

If Two Guys Love Each Other... Why Can't They Get Married In The Catholic Church?

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**This resource has been approved for release by the author's bishop
as well as the office of Courage International.**

Foreword (From www.LifeSiteNews.com)

It is no secret that the Catholic Church is under severe social pressure to promote homosexuality and to depart from the idea that holy marriage between opposite-sex couples should be the only form of marriage promoted. As well, the new “Celibacy Movement” for “Gay Catholics” is being pushed into the limelight, despite its misguided approach to growing in holiness.

LifeSiteNews is proud to present a novel perspective on the debate around same-sex ‘marriage’ authored by a person who experiences same-sex attractions but who joyfully chooses to live chastely, in accordance with Catholic teachings. He is a member of Courage International, and he has asked to remain anonymous. He is known to LifeSiteNews, and his bishop and the office of Courage International have both approved this article for release.

Be warned, the article is over 8,000 words. In order to remain accessible to those outside of Christianity, it does not rely on the Bible, Tradition, Natural Law, or the Catechism, but approaches the Catholic teaching using logical reasoning.

It is not about being “Gay and Catholic,” nor is it designed to “rally the troops,” or to offer misdirected love and sympathy to “gay people” by promoting passive acceptance with no challenge toward growing in holiness.

Spurred by what transpired at the 2014 Synod on the Family, and the media responses toward it, the author and other faithful Catholics like him who experience same-sex attractions feel it is time for them to come to the aid of the Catholic Church on this matter. “I can no longer sit on the sidelines hoping someone else will step up,” he said.

The article is thought provoking. For instance, in addressing the taboo subject of abstinence, it says, “We celebrate athletes who choose to abstain from eating junk food so that they can better maintain their nutrition, and who also choose to abstain from free time so that they can train rigorously,” yet at the same time we imply “that to choose to abstain from sexual activity is ‘ridiculous’ and or ‘unnatural.’”

The author explains the pain on the hearts of some persons who experience same-sex attractions, noting that “many people are firmly convinced that due to the attractions and or inclinations that they do not specifically choose to experience, they are rejected by the Church, and are therefore victims.” This mindset, he says, “causes some people to pursue retribution and or vengeance against the Church.”

The motivation, he says, behind homosexual actions is self-concept, which is influenced by the identities that people choose to embrace. Thus, he suggests, self-identifying as ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’ and importantly also as ‘straight’ or ‘heterosexual’ can move people farther away from seeing themselves first and foremost as beloved as children of God.

A key distinction must be made, he says, “between one’s non-specifically chosen attractions and or inclinations and one’s specifically chosen way of self-identifying and defining themselves.”

He demonstrates the falsehood of the notion that “existence of a particular attraction necessitates the embracing of a particular identity in order for a person to be honest with themselves.”

He also stresses the need to “get out of the political-activism arena (not out of the political arena) and start praying and fasting that people will be open to elevating the marriage conversation to be about the beauty found in a holy and virtuous marriage.”

I highly encourage study and reflection on the author’s important thesis.

John Henry Westin – Co-Founder and Editor in Chief, LifeSiteNews

Question

As a faithful Catholic, but also someone who experiences same-sex attractions, how would you answer one of the most common questions in the debate around this topic... If two guys love each other, how come they can't get married in the Catholic Church?

Answer

A Chaste Love

I am going to address the question “Why won’t the Church let two people *love* each other?” because the matter of loving someone precedes the matter of desiring to marry someone. Questions like this get asked every day and they reflect an underlying belief that marriage is merely an expression of love between two people. While this is definitely part of a marriage, it is less than the fullness of a marriage in the eyes of the Church. First of all, the Church *does* “let” people love whoever they want, but the Church consistently invites us to grow in our understanding of what love entails. We are offered this invitation so that we can come to know in our hearts the greatest possible degree of love, which is a love that will motivate us to strive to exemplify self-sacrificial virtue (with chastity being only one of the many virtues). As well, because we are all at different stages along our journeys through life (with different understandings of love), the Church simply invites us *from wherever we are today*, to become fully open to growing in those virtues.

Before We Go Any Further...

