

Eradicating the Sin of Heterosexism

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Debate in Catholic circles on homosexuality has resulted in a complete impasse. Those who consider homosexuality a sin and those who consider it a healthy, good, natural, and holy lifestyle simply disagree. If there were no consequences to that impasse I would ignore it. But because the institutional Roman Catholic Church influences public policy in many countries and causes untold spiritual and psychological damage to many of its members, I take seriously the need to enter the debate, if only to change its parameters. I suggest Catholics work together to eradicate heterosexism, and then, and only then, revisit the question of homosexuality.

Let me situate my remarks by identifying myself and my perspective. Then I will look at same-sex love and American Catholicism by articulating the well-known Catholic kyriarchal position and reviewing a bit of gay/lesbian history to show that there are a variety of Catholic positions on the issue. I will limit my sources to the United States' Catholic scene, which I know best. I will argue that while we have made enormous strides on the popular Catholic front, the fundamental Catholic kyriarchal position has not changed at all. It is my view that this is largely the result of looking at the wrong question, namely, homosexuality, and not at heterosexism, which is the real problem. I will suggest that eradicating heterosexism, rather than simply making homosexuality acceptable, is the moral task at hand. I will offer concrete steps toward doing so, and conclude with what I think will be positive results.

I am a Catholic feminist theologian who is a lesbian, living happily for more than twenty-five years with a wonderful woman. We adopted a daughter, who is now four years old (a little girl named Catherine, as in Catherine of Sienna), from China on December 12, 2001, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. For some people, we look like a new model of the Catholic Family of the Year. For others, of course, we are the epitome of everything that is evil.

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The most recent sustained treatment of same-sex love by the Vatican is its 2003 "*Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition To Unions Between Homosexual Persons*," issued in response to the international discussion of and progress toward same-sex marriage¹. The following statement struck me with special impact: "Allowing children to be adopted by persons living in such unions would actually mean doing violence to these children, in the sense that their condition of dependency would be used to place them in an environment that is not conducive to their full development. This is gravely immoral...." (par. 7)

While I have been working on the Catholic theological aspects of same-sex love for decades, that statement implies something about my life that I know to be untrue. It helped me to see the destructive impact of Catholic heterosexism. At first, I wondered —rather ironically— if the people who wrote and approved such a statement had ever been up in the night with a sick child. I wondered if they had ever seen, much less held, one of the hundreds of thousands of children who are orphaned because of sexist population policies or the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Many lesbian and gay families include such children, welcoming them with love and affection, reasoning that a child's life with one parent or two parents of the same sex is far better than languishing in an institution or, worse, dying from neglect.

On reflection, I realized that either Vatican officials are abysmally ignorant of the world in which we live, or they are pathologically focused on the need for one parent from column A and one from column B. That is, they are so concerned to have a biological man and a biological woman, regardless of what other dimensions those persons bring to the relationship, that it is Vatican officials and not same-sex parents who would do violence to children. This is the kind of classic reversal that Mary Daly named in *Beyond God the Father* more than thirty years ago². A variety of studies have shown that children of same-sex parents do just fine. If anything, they are a little more open to experimenting with same-sex dating than their peers, but in fact about the same percentage of them turn out to be heterosexual.

¹ *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons* Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, June 3, 2003.

² Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, pp. 95-97.

My theological project is predicated on the need for sexual justice. I have argued in a book entitled *Good Sex* for what I call "just good sex" as a basic human right³. "Just good sex" is a pun or play on words, used in a way to emphasize my Catholic starting point in a tradition that seeks justice in all dimensions of human life. It takes as an imperative of faith engagement in social change to bring about justice. I affirm sexual relationships that are safe, pleasurable, community building, and conducive of justice as part of a larger social agenda. That agenda is focused on the eradication of sexism, racism, economic oppression, colonialism, and, of course, heterosexism, in what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has called "kyriarchy," or the interstructured forms of lordship that are oppressive⁴.

