

## QUAESTIO DISPUTATA: HARVEY'S *THE TRUTH ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY*

### SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

WILLIAM E. MAY

*[Editor's Note: The author takes issue with the content of Gerald Coleman's recent shorter notice on the monograph *The Truth About Homosexuality* by John Harvey. As a service to our readers, we print his objections, to which, in the following contribution, Fr. Coleman briefly replies.]*

The notice on John Harvey's *The Truth About Homosexuality*<sup>1</sup> by Gerald Coleman in the last issue of this journal<sup>2</sup> is brief. It is also, unfortunately, inaccurate and can therefore seriously mislead readers.

In his second sentence Coleman asserts that the book "builds on the assumption that homosexual people can 'move toward heterosexuality.'" This is a very misleading way to characterize the work; it implies, particularly in the context provided by the sentences immediately following, that Harvey thinks that it is easy for a homosexual person to "move toward heterosexuality." Harvey's text, however, belies this implication. At the conclusion of a chapter devoted to a detailed review of pertinent literature on this issue, Harvey proposes that "from the combined testimony of secular professionals and religious counselors, one may draw the *modest conclusion* that *some* persons with a homosexual orientation can acquire a heterosexual one through a process of prayer, group support, and sound therapy."<sup>3</sup> This "modest conclusion" hardly serves as the fundamental assumption underlying the book. Harvey's fundamental presupposition is that persons homosexually oriented, like persons heterosexually oriented, can, with God's grace and support from a human community, lead chaste lives and refrain from freely choosing to engage in genital acts unworthy of human persons because they do not respect the dignity of human

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S., *The Truth about Homosexuality: The Cry of the Faithful* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Gerald D. Coleman, S.S., review of Harvey, *The Truth about Homosexuality*, *TS* 58 (1997) 398-99.

<sup>3</sup> Harvey, *The Truth about Homosexuality* 114, emphasis added.

persons and the precious goods human genital activity is meant to serve.

After insinuating that Harvey thinks it relatively easy for homosexual persons to "move toward heterosexuality," Coleman then faults Harvey for being inconsistent inasmuch as he holds, on the one hand, that "all are meant to be heterosexual," yet refuses, on the other hand, to impose on homosexual persons an obligation to effect a change in their sexual orientation. But a reading of the text shows no inconsistency. It is surely not inconsistent to hold that human persons are meant by nature to be heterosexual but that some individuals, unfortunately, fail to achieve their proper psychosexual development, due to a variety of factors, among them many environmental in character. It is tragic that this failure to achieve psychosexual development occurs with some persons, but one cannot impose on them an obligation to overcome the condition of homosexuality because in a given set of circumstances it simply may not be possible or realistic for particular persons to effect this change. Yet one can impose on them the obligation to refrain from homosexual acts and to provide them with the help needed to do so—and this is the essential message of Harvey's book. Nor is it inappropriate to inform homosexually oriented individuals, particularly the young, that competent studies (cited extensively in the work) support the conclusion that it is indeed possible to effect this change if appropriate help can be provided.

Coleman claims that Harvey is "self-authoritative, supporting views that agree with his own, rather than necessarily basing his views on authoritative sources." This accusation is not borne out by a reading of the text, which is characterized by a very thorough and fair presentation of the views of "authoritative sources." These sources, however, disagree among themselves and at times come to contradictory conclusions. Obviously, they cannot all be correct, and obviously some authoritative sources hold positions with which Harvey disagrees. Faced with the diversity of views, Harvey simply does what any sane person should do: he examines the evidence and arguments used to support particular positions in order to determine which ones are better founded. This is how Harvey uses his "authoritative sources," not in the purely subjective way Coleman implies.

Coleman further claims that Harvey confuses celibacy with chastity. This is simply not true. Harvey, along with many intelligent Christians and others, holds for good reason that the chastity of an unmarried person, whether heterosexual or homosexual, must be celibate inasmuch as it would be contrary to reason freely to engage in genital sex. This is also true for married persons, who must remain celibate if abandoned by their spouses, if separated (perhaps for long periods) from their spouses, or if their spouses are no longer capable (physically or mentally) to engage in the marital act. There is nothing odd about Harvey's views here.

