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SAFEGUARDING AND HOMOSEXUALITY

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Abstract. The Church is actively working to promote and build up a culture of safeguarding. Those most vulnerable to abuse need care and protection. Sexual orientation is an important element to consider in safeguarding, as there are specific risks for homosexual persons, and persons with same-sex attraction (SSA) frequently experience abuse. In a sensitive and respectful way, this article examines the background elements regarding homosexuality and abuse and gives specific details that can help in formulating a vision of safeguarding that takes into account the specific reality of persons with SSA.

Keywords. safeguarding; abuse; prevention; homosexuality; same-sex attraction

Introduction

Homosexual persons form part of a larger group known as "LGBT" which stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender. Sometimes the abbreviation is extended to "LGBTQIA+" where the "QIA+" represents queer (or questioning), intersex, asexual, and others (+). The percentage of persons who identify as LGBT will depend on the country, and not all have statistics.

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The results will also depend on how one asks the questions.[1] The surveys in the USA reveal that 5–7% of persons identify as LGBT. The number of persons who identify as LGBT is growing, especially among younger people.[2]

As LGBT is an umbrella term encompassing various groups, in this essay, we will look mainly at homosexual persons—the "G" in LGBT. Perhaps a good starting point is to examine our attitudes toward persons who are homosexual. An important detail is that in many Church documents and much pastoral work, the preferred terminology for a homosexual person is "person with same-sex attraction" (SSA). Cardinal Ratzinger reminded us that "the human person, made in the image and likeness of God, can hardly be adequately described by a reductionist reference to his or her sexual orientation."[3] In using the term persons with SSA, the desire is to avoid labeling the person; after all, a person is more than his or her sexuality.

How Do We View Persons with SSA?

How do we look at persons who are homosexual or have SSA? Do we have any bias or prejudice? The Catechism of the Catholic Church asks us to treat them with compassion, sensitivity, and respect, and

[1] In surveys, different questions are asked as their focus may differ. The various areas that can be looked at include attractions, orientation, identity, and/or behavior, terms which are not always precisely defined. In this article, this author will use the general designation of persons who *identify* as LGBT or homosexuals.

[2] The Williams Institute of the UCLA School of Law, using data from the 2020–2021 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), estimates that over 15% of young adults aged 18–24 identify as LGBT. See A. Flores & K. Conron, "Adult LGBT Population in the United States" (Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, December 2023), available at https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/adult-lgbt-pop-us/ (accessed January 2, 2024).

[3] 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), no. 16, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html.

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to avoid all unjust discrimination.[4] Often, our views and attitudes will come from our experience of meeting, talking, and interacting with persons with SSA. Our cultural background can also influence our views. In some cultures, homosexuality is illegal and punished with imprisonment; in others, persons with SSA are victims of violence and killed. In these situations, it is important to fight against this abuse, in support of the rights of our fellow brothers and sisters. In other countries, homosexuality is widely accepted and encouraged. In other places, it is very difficult to even mention the Catholic Church teaching for fear of being discriminated against.[5]

What are the Causes of Homosexuality?

The cause of homosexuality is "complex and difficult to explain with simple theories."[6] On its website, the American Psychological Association (APA) explains that

> there is no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or lesbian orientation. Although much research has examined the possible genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors. Many

[4] See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2358, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM. Hereafter referred to as *CCC*.

[5] For example, in the United Kingdom or Australia, a Catholic may experience abuse in just trying to discuss the issue of homosexuality respectfully, especially if they attempt to broach the aspect of Catholic Church teaching on homosexuality. Unfortunately, the same may also occur for students in theological studies in some Catholic academic institutions.

[6] Courage International, *Handbook for Courage and EnCourage Chaplains* (Trumbull, CT: 2020), 57, available at https://couragerc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Handbook-2020-Website-Version-No-USCCB-Doc-1.pdf (accessed January 2, 2024).

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> think that nature and nurture both play complex roles; most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.[7]

The APA underlines that sexual orientation is not determined by any particular factor like genes, so it is better to avoid phrases such as "born that way."[8] They may be in fashion but are nonetheless far too simplistic, and are not supported by current scientific findings.

