

# Homophobia, not homosexuality, is the problem

John Creager

"Homophobia" denotes disgust, aversion, fear, or anger against homosexuality. Covert attitudes differ from overt behavior, which may range from stating feelings to harassing homosexuals. People often view homosexuality and heterosexuality as either-or categories, not as poles of a continuous distribution.

Human sexuality, being complex, has spawned various groups:

1. People uncritical of their culture's mores, ignorant of how sexual orientations vary.

2. Transvestites, those who dress or act as members of the opposite sex, who may be either heterosexual or homosexual. Some perform in dramas, skits, and charades.

3. Transsexuals, who have the body features of one sex, but the feelings of the opposite one.

4. Repressed homosexuals, displaying a range of clinical symptoms.

5. Physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals, who discard homophobic views as they learn more about sexual complexity. After intensive debate the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses.

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Depression and other psychosomatic problems afflict heterosexuals as well as homosexuals. AIDS is not confined to homosexuals.

6. Those who believe that deviant sexual behaviors are sinful, worrying more about the sins of others than about their own. The notion comes from Judeo-Christian-Muslim traditions. Although their scriptures are deemed the inerrant "Word of God," they are interpreted by finite and fallible people.

Religious groups have seminaries where selected teachers teach future clerics the "party line." A seminary enables the group's leaders to control its members' thoughts. The leaders aid and abet the labeling of homosexuality as "sin and abomination."

The Bible contains two passages that explicitly condemn homosexuality as sin. Leviticus 18:22 calls homosexuality an "abomination" in the context of other sexual prohibitions (e.g., incest). It does not consider its complexity, relationship to other sexual orientations, or the distinction

between orientation and behavior.

The other Biblical passage comes from that pragmatic genius, St. Paul, who proclaims his attitude toward homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9, where he predicts who will "inherit the Kingdom of God." Isn't this judging the salvation of homosexuals? Jesus says not to judge with the same measure (Matthew 7:1-2).

This passage, often interpreted to mean judging one's salvation, admonishes against seeing the motes in the eyes of others while ignoring the planks in one's own. It is a general attack on hypocrisy, on which Jesus confronts the Pharisees. However, he does not call for suspending judgment about human beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

Paul upholds Leviticus, but in Jesus's ethics Love (capitalized deliberately) does not undercut Jewish law. It overrides Jewish law whenever it contradicts the Love ethic that judges erotic and brotherly love. Jesus confronted those who uphold "the law" rigidly regardless of situations or conse-

quences.

Paul was no scientist. He knew Greek philosophy from those who "spoke with the tongues of men and angels." It is John who speaks of Jesus's ethics. Like Leviticus, Paul probably did not know about the complexity and multiple causes of sexual orientation.

Religious leaders may preach tolerance and try to separate attitudes about sins from those about sinners, but the two always go together in the real world.

We can dismiss verbal expressions of homophobia as inflammatory rhetoric. More dangerous is apparently logical reasoning, even though syllogisms are no more valid than their premises. If the premises are ambiguous or actually false, the conclusions merely seem reasonable.

Scriptural infallibility looks simple until you consider its assumptions about the nature of God, His role in revelation, the role of the Holy Spirit, the role of fallible receivers of revealed "truth" passed down through the centuries, and the role of ecclesiastical politics engrained in our culture.

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*John Creager lives in State College.*

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