

# Tolerance and Compassion?

The editorial, "Behind the Facade," which appeared in the Journal Monday, April 12, is remarkable for its meanness. The article's mean-spiritedness rests largely in its lack of studied reflection on the issues addressed. As I read the piece, there are two strands of the argument, 1) "tolerance, compassion and guidance" should be exercised in dealing with homosexuals, and 2) homosexuality is "clearly unnatural" because "gays cannot procreate." Besides the obvious falsehood of the second argument—of course homosexuals can procreate if they choose to, many have, causing immense suffering in later years for spouse and children—the meanness of the argument lies in its exceedingly crude physicalist notion of sexuality.

Whether or not sexuality (in its many diverse forms, which from an existentialist psychological perspective, may be as diverse as there are persons who are sexual beings) is also a spiritual function has been completely ignored in the article. There is a mismatch of terms which gives the writer away instantly—the writer shifts from an appeal to the imagination of sexual acts observed on the Rotunda steps to an appeal to "one of life's most profound mysteries between a man and a woman." The writer indicates, again quite falsely, that homosexual persons of different genders cannot love one another; and he bases this mistaken opinion on a thoroughgoing physicalist representation of sexuality. It

seems the writer wants to say that the "profound mystery" of love is heterosexual coitus. No psychological or religious view I am aware of will support this view.

On the contrary, by way of example, Catholic moral theology, which had formerly maintained that sexuality found its proper end in procreation, now finds this an inadequate witness to the gospel. Fr. Charles Curran, a prominent contemporary Catholic moral theologian, in several essays on sexuality uses a wide-ranging battery of arguments to criticize the physicalist notion of sexuality; psychological factors must be considered at least as objective as physical factors in understanding *human* sexuality, personal growth and maturity must be seen as the focus of greatest significance in any discussion of sexuality, pastoral concern demands disavowal of negative attitudes toward sexuality, and while procreation is a very important human value it must be recognized that procreation is not a biologically necessary result of every sexual actuation. With regard to this last point, Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, was speaking evangelically when he said that God gives children not the sexuality of the partners.

So, the editorializer's statement that "whether one's god is Jesus Christ or Charles Darwin, it is apparent that, in a sexual sense, men were meant to be with women" is full of obscurantism. The writer makes a

glancing appeal to religion abstracted from any tradition of scripture or practice or theological reflection (and can there be religion without these?), very obscurely tries to relate his "Jesus/Darwin" religion to something called "sexual sense" (is he saying that religion is supposed to affirm a *biological structure of non-human species* as the proper end of *human spirituality*? or what?), and finally, uses a euphemism to cover up his crudely physicalist notions ("to be with" equals heterosexual coitus).

Back to our beginning, all the editorializer's comments about sexuality in general undermine his appeal to compassion and guidance. Because, for the writer, *sexuality* equals *physical* equals *heterosexual* equals *coitus*, the desire of gay persons to show affection modestly and publicly as do others (husband and wife, parent and child, friends) is intolerable. Talk of tolerance is meaningless where a physical standard is maintained as the ideal; tolerance and compassion are not matters of merely acknowledging the physical presence of something or someone. If anything meaningful at all, compassion and tolerance must be matters of honestly open and sincere reflection and personal relationship(s). Guidance is something we give one another, for the benefit of both parties; I suggest that heterosexuals have much to learn from homosexuals.

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