In many complex human traits like intelligence, for example, genetics has a role in that our genes can *predispose*, although they do not *cause*. For intelligence, one is not just "born intelligent"—one still needs to learn how to speak, study hard, etc. For homosexuality, there may be genetic influences, but to date, they have not been found to be causal. Like most complex aspects of our being, sexuality is likely to be multi-factorial, involving both nature and nurture.

This is well summarized in a 2019 study of persons who experience SSA, which states, "Many uncertainties remain to be explored, including how sociocultural influences on sexual preference might interact with genetic preferences. Overall, our findings … underscore the complexity of sexuality."[9]

Risk of Abuse

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons can be at risk for various types of abuse. At times, such abuse is driven by prejudice,

[7] American Psychological Association, "Understanding Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality" (2008), available at https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation (accessed January 2, 2024).

[8] *The Tablet*, an influential Catholic news weekly published in London, seems to have fallen into this mistake in a recent editorial entitled "Homosexuality: A Church Teaching with Shaky Foundations" where it categorically but erroneously states that homosexuality "is now understood to be an inborn and lifelong orientation." This statement itself is rather shaky, as there is no credible scientific research in the field that supports such claims. Cf. Editorial, *The Tablet* (February 4, 2023): 2.

[9] A. Ganna et al., "Large-scale GWAS Reveals Insights into the Genetic Architecture of Same-Sex Sexual Behavior," *Science* 365:6456 (2019): eaat7693.

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fear, and ignorance. In some cultures, a person who is gay may be attacked and beaten up just for being homosexual. A gay person can also receive a long prison sentence just for being homosexual. In such cases, it is important to raise a collective voice in defense of the basic human rights of a person.[10]

The Human Dignity Trust reports that 67 countries or "jurisdictions criminalise private, consensual, same-sex sexual activity."[11] Eleven of these countries (Iran, Northern Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar, and UAE) can or do impose the death penalty. Regarding the criminalization of homosexuality, Pope Francis stated that homosexuality is not a crime and that it is "unjust" to criminalize it.[12] Another type of abuse can occur in relationships between persons of the same sex, where one partner abuses the other in what is termed "intimate partner violence" or IPV, at a rate that is comparable to or even higher than abuse in heterosexual couples.[13] LGBT persons are known to be "vulnerable to

[10] The Church comes to the defense of LGBT persons, declaring that "for this reason, it should be denounced as contrary to human dignity the fact that, in some places, not a few people are imprisoned, tortured, and even deprived of the good of life solely because of their sexual orientation" (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita* [April 8, 2024], no. 55).

[11] Human Dignity Trust, "Map of Countries that Criminalise LGBT People," available at https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/ (accessed January 2, 2024).

[12] See N. Winfield, "The AP Interview: Pope Says Homosexuality Not a Crime" (January 26, 2023), available at https://apnews.com/article/pope-francis-gay-rights-ap-interview-1359756ae22f27f87c1d4d6b9c8ce212?utm_source=apnews&utm_medium=relatedcontentmodule (accessed January 2, 2024).

[13] L. Rollè, G. Giardina, A. Caldarera, E. Gerino, & P. Brustia, "When Intimate Partner Violence Meets Same Sex Couples: A Review of Same Sex Intimate Partner Violence," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (August 21, 2018), 393254: 2. A review of 42 existing studies on IPV and sexual abuse among LGBT persons "found a lifetime prevalence of IPV among lesbian and bisexual women, gay and bisexual men, and transgender people that is as high as or higher than [that of] the U.S.

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human trafficking,"[14] involving numerous abuses such as discrimination and exploitation as well as physical and sexual violence.

Children who identify as LGBT face specific challenges that make them vulnerable to child sexual abuse. For one, they may hesitate to report abuse as it may lead to disclosure of their LGBT identity. And when they do report, they may be less likely to be believed and their sexuality may be blamed for the abuse.[15] LGBT children are also at risk of cyber-abuse as they frequently use social media platforms to begin exploring their sexual identity. They may take the risk to use apps and websites meant for adults and thus increase the risk of being abused.

