

## **A ZENIT DAILY DISPATCH**

### **Pastoral Care for Those With Same-Sex Attraction**

Interview With Father John Harvey of Courage

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The new revised guidelines of the U.S. bishops on persons with homosexual tendencies reflects updated findings in psychology, says an expert in the treatment of same-sex attractions.

Father John Harvey, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, is director of Courage International, a spiritual support system for Catholic homosexual persons who desire to live a chaste life.

The bishops' document, "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care," mentions Courage and its partner organization for parents, Encourage, as examples of ministries whose principles are in accord with Church teaching.

In this interview with ZENIT, Father Harvey shared his views of the revised guidelines issued Nov. 14.

**Q:** How does the bishops' new document differ from previous documents on pastoral care of those with same-sex attraction?

**Father Harvey:** The document is a definite improvement from the 1997 document "Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers." That document was written in a way that it could be assumed that there are two orientations: heterosexual and homosexual.

The fact of the matter is that there is only one orientation, the heterosexual orientation. The homosexual tendency is an objective disorder, and if a person has this objective disorder, it is because other things have happened.

From all the psychological studies of homosexuality, there is no scientific evidence that you are born with the homosexual tendency. There is no evidence. In the future it might be that someone proves scientifically that some people are born as homosexuals, I doubt such would happen, but it might happen.

In the present state of scientific knowledge, however, this is no evidence that homosexuality is a condition, that it is passed down through a particular homosexual gene or is caused by a certain hormone. From what we know today, the main factors leading to a homosexual tendency all have to do with environment: family environment, school environment, adolescent environment.

Q: This document takes pains to note that same-sex attraction does not mean the person is objectively disordered, only that the inclination is disordered. Was there a widespread misconception of the Church's view on this point?

Father Harvey: In the document itself, they distinguish between the inclination and the person, and confers on the person with the disorder the dignity that God confers on all persons.

Same-sex attraction is not normal. The disorder is a subrational inclination of the person. People with homosexual tendencies suffer with these desires.

And not all persons with homosexual tendencies are alike. Studies indicate that of those who have homosexual desires there are those who have the homosexual desires, but are able to control them. There are also those who have the desires, and are actually able to

come out of the condition, to find the opposite sex attractive, to marry and to have children.

Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, founder of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, in Encino, California, says it best when he says that there are no homosexuals, just heterosexuals with a homosexual tendency.

The big difference in this document and previous ones is that we know much more about the origins, and much more about treatment than years ago.

The most important person in this regard is Elizabeth Moberly, who in 1984 published "Psychogenesis: The Early Development of Gender Identity." It's only 100 pages, but it revolutionized the therapy we use with homosexual people in that she shows that the homosexual tendency can be overcome.

Our goal at Courage is not to take homosexuals out of their condition, but that they be chaste. Many people have not been able to come out, but they have been able to live chaste lives.

Q: The document emphasizes that those with same-sex attraction need to be trained in the virtues. This seems to indicate that the people in question should be encouraged to think of themselves as protagonists who can change their situation. Is that a fair assessment?

Father Harvey: It used to be that if you had these deep-seated inclinations, you couldn't do anything. Now it's different.

For people who are willing to take therapy for a period of time, some are able to free their natural inclination to the opposite sex. And they even marry and have children.

Through group therapy, you develop virtues by which you learn to form good friendships. These friendships are ruled by the love of Christ, and are honest relationships with people that do not take you from God. It is more spiritual.

Cardinal Terence Cooke of New York asked me when we initiated this project to teach people how to be chaste. That is what we do, and it's not easy to do that.

At times it is what I call "white knuckled" chastity. It's called that because often that inclination is there constantly, and the person is constantly struggling. Through therapy and through our program the individual is often able to bring these desires under control, and he or she can be chaste, even though they still have these inclinations.

We also focus on living life according to Roman Catholic teaching, which means that one must develop a prayer life. This means Mass more than once a week, rosary, spiritual reading, spiritual direction and doing acts of charity on their day off.

Our program shows what can be done. We can't shortchange God's grace. I can't talk about success, only God can talk about success.

Q: The bishops point out that the Church doesn't refuse baptism to children in the care of same-sex couples, so long as there is hope that the little ones will be brought up in the faith. In practice, is this a realistic expectation? How could a same-sex couple seriously bring up a child in the faith?

Father Harvey: I read this passage over carefully, and the conclusion that I drew is that baptism can still be refused, unless there is a well-founded reason to lead one to believe that the child will actually be raised Catholic. For example, maybe there are grandparents or a sister who could take responsibility for the

child's Catholic education.

I found it difficult to see how a same-sex couple can manage to raise a child themselves, without outside help, and have that child receive a Catholic upbringing.

Whoever is the bishop or priest that must make that decision really has to inquire if they will be able to provide that child with an authentically Catholic upbringing. And it could be possible if they have a sister or brother who can help them out, or let their children go to Catholic school.

In most cases, however, most same-sex couples will say, "No thanks, we don't want to do that."

Q: The document emphasizes that spiritual direction with a priest is a primary means of helping someone with same-sex attraction. Given the large number of people who might need special attention, and the relatively small number of priests, how would this work?

Father Harvey: This is an example in which something is said and it's pretty difficult to carry it out.

But as the document says, it doesn't have to be a priest; there are many good psychologists and psychiatrists out there who could help a person with homosexual tendencies.

Also, the bishops mention Courage in a footnote. This is another option. What can happen is that people with a background in Courage could help others, as well as someone who is actively involved in Courage and leading a good life could reach out to others to help them. ZE06120723

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