



# OUR SOCIAL MISSION

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## The ethics of homosexual acts



**E**VERYONE has an opinion on homosexuality. On one side, homosexuality is considered unnatural and un-reproductive, and that makes it wrong. On another, it is a natural expression of love, with genuine intention between consenting adults, which brings no harm to anyone, and that makes it right.

The present state of the discussion seems to have exhausted all arguments and the final verdict seems to be one that is waiting for science to settle definitively if homosexuals are really "born that way".

The current stalemate is a result of seeking answers to the wrong questions about homosexuality.

### The right question

From the previous article, we see that conventional social dogma of individual choices makes for a diluted form of ethics. Ethical issues depend neither solely on nobility of intention nor the harm caused to others. For example, the intention to find a cure for cancer should not justify using humans as guinea pigs, and a murderous intent is immoral and criminal even if no one is killed.

The right question about the ethics of homosexual acts should rest on whether these voluntary acts harm or help the individual's dignity - even if it does not hurt anyone, or is done with the best of intentions.

### The body of the person

Popular in our culture today is a

*This is the second of two articles on homosexuality and we focus today on the core ethical question which ought to govern the debate on homosexuality: the dignity of the human person and his or her body. This ongoing series on values is by the Catholic Medical Guild and Caritas Singapore.*

belief that our body is separate from our person. This means the body is yet another tool or machine we use to accomplish our intended purposes.

Like any tool, the morality of the body lies solely on the purpose to which the tool is used. For example, a knife is morally neutral, but whether it is used for cooking or murdering becomes ethically relevant.

In this vein, some would argue that anal sex is ethical if, for example, used to express permanent commitment and genuine love (but perhaps not if it is just a lustful act). The morality of any sexual act takes on the meaning that the person chooses to view it with regards to nobility of intention and harm caused to others.

However, what if this view on the separation of our body from the person is wrong? What if our bodies are not merely something we have, but wholly integral with who we are? Does this understanding then not confer a different view with regards to the ethics behind sexual acts, for example?

Common sense tells us that when

a person is raped, it is not just a physical violation of the body. It is the entire violation - physical, emotional and mental - the victim feels. This deep violation occurs because the genitals represent the intimacy of the person.

It should be clear then that the body is more than a mere part of us, but represents who we are as persons. Tampering with the intimacy of the body amounts to tampering with the dignity of the whole person.

### The wrong centre

The dialogue about homosexuality has been orbiting around the wrong centre. The issue of homosexuality may not be so much a medical or psychological issue at all, but really an ethical one. Debates on homosexuality continue to focus on the intentions and even psychological conditions of homosexuals while neglecting the important issue of ethics.

A related question in this debate is: what has really changed in our culture for this issue to be on the table of most heated debates? The answer we hear is that this is one more case of failing to give homosexuals equal rights. But perhaps the truth is simply that the parameters of ethical and bodily perceptions have been changed by the back door and we do not even talk about it.

The debate over homosexuality will not be clarified until we dare to question the fundamental issues on which it rests. If sex is merely something our bodies engage in, there would be no ethical issue surrounding sex.

But should our bodies prove to be more than mere tools we possess, and actually represent who we are, we may begin a dialogue about the differences in opinions in this homosexual debate.

### What the Church Teaches

■ **Complementarity and fecundity of the sexual union was purposefully created by God.**

"Male and female, He created them." (Genesis 1:27)  
"When two persons are married, Jesus says 'they are no longer two but one body.'" (Matthew 19:4)

■ **Homosexual acts are incompatible with Christian living.** "Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life; and so it thwarts the call to a life of that form of self-giving which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living. This does not mean that homosexual persons are not often generous and giving of themselves, but when they engage in homosexual activity they confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination which is essentially self-indulgent.

"As in every moral disorder, homosexual activity prevents one's own fulfilment and happiness by acting contrary to the creative wisdom of God. The Church, in rejecting erroneous opinions regarding homosexuality, does not limit but rather defends personal freedom and dignity realistically and authentically understood." (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexual persons, 1986, 7)

■ **The Church puts forth the truth according to Christ's teaching.** "The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to the truth which is Christ, whose image is reflected in the nature and dignity of the human person, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection."

(Familiaris Consortio, 33 and Veritatis Splendor, 95)

■ **The Church does not impose.** "The Church addresses people with full respect for their freedom. Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. The Church proposes; she imposes nothing. She respects individuals and cultures, and she honours the sanctuary of conscience."

(Redemptoris Missio, 39)

■ **The Church does not judge anyone.** "God alone is the judge and searcher of hearts, for that reason He forbids us to make judgments about the internal guilt of anyone."

(Gaudium et Spes, 28)

■ **Homosexuals must be accepted and discrimination avoided.**

"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)