A subtle form of psychological or emotional abuse to be vigilant for is when a young person, who may have some confusion about his or her sexuality, is encouraged or even cajoled to "come out" when in fact he or she may simply be passing through a phase of exploring his or her sexual identity.[16] Self-care for persons with SSA

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general population" (see T. Brown & J. Herman, "Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Abuse Among LGBT People" [Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, November 2015], 2, available at https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/ipv-sex-abuse-lgbt-people/).

[14] See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (June 2021), 9, available at https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TIPR-GPA-upload-07222021.pdf.

[15] Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, *The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*, Executive Summary (United Kingdom: October 2022), 1, available at https://www.iicsa.org.uk/reports-recommendations/publications/inquiry/final-report/executive-summary.html.

[16] An adolescent "often confuses a 'crush' she has on an older girl or a female teacher as a form of homosexuality. She should be shown that she is simply going through a stage of strong admiration and needs to take care not to make an idol out of another person. Meanwhile, she must continue to seek friends within her peer group and learn to form good human relationships with both sexes" (J. Harvey, *Same Sex Attraction: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice* [New Haven: Knights of Columbus, 2007], 34–35, available at https://www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis385.pdf [accessed January 2, 2024]).

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is vital to avoiding damaging actions that can be harmful, thereby avoiding the serious health risks that can accompany some aspects of homosexual behavior.[17]

Safeguarding Children with Gender Dysphoria

A most disturbing trend in relation to safeguarding LGBT youth has been the treatment of young people who express gender dysphoria. The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith recently gave an updated presentation of the Church's teaching on gender and sex change in its document *Dignitas Infinita*, reminding us that "respect for both one's own body and that of others is crucial in light of the proliferation of claims to new rights advanced by gender theory."[18] Oftentimes, the Church's vision on gender is critiqued especially by LGBT theologians. However, the Church teaching is supported by the very latest medical evidence, as witnessed by the publication of the Cass Review,[19] which came out just two days after the publication of *Dignitas Infinita*. It was commissioned by the National Health Service in England and led by Dr. Hilary Cass, the former President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. The Cass Review is the world's biggest study to date on gender medicine. Interestingly, the report, the result of a four-year intensive study, gives credence to the Church teaching on gender.

The findings of the Cass Review call for a serious rethinking of the way young people with gender issues are treated. We know that there has

[17] These are well-documented and include higher rates of infection, particularly HIV, syphilis, and gonorrhea, as well as substance misuse. For more information on this topic, see J. McTavish, "Chastity and Homosexuality: Combating the Scourge of HIV and AIDS," *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 14:4 (Winter 2014): 637–645.

[18] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita*, no. 59.

[19] National Health Service England, *Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People* (April 2024), available at https://cass.independent-review.uk/home/publications/final-report/.

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been an explosion of young people over the last few years, the majority of them being adolescent girls, presenting with gender concerns. The gender affirmative approach has railroaded them until now into a medicalized care pathway that consists of social transitioning, puberty blockers, and cross sex hormones (testosterone for the females and estrogens for the males). What is of utmost concern is that the Cass Review has demonstrated that there is insufficient scientific evidence for such an approach, and that the worldwide guidelines (from the World Professional Association for Transgender Health) followed in many countries are unreliable and lack scientific rigor.[20] This means that thousands of children have undergone unnecessary treatments of dubious benefit and that may even be harmful. Many of these young people were neurodiverse, expressed autism, sometimes had serious concomitant psychological issues such as eating disorders, anxiety, depression, or suicidal ideation, or experienced sexual abuse. However, with a myopic focus solely on gender, these serious issues in much need of care and attention were, sadly, often overlooked. The Cass Review will likely change the way young people expressing gender issues are treated in the future, and other countries will be similarly challenged to take up more evidence-based practices.

The safeguarding concerns here are obvious—we need to protect our youth in that period of adolescence when they are questioning their identity, and not hurriedly dive in to medical treatment that is unproven, may be dangerous, and will have lifelong consequences. Indeed, an additional safeguarding concern here is that many of these gender confused young people actually experience SSA. It seems that instead of helping them to welcome their sexual orientation and live it well, they may have been offered a form of "conversion therapy," incorrectly addressing their SSA by encouraging them to change their gender medically.

[20] National Health Service England, *Independent Review of Gender Identity Services for Children and Young People*, 28.