Sexual justice, or "just good sex," is not isolated, a special interest, or a matter of privilege, but part of a consistent strategy and commitment to actualize in our time the values of love and justice that Catholicism promotes. What is new is the behavioral science and anthropology of same-sex love, the fact that it is now considered a common and healthy lifestyle⁵. This is not so new anymore and cannot be ignored by those who claim to speak theologically in a postmodern moment. However, if such shifts in anthropology are ignored, then it is not so much that the Vatican is in disagreement with my view as it is that we live out of different worldviews that may indeed be irreconcilable. We are more like ships passing in the night than ships running into one another.

I claim that same-sex love is healthy, good, natural, and holy. I base my view on social and biological scientific information, especially the data of psychology that long ago did away with homosexuality as a category of pathology. This is a significant fact the Vatican has consistently ignored, the analytic equivalent of pretending that Einstein's Theory of Relativity does not change philosophy and our way of acting in the world. Passed over, too, in the Vatican's construction of homosexual sex as wrong in every case is the data of sociology that show same-sex love lived out as healthily as heterosexism allows in virtually all human

3 Mary E. Hunt, "Just Good Sex: Feminist Catholicism and Human Rights", in *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives From the World's Religions*, edited by Patricia Beattie Jung, Mary E. Hunt, Radhika Balakrishnan, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, p. 169.

4 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992, pp. 117, 123.

5 "Informing the Debate on Homosexuality: The Behavioral Science and the Church," Isiaah Crawford and Brian D. Zamboni in *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology* Patricia Beattie Jung with Joseph Andrew Coray, editors, Colleagueville, MN. The Liturgical Press, 2001, pp. 216-251.

cultures. Left aside are the data of common sense which provide literally millions of examples of people in same-sex relationships who function as mature moral agents.

Even in classical theological terms, lesbian/gay/bisexual and transgender persons can embody the Virtue of Temperance, in Thomas Aquinas' terms, once one sees they do not commit "vices against nature" (*vitia contra naturam*) (Summa, Ila Ilae, q. 154, a.12) when such updated information about nature is at hand. Nor are they necessarily nonprocreative (Summa, Ila Ilae, q.154, a.1), as I can attest, unless one construes procreation in the most narrowly biologicistic way. I find it intellectually embarrassing to note that such simple and obvious facts are absent from contemporary official Catholic teaching on homosexuality.

The institutional teaching has not changed much in 100 years. That teaching is available for public consumption in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.' [141] They are contrary to natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved." (par. 2357)⁶

In addition to changes in what is "natural" and what constitutes "the gift of life," there is considerable debate among historians as to whether homosexuality has always been outlawed. Historian John Boswell made the case for the occasional tolerance of homosexuality in the Christian community over the centuries⁷. The matter of "sexual complementarity" is also suspect when in fact there are cases of women and men who have more in common with one another than some women do with other women and some men with other men—Boy George and Arnold Schwarzenegger, Martina Navratilova and Marilyn Monroe come readily to mind as more complementary than, say, Bill and Hillary Clinton, who exhibit a certain melded sameness.

Lest the new-found social enthusiasm for same-sex marriage dilute the teaching, the Vatican went to some lengths to reiterate in the 2003 *Considerations* that "there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family. Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law. Homosexual acts close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. United States Catholic Conference Inc., Washington, DC, 1994.

⁷ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved." (par. 4)

This formulation, nearly identical to the Catechism, also stretches credulity. What, then, are same-sex marriages analogous to if not marriage and family? Perhaps the Vatican thinks they are analogous to the death penalty, murder, war, torture, or any number of other evils I can imagine. It is simply absurd to say that same-sex marriages are not like heterosexual marriages insofar as they involve two persons who love one another, make a commitment, and intend to live together. Knowing same-sex couples who have married legally in the state of Massachusetts or the cities of San Francisco, California, or Portland, Oregon, not to mention in Sweden and the Netherlands, I am confident to say that the primary analogue is marriage even though my own view is that marriage is problematic for everyone, heterosexual or homosexual⁸.

What troubles me most about the Vatican's position is that it makes no distinctions between and among same-sex relationships. Surely there are some same-sex relationships, like their heterosexual counterparts, that are morally dubious. But again it is intellectually embarrassing for 21st century Catholics to be left with this kind of generalizing. We are more than capable of making many and fine distinctions between and among all sorts of love relationships, those we wish to emulate and those we see as destructive. We make such judgments on criteria that go well beyond the sexual constellation of the people involved. The big loss here is any frank, public, much less official, theological discussion of the goodness of same-sex love.

