

ANTECEDENTS OF HOMOSEXUALITY: SCIENCE AND MORAL EVALUATION

Introduction

In the chapter on homosexuality, in the fifth edition (1989) of the authoritative *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* (ed. Kaplan, H. H. and Bedeck, B. J.; Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore, 1989, vol. I, pp. 1086-96), Warren Gaddaille begins by observing that for many people, including psychiatrists, homosexual behavior has become more a sociopolitical issue than a variety of sexual activities that may or may not have clinical relevance. The already complex scientific problems have also become an ideological battlefield, resulting in considerable confusion. In fact, one finds that the six editions of the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* give six different answers to the question of whether homosexuality represents a sexual disturbance. In the first edition (1967), the response was clearly affirmative. The answer given in the second edition (1975) was less clear. The third edition (1980) answered in the negative. The fourth edition (1985) and especially the fifth (1989) show a cautious return to the position that homosexuality is the result of a defective psychosexual development, so that the fifth edition is, in fact, rather like the first. In the sixth edition (1995), Gaddaille does everything possible to maintain the positions taken in the fifth edition, even though it seems obvious that, in this edition, the editors and others pressured him to modify his previous positions.

At the same time, we also find in psychological and psychiatric literature true and proper apologies for the homosexual life (cf. *Review of Psychiatry*, 12 [1993], ed. Oldham, J. M. et al.; American Psychiatric Press, Washington, D.C - London, Ch. 1, 3, 4, 5). In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association decided to remove homosexuality from its list of psychiatric disturbances. But, in 1977, a survey of American psychiatrists (cf. Lief, H. I., "Sexual Survey 4: Current Thinking on Homosexuality", *Medical Aspects Of Human Sexuality*, 11 [1977] 110-111) revealed that 69 percent of them continued to think that homosexuality was a pathological adaptation and not a normal variation.

In the current situation, therefore, we find considerable differences of opinion among psychologists and psychiatrists. The purpose of this brief article is two-fold: to summarize the clearest research results and to comment briefly on how these results relate to the traditional Catholic evaluation of homosexuality. The question of the antecedents of homosexuality will be discussed under three headings: the possibility of biological causes, the role of psychosocial factors, and several cultural aspects of the problem.

Possibility Of Biological Causes

Many scientists have tried to find a biological cause of homosexuality, e.g. in the endocrine system or the brain. The results of this research have been very limited; a recent survey concludes that so far nothing clear has been discovered: "Many researchers have searched for the causes of homosexuality, but so far the research has been futile" (McWhirter, D. P., "Biological Theories of Sexual Orientation", in *Review of Psychiatry*,

12, p. 54). Some recent research suggests the possibility of a genetic component in the origin of homosexuality (see Bancroft's recent survey "Homosexual Orientation: The Search for a Biological Basis", *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 164 [1994] 437-440). But, in his opinion, it is unlikely that a gene *per se* determines sexual orientation, whereas psychosocial factors seem to be of crucial importance in the genesis of adult homosexuality. The fact that many homosexual persons can change their sexual orientation with psychotherapy (Gadpaille [1989], p. 1095), while no heterosexual person has ever been known to receive therapy in order to become homosexual (cf. Nicolosi, J., *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach*, Jason Aronson, Northvale [New Jersey] - London, 1991, p. 9) confirms the importance of psychosocial factors. As for possible genetic factors, the type of research that could provide a clear answer, that is, the study of monozygotic twins raised separately from birth, so far has been conducted to a very limited degree with inconclusive results (Gadpaille [1995], p. 1324). Such research would serve to clearly distinguish the influence of biological heredity from that of the family and social environment.

Role Of Psychosocial Factors

Researchers of the psychoanalytic tradition primarily have studied the influence of these psychosocial factors. On the basis of psychoanalytic exploration, these researchers attribute homosexuality to the developmental difficulties a young person experiences. Gadpaille (1989, p 1089; cf. also 1995, pp. 1324-25) gives the following summary: "Clearly, there is no one pathogenic family constellation in the background of all homosexuals. There are, however, common denominators in the various family patterns: parenting figures of the same sex who are so weak or punitive and hostile as to make identification impossible or unacceptable; parent figures of the opposite sex who are so seductive or so demeaning and hostile or so emotionally disorganized that the child cannot learn to trust those of the opposite sex; and parents who successfully undermine and reject a child's biological sex and the sex-specific behaviors and attitudes typical of it." The homosexuality resulting from a difficult psychosexual development has the character of a "compromise" or defense mechanism; the homosexual person does not achieve heterosexual maturity in the psychosexual aspect of his or her development. There remains a partially unanswered question: whether the same genesis can be attributed to all homosexuals, given what the majority of them have never been studied with psychoanalytic methods.