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Abuse and Sexual Orientation

Worldwide, abuse is predominantly carried out by heterosexual persons, and the majority of victims are female. Moreover, most homosexuals do not molest minors.

In the Catholic Church experience, most of the victims are male. In the John Jay study, 81% of victims of clerical sexual abuse were males, and 51% were 11–14 years old.[21] Experts gathered in a Vatican symposium in 2003 proposed that homosexuality is a risk factor in, but not the cause of the sexual abuse of adolescent males.[22] Dr. Martin P. Kafka of the Harvard Medical School commented, "We described it as a risk factor," noting that the majority of cases in the American crisis involve adolescent males. Kafka emphasized, however, that this does not mean homosexuality causes sex abuse. "A risk factor is not a cause," he said. "The great predominance of homosexual males are in no way sexual abusers," Kafka said. "There is, however, a subgroup at risk."[23]

In the general population, the proportion of males who declare that they are gay is approximately 2–3%.[24] In the priesthood, the

[21] John Jay College of Criminal Justice, *The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950–2002* (Washington, DC: February 2004), available at https://www.bishop-accountability.org/reports/2004_02_27_JohnJay_revised/2004_02_27_John_Jay_Main_Report_Optimized.pdf.

[22] J. L. Allen Jr., "Homosexuality a risk factor, Vatican told" (National Catholic Reporter, 18 April 2003), available at https://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2003b/041803/041803n.htm (accessed January 2, 2024).

[23] *Ibidem.*

[24] The research done by Kinsey in the late 1940s reported that 10% of males are homosexual (A. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* [Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1948]). Nowadays, this figure is heavily critiqued and generally considered unreliable. However, the 10% myth still lingers on. For the latest statistics on sexual orientation in the U.K., see Office for National Statistics, "Sexual Orientation, UK: 2021 and 2022," available at https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/

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percentage of persons with SSA is higher and is likely to be around 15–20%. Sullins estimates that around 17% of Catholic priests in the United States are persons with SSA, a rate 4–5 times higher than in the wider population. He also reports that "today half of all Catholic priests are between the ages of 60 and 84, and about one in five of these priests is homosexual; but less than one in thirty priests under age 50 is homosexual."[25]

It is thought that most cases of abuse of minors occurred in an "opportunistic" fashion such that as more males were around—in the context of the minor seminary, or serving at the altar—there were more male victims. This type of opportunistic or situational homosexuality is on par with what occurs in mostly male environments like the military or prison settings. For Sullins, though, he notes that

> the decline in male victims since the 1980s has not occurred due to a rise in the abuse of girls, but because of a dramatic drop in the abuse of boys.… What has changed since then is not that more girls are being abused, but [that] far fewer boys are being abused.[26]

He proposes that more priests were persons with SSA in the past, and thus there were more male victims. Now the number of male victims is falling because the percentage of persons with SSA in the new generation of priests has fallen—from more than 20% in the past to just 8% of those ordained after 2000.

It seems we have two camps—at one extreme, there are those who blame the whole abuse crisis on homosexuality, and, on the other, those who deny that homosexuality has anything to do with it.

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sexualidentityuk/2021and2022 (accessed January 2, 2024). For U.S. figures, see Flores & Conron, "Adult LGBT Population in the United States."

[25] D. Sullins, *Receding Waves: Child Sex Abuse and Homosexual Priests since 2000* (The Ruth Institute, The Catholic University of America, 2019), 3, available at http://sullins.epizy.com/published%20articles/Receding%20Waves%202019.pdf?i=1 (accessed January 2, 2024).

[26] Sullins, *Receding Waves: Child Sex Abuse and Homosexual Priests since 2000*, 14.

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Where Do We Stand as Safeguarders?

We can clearly reiterate the advice of the Catechism to avoid unjust discrimination, which seems to be behind those who erroneously blame the abuse crisis solely on homosexuality. We are also aware that homosexuality is not the cause, although it can be a risk factor.