A discussion around this question will be relatively fruitless unless one has an awareness and an understanding of virtue itself – namely the virtue of chastity. **Note that *the virtue of chastity is not the same as abstinence or celibacy***. However, all three are very important *and distinct* facets of our potential journeys towards personal growth. To accurately communicate about objective truth, we must consider these facets to be distinct at all times. **If we use them interchangeably, then we will be participating in the inhibition of truth**. Brief clarifications aimed at highlighting the differences are as follows:

a) Abstinence

To abstain is to simply not do something (and yes, you can even abstain from “doing nothing”). Abstinence is actually celebrated in our culture – for example, we celebrate athletes who choose to abstain from eating junk food so that they can better maintain their nutrition, and who also choose to abstain from free time so that they can train rigorously. We even elevate these people to be models of how we should strive to grow. Our world contradicts itself by celebrating abstinence in this regard, but then implying that to choose to abstain from sexual activity is “ridiculous” and or “unnatural”.

b) Chastity

To be chaste is to abstain *for the glory of God above self* (or anything else of this finite universe). This virtue transcends the realm of sexuality and is applicable to all facets of our lives. It pertains not as much to our *behaviors* as it does *the state of our hearts*. For example, a person might be open to growing in the virtue of chastity, and might even be striving to live chastely, but might not yet be successful in actually *living* chastely. Likewise, a person can abstain from sexual activity, but not have a chaste heart. Further, a person can become engaged in sexual activity while being chaste! That is, chastity *does not* mean “No sex!” – it *does* mean that if there is sex, it is “holy and virtuous sex” – sex in which both spouses offer themselves fully to one another with love instead of lust, and with an openness to first and foremost glorify God (above themselves). In any case, a heart that is open to growing in the virtue of chastity will draw a person (over time) away from unchaste pursuits. Again, the degree to which a person is open to growing in that virtue reflects the state of their heart. The state of the heart needs to be more important of a focal point than assessing one’s precise behaviors, because the state of the heart is what motivates us into action.

c) Celibacy

While abstinence pertains to behavior and chastity pertains to the motivations *behind* behavior, *celibacy* is simply a discipline (not a “rule”), wherein people who are already striving to live chastely, are not having sexual relations. All of us are called to be open to growing in the virtue of chastity, but not all persons are called to commit their lives to celibacy. However, note that at any point where a person who is striving to live chastely (with regards to sexuality) is actually *not* having sexual relations, they are already practicing a temporary form of celibacy. In short, there is no celibacy without chastity, but there is chastity without celibacy. “Celibacy” without chastity is not celibacy at all, but is merely abstinence.

We Must Ask A Bigger Question

Instead of asking why the Church won’t “let” people do this or that, we need to ask whether or not *we* are open to growing in the fullness of virtue. This shift in questioning brings us past the idea that “the Church is a bunch of rules”, and into the idea that regardless of what the Church says, we are still accountable for the state of our own hearts. As well, when we ask this bigger question, we are brought to examine how the Church *invites* us to grow in the fullness of virtue, despite having the awareness that some people will be closed to growing in this fashion.

When people complain that the Church won’t “let” two people love each other, they often use their angle of approach to falsely claim that the Church discriminates against “gay people”. The reality is that the Church invites *all persons* (regardless of attractions and or inclinations experienced) to be open to growing in the fullness of virtue (*including* the virtue of chastity). It is simply up to us to embrace or reject that invitation. That is, our openness to embrace this invitation (or not) *is a matter of our own specific choice*. For this reason, our openness to embrace this invitation (or not) must be considered distinct from the *non-specifically chosen* attractions and or inclinations that we *experience*.

As well, with the degree of openness to virtue being a matter of one’s specific choice, one can no longer claim to be a victim of circumstance in this regard. This is an essential point because many people are firmly convinced that due to the attractions and or inclinations that they do not specifically choose to experience, they are rejected by the Church, and are therefore victims. This mindset causes some people to pursue retribution and or vengeance against the Church, depending on how deeply that way of thinking has permeated their reality.

The Word “Marriage” Is Perceived to Mean Different Things

We must also recognize that the word “marriage” is now perceived to mean different things to different people. The Catholic meaning of the word “marriage” is most often *not* applied by those who do not understand why the Church upholds what it does. The Church merely upholds as true, that *it is a truth of our universe* that there is a particular type of relationship between two persons that is intrinsically (by structure) open to “babies and bonding”. As well, the Church upholds as true, that the union with the greatest probability of creating a long-term stable parental relationship – which is most optimal for raising children – is a relationship in which parents are striving to grow in the fullness of virtue (which again includes the virtue of chastity). Conversely, the rejection of the virtue of chastity may give rise to the counter-virtue of lust, which is, for many, the forerunner to a deterioration of spousal and familial stability.