This approach has been strongly challenged by those who defend homosexuality as normal. However, it has two merits worthy of mention. In the first place, it is based on careful research, such as that of Bieber and his colleagues (cf. Bieber, i., Bieber, T. B., "Male Homosexuality", *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 24 [1979], 409-421). In the second place, it corresponds to the experience of many homosexuals who have personally told me their story (cf. also Nicolosi, J. *Healing Homosexuality: Case Studies of Reparative Therapy*, Jason Aronson, Northvale, NJ, 1993). Obviously, this last point does not clear up the doubts as to whether the same experiences are part of the life of homosexual persons who do not seek the help of a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Current Cultural Situation

As for the current cultural situation, it should be recalled that on February 8, 1994 the European Parliament in Strasbourg voted in favor of a resolution that homosexual persons be given equal rights, including the right to marry, to adopt children, and to political asylum. This critical fact helps to illustrate the phenomenon of how politicized the homosexual question has become. Other aspects of the "gay culture" and its defense have been described by Nicolosi (1991, especially Ch. 13): the demand that homosexuality be recognized as normal, the tendency to reject research results showing that homosexuality is not normal, the attributing of all the difficulties experienced by homosexual persons to the "homophobic" prejudice of heterosexuals, and the extreme thesis of some people that homosexual persons should follow a different moral system in which promiscuity would be acceptable.

Certainly, these phenomena are part of a complex, extensive process of social change, which includes the crisis of moral values, a process that cannot be adequately commented on here. At any rate, it is obvious that, if a young person identifies with the "gay culture", homosexuality will become a central part of his or her life.

Moral Evaluation

It is not easy at all to find one's bearings in such a polarized situation; however, the following assertions can be made about the moral evaluation of homosexuality:

1. Even if it does turn out that a person can inherit a biological predisposition to homosexuality, it would not follow that homosexuality should be considered normal. The same can be said of possible family or social conditioning. If we think of a less provocative subject, such as shyness or aggressiveness, it becomes clearer that the tendencies a person develops (for whatever reason) are to be evaluated according to their intrinsic nature; extreme shyness never becomes a good or normal quality, even though the person is not that way through his or her own fault.
2. In the light of available evidence, the position can be defended, also in psychological terms, that homosexuality represents a defective form of psychosexual development (Nicolosi, 1991, cited above). Apart from the exclusion of the procreative meaning of sexuality, it is clear that the relationship between two homosexual persons (of the *same* sex and of the *same* sexual orientation) lacks that complementarity that characterizes heterosexual marriage. Furthermore, if one accepts that the homosexual orientation represents a "defensive compromise" (and the evidence for this conclusion is very strong), it follows that, for this reason too, homosexual acts cannot represent true self-giving.
3. The traditional moral evaluation of homosexual acts does not depend on any psychological theory of homosexuality. The Catholic evaluation of homosexuality is based on Sacred Scripture and constant tradition. This tradition is very ancient; it goes

back to the Pentateuch, with its rejection of the sexual practices of the surrounding world.

4. The controversies in psychology and psychiatry concerning the normality not only of the homosexual orientation but also of homosexual acts do not in any way result from new scientific discoveries. In what I have been able to read, I have found nothing of a scientific nature that would logically lead to new moral evaluation of homosexual acts. The recent tendency to defend the homosexual orientation and homosexual acts appears to stem instead from a change in society's moral consensus, with echoes in the scientific world. It is interesting to recall how clear was the position in psychoanalytic writings of scarcely 20 years ago that homosexuality is a disturbance, (e.g. Lesse, S., Editorials, *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 27 (1992) 151-154, and 28 (1974) 1-3; Socarides, C. W., "The Sexual Deviations and the Diagnostic Manual", *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 32 (1978) 414-426; Socarides, "How America Went Gay", *America*, 18 November 1995, pp. 20-22).

This change tends to favor the importance of sexual gratification, so that a chaste life becomes almost unthinkable for many people, and at the same time personal freedom, understood in a strongly subjective sense, is exalted. It should be noted that the same change in the social perception of values also involves other issues such as abortion, premarital chastity, divorce, and conjugal fidelity. The traditional doctrine has been challenged on all these points. Precisely for this reason, the defense of the Church's traditional teaching in the whole area of sexual morality takes on new importance as a defense of future families and of those individuals who do not want to surrender themselves to possible homosexual tendencies.

--Bartholomew Kiely, S. J., edited by Patrick J. Hession
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