We also note that the priesthood has a higher percentage of persons with SSA than is present in general society. It is also worth mentioning that we see some hypocrisy at times in the Church hierarchy, where Church leaders may publicly denounce homosexuality, on the one hand, but seem to accept if not practice it readily.[27]

Church Teaching on Homosexuality

Traditional Catholic moral teaching makes a difference between a homosexual orientation and homosexual acts. The homosexual orientation is not in itself sinful. This means that statements such as "The Catholic Church teaches that homosexuality is a sin" are incorrect as they lack precision. We can only connect an orientation, either homosexual or heterosexual, to sin when the person with the orientation engages in sinful thoughts, words, or actions, such as, for example, sexually fantasizing about another, watching pornography,

[27] In 2012, Scotland's only cardinal, Keith O'Brien, publicly denounced same-sex relationships as being "harmful to the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing of those involved" and stated that same-sex marriage would be "a grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right" (K. O'Brien, "Cardinal O'Brien: Same sex marriage would be 'a grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right,'" *Sunday Telegraph* commentary [Scottish Catholic Media Office, March 4, 2012], available at https://scmo.org/news-releases/perma/1330857739/article/cardinal-obrien-same-sex-mar.html [accessed January 2, 2024]). Cardinal O'Brien, who was then the President of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland and Britain's most senior Catholic, later had to step down for the purpose of "spiritual renewal, prayer and penance" after it was revealed that he had been having long-standing abusive homosexual relationships with various men, who accused O'Brien of either sexually harassing them or pressuring them into sex.

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masturbating, or engaging in a sexual act with another (who is not one's spouse).

Francis, who famously stated, "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge him?", also recently underlined that any sexual act outside of marriage is a sin.[28] The document *Fiducia Supplicans* from the Dicastery (formerly Congregation) for the Doctrine of the Faith opens the door for non-liturgical blessings of same-sex couples.[29] The document underlines that blessings are aimed at "giving glory to God for his gifts, asking for his favors, and restraining the power of evil in the world."[30] The document does not endorse same-sex unions and also takes pains to underline that it is only in the context of marriage "that sexual relations find their natural, proper, and fully human meaning. The Church's doctrine on this point remains firm."[31] The teaching in the document, when properly understood and correctly applied, is a welcome step toward a greater acceptance of persons with SSA.

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[28] Francis, "Lettera del Papa a padre James Martin su omosessualità e peccato," *L' Osservatore Romano* (January 28, 2023). The *Osservatore Romano* here is reporting on a Spanish letter handwritten by Francis dated January 27, 2023, addressed to the Jesuit priest James Martin. Fr. Martin had asked the Pope to clarify what he meant when he said that homosexuality is a sin. The Pope lacked precision in his informal statement, so in his letter, he wrote,

> When I said it is a sin, I was simply referring to Catholic moral teaching, which says that every sexual act outside of marriage is a sin. Of course, one must also consider the circumstances, which may decrease or eliminate fault. As you can see, I was repeating something in general. I should have said, "It is a sin, as is any sexual act outside of marriage." This is to speak of "the matter" of sin, but we know well that Catholic morality not only takes into consideration the matter, but also evaluates freedom and intention; and this, for every kind of sin (p. 12).

[29] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Fiducia Supplicans* (December 18, 2023).

[30] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Fiducia Supplicans*, no. 10.

[31] Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Fiducia Supplicans*, no. 4.

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Admission to Seminary

For admission to the seminary and ordination to the priesthood, the *ratio fundamentalis* for priestly formation in many countries will usually follow the guidance given by the Dicastery (then the Congregation) for Catholic Education in 2005. The Dicastery identified three groups of men who cannot be admitted to the seminary or holy orders: those who practice homosexuality, support the so-called gay culture, or present deep-seated homosexual tendencies.[32]

Deep-seated Tendencies

When we say "deep-seated," to what exactly are we referring? Although the term "deep-seated" is often used in Church documents regarding homosexuality, they do not give a further explanation. Kleponis and Fitzgibbons describe deep-seated SSA in the following way.

