Catholic Teaching on Homosexuality**

#### **Biblical/Doctrinal**

The Catholic Teaching on homosexuality has its foundation in the Church's understanding of the Natural Law, and in the theology of creation found in the book of Genesis. God created the human person in his image and likeness. In the complementarity of the sexes, God's people are called to reflect the inner unity of God and, by a mutual gift of self to the other, to become collaborators with God in the transmission of life. With original sin there was a loss of awareness of the covenantal character of the union of people with God and with each other. While the spousal nature of the human body continued to be the biblical teaching, its appreciation was clouded by sin.<sup>2</sup>

There is an obvious consistency in Old Testament and New Testament salvation history about the moral unacceptability of homosexual relations. The biblical testimony can be found in Genesis 19, 1-11; Romans 1,18-32; I Corinthians 6, 9; I Timothy, 1, 10. The Church, ever faithful to the

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<sup>1</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," December 29, 1975, Section V. Hereinafter cited (CDF, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," October 1, 1986, N. 5. Hereinafter cited (CDF 1986).

data of revelation, teaches that these texts communicate immutable moral principles. The Church has consistently taught that even heterosexual union is only legitimate when a community of life has been established between the man and woman in marriage.<sup>3</sup> The teaching of the Church on marriage has a clarifying application to the issue of homosexuality. Since homosexual relations cannot reflect the complementarity of the sexes intended by God and openness to the transmission of life, they are contrary to the creative designs of God. A person who engages in homosexual behavior acts immorally.<sup>4</sup> The Catholic tradition teaches that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. Under no circumstances can they be approved.<sup>5</sup>

#### Moral/Pastoral

The moral/pastoral dimensions of Catholic Teaching on homosexuality are, of course, rooted in the biblical/doctrinal teaching of the Church. The Church has always made a clear distinction between sexual orientation and sexual behavior. Sexual orientation is morally indifferent while homosexual behavior is immoral, objectively speaking. Although some, possibly many, of those who are trying to have the homosexual behaviour accepted as though it were not disordered are subjectively sincere, the moral theology of the Church has consistently taught that morality does not depend **solely** on the intentions of the person. The nature of the act must be considered. Homosexual acts do not conform to the truth about the human person. They are contrary to the creative plan of God about the complementarity of the sexes or to the openness to life intrinsic to sexual relations within marriage. While the subjective capacity of an individual may reduce or even eliminate moral culpability, the moral nature of the action does not and cannot change.<sup>6</sup>

While the Church is obliged to preach the truth, it is also obliged by the love of Christ to provide quality pastoral care to persons who have a homosexual orientation and who may be struggling with homosexual behavior. The Church understands the intensity of the struggle many homosexual people experience and also the psychology of compulsive behavior which, at times, is applicable in individual cases.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the Church encourages prayer, a full sacramental life, offers spiritual direction, counseling and support to homosexual persons as they journey through life. It educates parents who also struggle when they discover one or more of their children are homosexual.<sup>8</sup>

Discussions on proposed changes in legal norms regarding homosexuality, whether by legislation or judicial decision, can be highly emotional especially in terms of discrimination and violence against homosexual persons. The Church has condemned, authoritatively, discrimination and violence against all people including homosexuals.<sup>9</sup> Many are opposed to decriminalizing adult consensual homosexual activity because they are convinced that a not so subtle agenda is operative in international society - an agenda which is trying to make the homosexual lifestyle a valid life option to heterosexual union in marriage. Society must process all aspects of the debate but without discrimination or violence. **No matter how the debate on decriminalizing adult consensual homosexual activity ends, the teaching of the Church will remain unchanged**

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<sup>3</sup> CDF, 1975, Section VII

<sup>4</sup> CDF 1986, N. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, N 2357

<sup>6</sup> CDF, 1975, Section VIII

<sup>7</sup> National Catholic Bioethics Center, Proceedings from the 17<sup>th</sup> Workshop for Bishops, "Addiction and Compulsive Behavior," November 21, 2000, pages 225-238 - Homosexuality and Compulsion.

<sup>8</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage and Family, "Always Our Children," September 10, 1997

<sup>9</sup> CDF 1986, N. 10

**and the pastoral outreach of the Church will continue to manifest the reconciling love of the Lord<sup>10</sup>.**

We, the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference respectfully offer this Statement on Homosexuality and Homosexual Behavior for prayerful reflection.

Signed:

Most Rev. Edgerton R. Clarke, Archbishop of Kingston in Jamaica, President	
Most Rev. Lawrence Burke, S.J., Nassau, Vice-President	
Most Rev. Kelvin Felix, Castries	Most Rev. Edward Gilbert, C.Ss.R., Port of Spain
Most Rev. Paul M. Boyle, C.P., Mandeville	Most Rev. Kevin Britt, Auxiliary (Detroit)
Most Rev. Sydney Charles, St George's	<i>Missio sui iuris</i> of the Cayman Islands
Most Rev. Charles Dufour, Montego Bay	Most Rev. Malcolm Galt, C.S.Sp., Bridgetown
Most Rev. Robert Kurtz , C.R., Hamilton	Most Rev. Donald Reece, St John's-Basseterre
Most Rev. Robert Rivas , O.P., Kingstown	Most Rev. Luis Secco, Coadjutor, Willemstad
Most Rev. Louis Sankale , Cayenne	Most Rev. Benedict Singh, S.J., Georgetown
Most Rev. Aloysius Zichem, C.Ss.R., Paramaribo	
Most Rev. Samuel Carter, S.J., Archbishop <i>emeritus</i> , Kingston in Jamaica.	

Edinboro,  
St Vincent.  
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#### 10 Communication of Church Teaching

The communication of the Church's teaching on homosexuality and homosexual behavior is very important because of the powerful educative dimensions of legislation and judicial decision and the ability of the media to undermine truth by trivializing the sacred.

While the communications capacity of the Church may not be able to match that of secularized society and its media outreach, it is still formidable. The Church must learn from the debate on life issues and use its substantial infrastructure to alert people to the real issues in the discussion about homosexual behavior. It must educate people to the truth component in contemporary debates and share the wisdom of the Catholic Tradition in every possible way. However, the communication must be accomplished with gentleness and respect because the ministry of the Church is fundamentally about bringing the salvation offered by Jesus Christ to all people but especially to those who feel abandoned and rejected.