The price of not having such conversation is high. It is currently being paid in the millions of dollars in settlements for sexual abuse cases, most of which are males with males. The issue at hand in clergy sexual abuse is not homosexuality, but the climate of fear, silence, and duplicity that creates the conditions for unhealthy, criminal behavior and its cover-up. Mark Jordan's book The Silence of Sodom tells this story best⁹. I am not suggesting that homosexuality is the root of the clergy sexual abuse that has resulted in the most serious legal and moral problems in the history of the American Catholic Church. Rather, I am claiming that the heterosexist teachings and the sanctions that go with them leave little room

8 See Mary E. Hunt, "Same-Sex Marriage and Relational Justice," Roundtable Discussion on "Same-Sex Marriage", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 83-92.

9 Mark Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2002.

for healthy, legal, and public expressions of same-sex love. Such repression can easily result in the sordid behaviors we have learned about because the clerical culture had no practice in dealing healthily with the range of sexualities among priests and no public structures of accountability for those who transgressed professional boundaries sexually. Again, it is not the homosexuality, per se, but the ecclesially constructed heterosexist culture that helped to spawn unspeakable criminal abuse.

It is the wholesale writing off of same-sex love, this heterosexist bias, that has contributed to Catholicism's well deserved reputation as a prime symbol of queer repression. One has only to march in the annual Gay Pride Parade in New York City to feel the depth of emotion as the crowd approaches St. Patrick's Cathedral which is ringed with New York police officers and closed up tighter than a drum. The fact that Irish lesbian and gay people are not allowed to march in New York's annual St. Patrick's Day Parade is an annual reminder of how the Catholic Church wields its power. But activists like Susan O'Brien and Brendan Fay rejected that option years ago. They and their friends created an inclusive march held each year as a creative alternative to the exclusive one. If history is any judge, one day there will only be one parade, with gay and lesbian Irish Catholics marching along in gratitude to our ancestors. That is the power of ordinary Catholics who are out ahead of the institution in eradicating heterosexism. It is the case theologically as well.

In light of clear teaching to the contrary, it borders on miraculous that there is a healthy and vibrant Catholic lesbian, gay, bisexual, and now emerging, transgender community in the U.S. and in many countries around the world. I will confine my remarks to the U.S. context, but I know from work in Brasil, Argentina, Uruguay, Australia, and several European countries, especially Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, that there are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (lgbtq) Catholics everywhere among the more than one billion who claim a connection to the Catholic tradition. That scope alone gives impetus to my analysis since I realize that Catholicism is responsible, for good or for ill, for the moral foundation and legal structures of many countries, especially in Latin America.

Over the last three decades, challenges to the official Catholic position on homosexuality came from many corners. Some were quiet, the work of women and men including lesbian nuns and gay priests and brothers. Others were more public and academic. Among the earliest and most productive was the work of Jesuit priest John J. McNeill, whose book, The

Church and the Homosexual, resulted in his being dismissed from the Society of Jesus. He enjoys a high place in the panoply of gay/lesbian heroes. He wrote, "Homosexuals within the Church have an obligation, and therefore a right, to organize and attempt to enter into dialogue with Church authorities. Church authorities in turn should show an example in terms of just behavior...by displaying an active willingness to hear, to enter into dialogue, and to seek ways to resolve whatever injustice becomes clear as a result of dialogue."¹⁰ That was written in 1976 and we still await such a dialogue. Nonetheless, John McNeill opened a door that made it possible for many Catholic lesbian and gay people to imagine themselves Catholic and good.

New Ways Ministry was founded by Sister Jeannine Gramick and Father Robert Nugent in 1977 to provide "a gay-positive ministry of advocacy and justice for lesbian and gay Catholics and reconciliation within the larger Christian and civil communities."¹¹ New Ways helped many gay and lesbian people, especially members of religious communities, and now many parents with lesbian and gay children, to deal with the spiritual dissonance the kyriarchal church created around being gay/lesbian and being Catholic. The measure of New Ways' success was the condemnation of it by the Vatican, which ordered both of the founders to cease and desist their ministry. Today the public work is carried on by others who share their vision.

