

## Evangelizing The Homosexual

BY Melinda Selmys

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Last week, I said I couldn't say for certain when I first became involved in a homosexual relationship. I said I always perceived my relationships with men as a power struggle — and that with another woman I could always easily perceive myself as more in control.

This obviously is not reflective of the entire lesbian community — relationships between two emotionally distant, hyper-independent psychological cowards wouldn't work, both because they would never form in the first place, and because they would ultimately lead to power struggles that would eliminate their appeal.

Even within a homosexual relationship there has to be some sort of complementarity — and so it is necessary that there be a number of different psychological conditions that produce same-sex attractions.

What is most important, though, is that we realize that the reasons underlying homosexual behavior are genuine emotional and psychological needs or fears.

People who experience these desires are people whose sexuality, and possibly the ability to identify with their own gender, has been wounded in some way.

It is, therefore, not enough to convince them that homosexual activity is wrong. There are plenty of people practicing homosexuality who believe in the immorality of their actions, but feel unable to stop because they don't know of any other way to fulfill their fundamental, underlying needs.

Many have gone through years of guilt and shame before finally deciding that any God who demands such an impossible sacrifice is cruel, and any church that rejects their sexual actions is unjust. It is important, therefore, to seek to bring the healing power of God into their lives so that, rather than simply telling them to live chastely, we give them the emotional and psychological means by which to do so.

This work requires a one-on-one approach — it cannot be done through the mass media — and it cannot be achieved from the pulpit. Most people who have had any success in ministering to persons with same-sex attractions agree that you can't get anywhere unless you first form a personal relationship.

This is one of the reasons why fear, hatred or disgust directed towards those who are attracted to their own sex is so crippling when it is found within the Christian community. It repels those who have embraced the “gay” lifestyle, and alienates those who are struggling to remain faithful in spite of their same-sex attractions.

When Christians use degrading language or demonstrate uncharitable attitudes, it interferes with our ability to reach out to souls who are suffering with these temptations. Yet this is the most important work — not the work of safeguarding the legal definition of family or of changing public opinion on the matter of homosexuality (although these are obviously also important battles), but the work of saving individual souls who are afflicted with homosexual tendencies.

We must be clear on this: Persons with same-sex attractions, even the most strident, anti-Catholic, shamelessly sexualized demonstrators, are not the enemy. They are our own people, who have fallen into enemy hands, and it is our responsibility as Christians to do anything necessary to win them back.

Keeping this in mind, there are a couple of practical points that should be kept in mind by anyone attempting to evangelize persons with same-sex attractions.

First, while it is important to be conscious of the psychological problems that may underlie a homosexual orientation, it is equally important not to openly psychoanalyze. People hate being told that their feelings and attitudes are the result of an Oedipus complex, even if it happens to be true. If it becomes appropriate to help them realize, at some point in a long-term relationship, that their feelings stem from a lack of comfort with identifying with their own gender, that's fine, but you have to make sure that this conclusion is something that they are coming to realize themselves, not merely something that you are trying to tell them as a supposed expert.

Secondly, it is usually not a good idea to go into a deep discussion of the moral theology of sex unless they absolutely insist on doing so. Of course, you must never give the impression that you approve of what they are doing, but it is usually sufficient to say that, yes, as a Catholic, you support the Church's teachings on homosexuality and believe that homosexual behaviors are morally wrong — but that those teachings don't in any way interfere with your personal feelings of love or affection for them as a person.

One of the people who was most instrumental in my conversion to Catholicism took precisely this approach. I always knew that he didn't approve of my sexual choices, but it was never one of the central concerns of our relationship. For the most part, it was something that didn't even come up.

Once you've established a relationship, it is tremendously important that you seek to undermine their identification of self with sexual preference.

This can be difficult, because our sexuality does form an important and integral part of our personality, and since those who experience same-sex attractions usually suffer from a wounded sense of sexual identity, it is easy to see why they would think that their "sexual orientation" was tied to something more profound and fundamental than the mere sex act itself.

Thus, if you tell someone suffering from same-sex attractions that their sexuality is objectively disordered and their behaviors are immoral, but that you love them in spite of their sexuality, they are going to call you a hypocrite. This sentiment is baffling to many Catholics because we tend to see same-sex attractions primarily in terms of homosexual intercourse. We need to bear in mind that many people in the homosexual community feel that they have only ever really been personally accepted by that community — not just because the outside world condemns homosexuality, but because some significant part of the outside world failed to accept their personality even before they had any sort of homosexual feelings.

As a result of this, their genuine personality traits — aspects of themselves that actually are part of the way God made them — are psychologically bound up with their homosexuality. The things that made society (or Daddy or whoever) reject them are a part of their “gayness,” and to reject their homosexuality is, in their eyes, to reject all of those aspects of their personality, as well.

What is necessary, therefore, is to show them that someone can love them, and love all of the things that they erroneously associate with homosexuality, without actually loving their sin. Only when this becomes a practical reality, rather than a theoretical tagline, will they actually believe that it is possible, and understand that they have an identity and a personality with which their sexual desires are not integrally connected.

Since we can't bring people who identify themselves as “gay” into the Church simply by demonstrating that their actions are contrary to natural law, we need to use another approach.

The one that is most appropriate is, in fact, surprisingly simple: Make the faith appealing. Show them a God who is patient, merciful and loving, a God who brings healing to a world broken by sin. Talk to them about your faith, your experience of God's healing power and of his forgiveness. Show them that God will meet, perfectly, all of the psychological needs that they have been trying to fulfill through homosexuality.

When I finally decided to join the Church, and to abandon my homosexual lifestyle, it was not because I had been rationally persuaded that homosexual acts were unnatural, it was because I had developed a relationship with God, and he asked it of me.

At the time I didn't even remotely understand the logic behind his request, but he had died for me on the cross, so he had the right to ask that I give up something as relatively minor as my sexuality for his sake. Before I believed this, there was no amount of logic in the world that could have persuaded me that what I was doing was wrong. Once I believed it, it didn't matter if all the logic in the world was against me, because my God had asked it.

Although, as I said, it is usually not a good idea to bring up homosexuality, it is fairly important to understand the Church's teachings. There is likely to come a point where the

person you are evangelizing will want to know why this Church and this God that are suddenly starting to be appealing insist that homosexuality is sinful.

When this point comes, you are going to need to be able to explain Catholic doctrine clearly, rationally and with the greatest possible compassion. How? We'll save that for next week.

*Melinda Selmys writes*

*from Etibicoke, Ontario.*