> Those with deep-seated homosexual tendencies often identify themselves as "gay men" which is based to a large extent upon their sexual attractions. They often reject the current scientific findings that there is no genetic or biological basis for SSA and believe they were born this way. They do not view homosexuality as a disordered inclination, are comfortable with their sexual attractions, subscribe to the increasingly prevalent belief that homosexuality is a normal variation in human sexuality, and think there is nothing wrong with homosexual acts. Their beliefs make them highly vulnerable to sexual acting out.
>
> Men with deep-seated homosexual tendencies are usually unwilling to examine the possibility that they experienced emotional conflicts in significant male relationships that result in same-sex attraction. When asked, they are often unable to name a best male friend in elementary school. Their strong physical attraction to other men's bodies and to

[32] Congregation for Catholic Education, *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders* (November 4, 2005), no. 2. This teaching is simply repeated in Congregation for the Clergy, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* (*Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*) (Vatican City: December 8, 2016), no. 200.

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> the masculinity of others is the result of profound weakness in male confidence, a craving for male acceptance, and a poor body image. They have a significant affective immaturity with excessive anger and jealousy toward males who are not homosexual. Their insecurity leads them to avoid close friendships with other men who do not have SSA.[33]

As previously reported, this allows us to identify three aspects of deep-seated SSA.[34] First, this depth can be gauged by the intensity of the feelings and whether the candidate finds them manageable or not. Second, it makes a difference whether these feelings have been present since childhood, for as far back as the seminarian can remember, or are of more recent origin. Third, if a man has had multiple sexual encounters with other homosexual (or bisexual) men, the behavior itself can become deep-seated, as in a vice or vitiated state.

Safeguarding and HIV Infection

The abovementioned points will have a largely universal application. Now as we wrap up, we pass on to an example of contextualized theology. Our discourse on safeguarding would remain somewhat incomplete if we were to ignore the current HIV crisis in the Philippines and its implications for persons with SSA. Dr. Lui Ocampo, the UNAIDS Philippines Director, commented that despite an overall global decline, the Philippines experienced a 327% increase in annual new infections between 2010 and 2021.[35] The current rate of transmission has been described as "fast and furious." What is of

[33] P. Kleponis & R. Fitzgibbons, "The Distinction between Deep-Seated Homosexual Tendencies and Transitory Same-Sex Attractions in Candidates for Seminary and Religious Life," *The Linacre Quarterly* 78:3 (2011): 355–362.

[34] J. McTavish, "Same-Sex Attraction and the Priesthood," *Ethics and Medics* 44:4 (April 2019): 2.

[35] A. Bancud, "UNAIDS: PLHIV in the PH could reach 364,000 by 2030" (Philippine Information Agency, May 23, 2023), available at https://mirror.pia.gov.ph/news/2023/05/23/unaids-plhiv-in-the-ph-could-reach-364000-by-2030#:~:text=In%20terms%20of%20annual%20death,15%20to%2024%20years%20old (accessed January 2, 2024).

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particular concern is that the main mode of transmission is among males who have sex with other males (MSM).[36] The MSM group is variously composed of gay males, persons engaged in transactional sex or prostitution (who may also be heterosexual), and those who have sex with both males and females. As part of safeguarding efforts, serious consideration needs to be given to the startling statistic that 47% of new HIV cases in the Philippines occur among youth aged 15–24 years old, with MSM interactions being the main mode of transmission.[37]

The Courage Ministry

The group called "Courage" is a ministry to persons with SSA in the Catholic Church that has ecclesiastical approval.[38] Founded in 1980 in the USA by Fr. John Harvey, it is present today in various dioceses around the world. The goals of Courage are:

[36] In 2012, *The Lancet* ran a series of articles on HIV in men who have sex with men. They described MSM thus: "Men who have sex with men (MSM) is a term introduced in 1992 to attempt to capture a range of male-male sexual behaviours and avoid characterization of the men engaging in these behaviours by sexual orientation (homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, or gay) or gender identity (male, female, transgender, queer). MSM includes gay-identified men, heterosexually-identified men who have sex with men, bisexual men, male sex workers who can have any orientation, men engaging in these behaviours in all-male settings, such as prisons, and the rich and wide array of traditional identities and terms for these men across cultures and subcultures" (C. Beyrer et al., "Global Epidemiology of HIV Infection in Men Who Have Sex with Men," *The Lancet* 380:9839 [2012]: 368).