Dignity, the Catholic lesbian and gay organization, was founded in 1969 under the leadership of Father Patrick Nidorf, OSA. It has as its mission to work "for respect and justice for all gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy and support."¹² Dozens of chapters meet throughout the country, though none are allowed to meet on Catholic Church property. They celebrate the Eucharist and consider themselves as Catholic as the Pope. Dignity includes outreach to many other marginalized people, engages in theological reflection, works with other progressive Catholic groups on church reform, and provides an experience of church for thousands of lgbtq Catholics, their families and friends.

10 John J. McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*. 4th edition, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993 (1974), p. 195.

11 New Ways Ministry, <http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze43yrc/>, accessed March 6, 2005.

12 Dignity USA, <http://www.dignityusa.org/whatis.html>, accessed March 6, 2005.

The Conference for Catholic Lesbians was founded in 1983 "to promote Catholic Lesbian visibility and community."¹³ Though always significantly smaller than Dignity and now mostly a virtual community on the Internet, CCL empowers women to claim both Catholic identity and a lesbian lifestyle without contradiction. Many Catholic lesbian women find the fundamental contradiction in being female in a sexist church, rather than in being lesbian in a heterosexist one. Many gay men find the primary contradiction to be being gay in a homosocial church, that is, one with an all-male clergy caste, and no contradiction at all being men in a kyriarchal church. This accounts for some of the vast differences between Catholic lesbian women and Catholic gay men in terms of strategies and tactics. For example, feminist Catholic women are deeply concerned about the rank discrimination against all women on issues of reproductive health, ordination, and the like, prompting us to look for substantive changes in church structure rather than simply inclusion of us into what already exists. Many non-feminist gay men, on the other hand, are concerned about reforming the anti-gay nature of the Church to include them on its terms rather than transform the whole structure. Nonetheless, the meeting ground of heterosexism has kept lesbian and gay Catholics in touch over the decades. It promises to encourage a united movement for years to come.

Catholic scholarship on LGBTQ issues proliferates despite the clarity and gravity of the Vatican's position. For example, Patricia Beattie Jung, professor of theology at Loyola University Chicago, gathered a group of Catholic scholars to examine the biblical scholarship and Roman Catholic official teachings about the morality of same-sex love. The collection of essays that resulted, Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology, includes a broad range of well-informed Catholic theological opinions, all within the tradition¹⁴. Discussion of same-sex morals represents the vanguard in Catholic theological re-visioning of sexual ethics across the board. For example, in Patricia Beattie Jung's collection, Christina L. H. Traina examines heterosexual marriage. She concludes that "the ultimate fruitfulness and durability of any union—heterosexual or homosexual—have nothing to do with gender complementarity or lack thereof. But they have everything to do with faith, friendship, generosity, communal support, the serendipity of personalities, sexual and verbal

13 Conference for Catholic Lesbians, <http://www.catholiclesbians.org/pages/ccltoday.html>, accessed March 6, 2005.

14 Patricia Beattie Jung with Joseph Andrew Coray, editors, *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*. Collegeville, MN. The Liturgical Press, 2001.

affection, and the hard work that goes into mutual formation of a working partnership."¹⁵ Dr. Traina's reflections demonstrate that the implications of changing views on homosexuality will have a broad and positive impact on views of sexuality in general. No wonder the Vatican is so panicked.

In my own essay in the same collection, "Catholic Lesbian Feminist Theology," I claim that "Catholic lesbian feminist theology is no longer an oxymoron" even though it is just beginning to be articulated¹⁶. Of course we have heard from lesbian nuns and other Catholic lesbian women¹⁷. But I argue that lesbian sexual expression, like all sexual expression, "is part of a larger relational constellation, and how that relationship is conducive of community. The rest, as the rabbis say, is commentary."¹⁸

Criteria reminiscent of "just good sex" apply: safety, responsibility, mutuality, and care, all of which sound quite Catholic to me. Lesbians have the option of motherhood, share the human call to holiness, and respond to "the invitation to break bread and do justice."¹⁹ This is a prolegomenon to a Catholic lesbian feminist theology which my colleagues and I need to flesh out for the benefit of the whole Church, whether it wants it or not.