From the preceding illustrations one can see how inaccurate Cole-

man's notice on Harvey's book is, and how it can mislead readers. Other inaccuracies could be noted. I will omit pointing them out, however, in order to conclude this brief note by calling attention to one of the most serious misrepresentations of Harvey's views found in Coleman's notice. Coleman claims that Harvey gives "poor pastoral advice to homosexual people about marriage (he need not reveal this to his future spouse)." From this statement readers will infer, legitimately, that Harvey advises homosexual persons to conceal their homosexuality from future spouses. If Harvey offered this advice he is surely giving very bad counsel, and he ought to be censured severely for providing such contemptible advice. But he simply does not give the counsel Coleman says he gives. Coleman has taken the quotation attributed to Harvey in his parentheses out of context and grossly manipulated it. Let me, however, put this citation into its context; readers will then be able to judge whether or not Coleman has accurately expressed Harvey's views. The relevant text reads as follows:

Since these situations involve at least one other person, the question arises whether the person with these tendencies is bound to tell the fiancée or spouse. There is no easy answer. *Sometimes* the individual undergoes what is called "homosexual panic." A person is convinced that he is homosexual because he committed a homosexual act or because as a teenager he was seduced into such an act. *This does not prove that he is homosexual.* He need not reveal this to his future spouse; however, he may decide to do so because he believes that she will not reject him for what happened in the past.<sup>4</sup>

Within the same section where this citation is found, moreover, Harvey makes it clear that a person who is truly oriented homosexually ought not to marry and has an obligation to make this known to any one who might be interested in marrying him.

Since Coleman's notice attributes to Harvey views that he does not hold and moreover inaccurately presents his position on many key issues, it may unjustly harm Harvey's reputation as a scholar and priest counselor. His notice, moreover, neglects to mention the many superb features of this very comprehensive, scholarly study: Harvey's reasoned arguments (enhanced by acceptance of divine revelation as authoritatively proposed by the magisterium of the Church) that homosexual acts are always intrinsically immoral and ought not to be chosen freely, even by persons homosexually oriented; his critique of the specious reasons given to justify same-sex "marriage," the role of Courage, the group Harvey founded, in helping homosexually oriented individuals lead chaste lives in service to others, etc. I hope that this brief note helps to set the record straight.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 182, emphasis added.

## A RESPONSE TO DR. MAY

GERALD D. COLEMAN, S.S.

In strong support of Harvey's *The Truth about Homosexuality*,<sup>1</sup> Dr. May has written an alternative analysis, with far more latitude than I was permitted for a *TS* shorter notice (300 words or less). May presents what he believes to be the book's "fundamental presupposition" and "essential message," and outlines some points that I neglect to mention. Unfortunately, May draws his own implications from my review (implications that I reject) and restates my views, attributing to me language much more severe than I used about Harvey's book.

Amidst praise of Harvey's book and work ("balanced" and "admirable"), I mention disagreements, as a reviewer might be expected to do. I am not alone in this.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. May objects to my review on several points. First, he judges that I "imply" and "insinuate" that Harvey holds that it is either "easy" or "relatively easy" for a homosexual person to move toward heterosexuality. Nothing that I said in the notice implies that, nor does Harvey's book. I simply state accurately that Harvey believes (as I do) that homosexuals "can" move toward heterosexuality. I ask about the "assumptions" grounding this belief, but May seems to think that raising a question is undermining the belief.

Second, May says that I "fault" Harvey for inconsistency between the double claims that everyone is meant to be heterosexual, and that one cannot mandate that homosexuals make this change. In fact, I never mention inconsistency in this regard but ask only about the pastoral implications of the two claims. May tries to spell them out, but I do not think Harvey did.

Third, I claim that Harvey "is" self-authoritative. Indeed, after praising Harvey for his balanced review of many writers, I state that he "tends to be self-authoritative, supporting views that agree with his own." May disagrees, but he cannot accurately claim that I accuse Harvey of being "purely subjective."

Fourth, May claims that it is "simply not true" that Harvey confuses chastity and celibacy. On the contrary, Harvey conflates the two. The basis of my critique is statements like these: ". . . one does not have to

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S., *The Truth about Homosexuality: The Cry of the Faithful* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1966); and my review in *TS* 58 (1997) 398-99.

<sup>2</sup> For example, John H. Miller, C.S.C., editor of *Social Justice Review*, raises a "few disagreements" as well; see the March/April 1997 issue of that journal, p. 62.

be a monk, a nun, or a priest to live this kind of life [a celibate life]"; ". . . the positive value of celibacy in the lives of many Christians, including those with homosexual orientation"; and "God gives the gift of celibacy to all who ask for it." The magisterium clearly *distinguishes* between celibacy and chastity. Celibacy is lived "by groups of persons called to the practice of the evangelical counsels."<sup>3</sup> But homosexual persons are called "to a chaste life."<sup>4</sup> Chastity is a universal Christian obligation, whereas celibacy is a specific call within this virtue for those living an evangelical life. Homosexual people are more precisely called to be chaste, not celibate.

Finally, May claims that I have "grossly manipulated" the text that he cites. I simply indicated that Harvey's advice ("He need not reveal this") is "poor pastoral advice." I stand by this judgment since I believe that the sexual dimensions of one's past life (e.g. a "homosexual panic") should be discussed with a potential spouse.

May and I have common ground: our respect for Fr. Harvey and the fine work he has done. However, I do not think that everything in this book reflects Harvey's laudatory accomplishments.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., The Congregation for Catholic Education, *A Guide to Priestly Formation* (1972) Part 1.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986) n. 12.