[37] L. Cabato, "HIV daily average cases on the rise in 2023—DOH," *Inquirer.net* (November 14, 2023), available at https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1859709/hiv-daily-average-cases-on-the-rise-in-2023-doh-2 (accessed January 2, 2024).

[38] See the Courage International website which also contains helpful testimonies and resource material at https://couragerc.org (accessed January 2, 2024). A most helpful pastoral resource is Harvey, *Same Sex Attraction: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice*.

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1. To live chaste lives in accordance with the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality (Chastity);

2. To dedicate our entire lives to Christ through service to others, spiritual reading, prayer, meditation, individual spiritual direction, frequent attendance at Mass, and the frequent reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist (Prayer and Dedication);

3. To foster a spirit of fellowship in which we may share with one another our thoughts and experiences, and so ensure that no one will have to face the problems of homosexuality alone (Fellowship);

4. To be mindful of the truth that chaste friendships are not only possible but necessary in a chaste Christian life; and to encourage one another in forming and sustaining these friendships (Support);

5. To live lives that may serve as good examples to others (Good Example/Role Model).[39]

There is also the Encourage ministry, which caters to those parents who have children with same-sex attraction.

Conclusion

Homosexuality is a delicate and challenging issue. When discussing it, we must always consider the person, treat them with dignity and respect, and avoid unjust discrimination. It is important to denounce the physical abuse and violence that LGBT persons may be subject to, as well as the criminalization and often-related threat of the death penalty.[40]

[39] See https://couragerc.org/about/.

[40] CCC, 2267 (2018 revision): "Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that 'the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on

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Most persons with SSA do not molest minors, and the majority of victims worldwide are female. Homosexuality is not the cause of child sexual abuse, but for a sub-group of males with SSA, it can be a risk factor.

The percentage of priests with SSA (estimated at 15%) is higher than the percentage of males with SSA in general society (2–3%). Deep-seated same-sex attraction can mean that the person is not suitable for seminary life or ordination, whereas transitory or passing same-sex feelings may be worked out and most likely overcome. The admission criteria of seminaries and houses of religious formation for admitting men with homosexuality vary, and Church teaching does not yet clarify what deep-seated tendencies are.

Of particular concern is the current epidemic of new HIV cases among Filipino youth (aged 15–24 years old). Our safeguarding efforts should aim to reduce the high rates of transmission, especially in the MSM group.

Various obstacles may be encountered when seeking to provide pastoral support to persons with SSA. The United States bishops note that "the pervasive influence of contemporary culture creates, at times, significant difficulties for the reception of Catholic teaching on homosexuality."[41] Nevertheless, the Courage and Encourage groups are doing good work in the dioceses where they are present.

Overall, the person with SSA is called to holiness.

> The Church seeks to enable every person to live out the universal call to holiness. Persons with a homosexual inclination ought to receive every aid and encouragement to embrace this call personally and fully. This

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the inviolability and dignity of the person,' and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide."

[41] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care* (November 14, 2006), no. 24.

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> will unavoidably involve much struggle and self-mastery, for following Jesus always means following the way of the Cross.[42]

The reality of homosexuality presents particular and specific issues. It is hoped that the overview provided in this article can help us in our work of safeguarding persons with SSA.

About the Author. **James McTavish, F.M.V.D.** is a Verbum Dei missionary priest from Scotland. He is currently assigned as a General Counselor in Rome. He spent 18 years in the Philippines in various posts such as Novice Master and later Provincial. He was a Professor of Moral theology and Bioethics at Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University as well as teaching at other theological and medical schools of the Jesuits and the Dominicans.

He completed his undergraduate studies in medicine at Cambridge University, England and graduated as a medical doctor in 1992, pursuing a career in surgery and eventually gaining his fellowship in general surgery with the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh. He met the Verbum Dei missionaries in Sydney, Australia, joined them in 1999, and had his formation years in the Philippines.

He studied and obtained his License in Moral Theology from the Accademia Alfonsiana (the Redemptorist Higher Institute of Moral Theology) and an M.A. in bioethics at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum in Rome. He has published over 80 articles in international journals and has written several books. He completed the Diploma in Safeguarding at the IADC institute of the Gregorian University, Rome, and has been part of the international Safeguarding team of his community for the last three years.

[42] US Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, no. 13.

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