On any given Sunday, one can find a wide variety of Catholic views on homosexuality in and away from the pews. But for all of the diversity, and for all of the strides made by progressive Catholics, the institution, with few exceptions, remains unwavering in its condemnation, unwelcoming in its behavior, and unhelpful in its ministry. I would ignore it as a vestige of the uninformed if it did not have such negative impact on the wider culture. The 2004 presidential election proved that the American Catholic bishops continue to have more clout than I care to admit when it comes to influencing the electorate. Some pollsters claim the margin of victory

15 Cristina L.H. Traina, "Papal Ideals, Marital Realities: One View from the Ground," in *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, edited by Patricia Beattie Jung with Joseph Andrew Coray. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001, pp. 269-288.

16 Mary E. Hunt, "Catholic Lesbian Feminist Theology," in *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, edited by Patricia Beattie Jung with Joseph Andrew Corway. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001, pp. 289 (289-304).

17 Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan, editors, *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*. Tallahassee, FL: The Naiad Press, Inc., 1985; Barbara Zanotti, editor, *A Faith of One's Own: Explorations by Catholic Lesbians*. Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1986.

18 Hunt, "Catholic Lesbian Feminist Theology," p. 300.

19 Hunt, "Catholic Lesbian Feminist Theology," p. 302.

for President Bush was granted by some bishops' comments and others' silence on the matter of the candidates' opinions on reproductive health and same-sex marriage. I find it scandalous that the bishops did not make a difference on questions of war, torture, greed, or the death penalty. I think the Catholic social and intellectual tradition is capable of and worthy of much more. To that end, I propose that we change the parameters and priorities of the debate.

As long as the focus stays on homosexuality, with gay and lesbian people forced to defend our love against an outmoded anthropology and a lack of social scientific understanding, the gulf will only widen between the kyriarchal church and the Catholic community. While polls do not make theology, it is simply impossible to ignore that just as Catholics have changed their view of slavery, the place of women, and the role of science, so, too, many Catholics have changed their views on homosexuality. We are morally mature enough to recognize that same-sex relationships, like mixed sex ones, come in all sorts of packages. The ethical focus is on the quality of the love, not the quantity of each sex involved. What Catholic tradition can teach in this regard comes from theologians whose views, like mine, do not correspond with the kyriarchal view. Nonetheless, as a pragmatic matter, I think it is useful to find points of contact in an effort to limit the damage the institution does, especially to young people.

Changing the conversation from homosexuality to heterosexism is a step in that direction. It is an effort to move from an unproductive non-conversation about homosexuality where agreement eludes us, to a productive conversation on eradicating heterosexism, where I think widespread agreement is a real possibility. Even the Catechism (par. 2358) seems to imply this when it acknowledges that there are many LGBTQ Catholics (more than they know, especially among priests where no one disputes that half are gay, and some think the percentage is more like 70%).

It asserts that homosexuality is given, not chosen. Against a great deal of evidence, it claims that homosexuality is "a trial." This is another reversal. I can attest that same-sex love is wonderful, but heterosexism is a trial.

The Catechism text states: "They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided." I think this can be taken generously as openness to eradicate heterosexism. As we have learned

painfully in the abortion debate, such common ground is hard to come by, but, when found, it can be useful in moving the question along.

Heterosexism is the attitude and ability to enforce the notion that heterosexuality is normative to the exclusion of the full flowering of same-sex possibilities. It is not to be confused with homophobia, which is a psychological approach to the same phenomena, nor with homohatred, which is the explicit articulation of disdain that often leads to violence. Rather, heterosexism is a structural and personal matter that takes many forms.

The most obvious is the ban on same-sex marriage. There are seven sacraments for heterosexual Catholics and six for homosexuals. Another small example is that godparents are usually expected to be one of each sex even if two women or two men would do just fine. The claims that homosexual orientation is "intrinsically morally disordered" and homosexual acts are "intrinsically evil" flow from the same heterosexist thinking. Priestly celibacy and the vow of chastity taken by women and men in religious orders were, until quite recently, assumed to mean a prohibition against heterosexual relations. Many a jesuitical religious has justified her/his same-sex experiences on this basis.

The damage of heterosexism is stunning. It ranges from the personal to the political, from a young gay man who confronted his good Catholic mother who has a PhD in psychology on why she had not presented same-sex love on a parallel with heterosexuality to the active lobbying by the Catholic Church against same-sex marriage. I am not naïve enough to believe that changing the framework of the debate will lead toward a gay-friendly Catholic Church overnight. But I am persuaded that the debate as currently constructed is going nowhere fast. There is simply no meeting of worldviews.

As a first step, I suggest that we focus on heterosexism as a sin, using traditional language and sacramental theology, and then eventually move ahead to understanding homosexuality as morally neutral. I do not use the term "sin" often in my theological project, but I think it fits the bill here since the impact of heterosexism is to cut off relationships and possibilities. This needs to be remedied, for which the traditional Catholic penance formula is appropriate.

First one acknowledges the sin. Granted we are not there yet, but I can imagine a day when Catholics will repent of their heterosexism just as some repented of holding slaves, and as some have acknowledged their sexism and racism as preconditions for forgiveness. Next comes the request for forgiveness. It is followed by the resolution not to commit the sin again.

Finally, there is penance or providing some restitution for the harm done. This is the traditional formula. It has a proven track record. It is easy to understand, regardless of what one thinks of homosexuality. Given the harm done by this sin, I respectfully suggest that we begin this process immediately on the personal and corporate levels.

The gains for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people are obvious. We stand to live and love on a level moral playing field for the first time in human history. Some of our lives may even be saved because of it. But just as undoing racism has been helpful to white people, and undoing sexism has given men more freedom, I see gains for heterosexual people, too. Sometimes such self-interest is the only way to cajole people into doing the right thing. I ask my heterosexual friends: Why did you not question the strictures on love that you received? Might you have missed some love along the way? How will we educate our children to be more loving now that the options are wider? What can we learn from same-sex love that will enhance heterosexual relationships?

Thomas Aquinas offered five proofs for the existence of the divine ([*Summa Theologica* I, 2, 3](#)). I borrow his categories as a frame for claiming why the eradication of heterosexism is so important.

First, the argument from motion or God as the first mover: I suggest that insofar as we collaborate with Divine energy, we need to be first movers on this matter, pointing out both the sinfulness of heterosexism as it limits love and the potential of a same-sex-friendly world to enhance justice. I see this as a theo-ethical imperative now that we know that homosexuality is healthy, good, natural, and holy.

Second is the argument of first efficient cause or God as the cause of all that follows. In this spirit, I think we can say that heterosexism causes untold harm. Its eradication is the first step toward a safe and just context in which to love.

Third is the argument of possibility and necessity that says God exists out of God's own necessity: So, too, we can say that remedying heterosexism must be done for its own sake since it truncates human love.

Fourth is the argument from gradation or how things achieve goodness: It is impossible to think that human love can flower where *a priori* barriers are erected against its growth. That is what heterosexism is and why it must be eradicated.

Finally, there is the argument of the Divine as an intelligent being "by whom all natural things are directed to their end." Those who cooperate with the Divine need to behave in a similarly intelligent way, naming heterosexism as the moral issue and finding ways to eradicate it.

At least three positive results will accrue:

1. Catholicism will move into the 21st century with some intellectual and moral integrity. While there will not be immediate agreement across the board on the problem of heterosexism, at least the Catholic community will be debating the right issue.
2. Removing the moral focus from homosexuality will mean an implicit "normalization" of same-sex relationships, or at least some opportunity to reflect on how ordinary most of them are.
3. Finally, there is something refreshing about beginning a new debate. The tired old polarizations go by the wayside and new alliances form. I may even find myself agreeing with Cardinal Ratzinger as we join hands to eradicate the heterosexism that affects us both.

The move to eradicate heterosexism emerges from the larger same-sex debate that is going on in virtually all religious traditions. I delight in the fact that American Catholics can contribute the methodological challenge to focus on heterosexism and not homosexuality to the interreligious conversation and to the worldwide Catholic Church to which we are so indebted.