Note that whether or not a couple is “past the age” or experiences physical complications is moot, for that does not undo one’s openness to that type of relational structure. It is simply a truth of our universe that *by structure*, this particular type of relationship exists. Again, it is not a “truth invented by the Church”, but rather what the Church understands to be an objective truth of our universe. The Church merely says “Yes, we uphold this to be true.”

When two people seek to enter that aforementioned relational structure, and choose to vow their life-long commitment to one another and to the children (potentially) born of their union, the Church calls that a marriage. That is, *in Catholic Church language*, the word “marriage” necessitates *at the very least* both the male XY and the female XX, *and* an intrinsic (structural) openness to life. If one of those conditions is not met, then a marriage is not present, or rather, a marriage has simply not *occurred*. However, when the secular world uses the word marriage to imply a union in which there is a civil ceremony to outwardly show that two people love each other, the idea of *not* referring to a *same-sex* civil union as a marriage appears to be horrifically discriminatory. If approaching from that frame of mind, I don’t blame people for feeling that way. But that also goes to show that it ultimately comes down to frame of mind – our approach to “who we are” and how we should self-identify and define ourselves as persons.

In short, when the Church talks about marriage, it is talking about a union in which people have:

- 1) Entered freely, without compulsion
- 2) Entered with the expectation of permanence
- 3) Entered with the expectation of fidelity
- 4) Entered with the openness to having biological children – *this of course only being possible with the presence of both XX and XY.***

Time to Elevate the Conversation

What we need to do is *get out of the political-activism arena* (not out of the *political* arena) and **start praying and fasting** that people will be open to elevating the marriage conversation to be about the beauty found in a *holy and virtuous* marriage. That will be difficult and humbling because that angle of approach will shine a light on the states of our own lives; including our own weaknesses and failings. However, we must humble ourselves to realize that it is in our brokenness that we are united, and that once we humbly offer ourselves to God, He can use us “as broken brushes”, to paint His masterpiece... if we let Him. As well, we must humble ourselves to realize that through fervent prayer and fasting, God is able to do more than all of our best earthly (political *and* political-activist) efforts combined.

I bring this up because we are not winning hearts with political counter-activism, and the young people of this day have been indoctrinated to “follow their hearts”. That is, we need to elevate our approach above the predictable *reactionary* response – which on this topic, is driving our youth away from the Church. We need to win their hearts over with love. We need to trust God that this is possible – and ask ourselves how we are going to be a part of that plan. **If we can strive to become living examples of joyful chastity – this is for both single and married persons – then people might come to desire the joy that we are experiencing.** However, if we do not redirect our efforts in this way, we will likely continue along our current trajectory of losing our youth, while the youth who remain in the faith will continue to be shamed (which will increase the probability of them eventually leaving the Catholic faith).

Love Can Exist

Each and every one of us can only love in the greatest way that we know how. We are all on a journey and even the secular world seems to support the idea that we should grow in our understanding of what love entails. As we grow in our understanding of love, we grow in our understanding of how we can *better express* love. Though we may love each other in the most complete way *that we know how* at any given time, that particular way still may not reflect the *greatest possible* degree of love – this is true in *any* relational structure. It is for that reason we must acknowledge that in *any union*, it is true that there may be *degrees of love* expressed, relative to the Truest love of Christ (the *fullness* of love). That is, whether we consider an opposite-sex union *or a same-sex union*, we must recognize and acknowledge that there may be degrees of love expressed within that union – *as best as the persons know how.*

To imply that either of those types of relationships are *devoid* of love (with regards to the awareness of each person involved) is to negate the reality that they might still be offering their love to each other in the best way *known to them*. To approach with the **inaccurate assumption** that same-sex relationships *are devoid of love, or are incapable of love*, is to approach in a way that will be very likely to hurt and or alienate people. If we recklessly respond in this way, then we are not communicating The Truth in the most effective manner. If that is the case – if we are nothing more than a “clanging cymbal” – then *there must be a better way*.

[Author’s Post-Publication Note: *In the following sections, the phrases “unchaste identity” and “chaste identity” are used. At the time of writing, the matter of describing various embraced identities was still being explored, and the language has since developed to more accurately attribute the degree of one’s openness to chastity to be applicable to the state of the heart of the person, as opposed to the embraced identity itself. For that reason, **within the context of this particular resource**, where the phrases “unchaste identity” or “chaste identity” are used, we can envision the following greater and more accurate meaning, elaborated as follows:*

An “unchaste identity” is an identity that is reflective of a heart that is not fully open to growing in virtue, as evidenced by one’s specific choice to elevate themselves above Christ with regards to how they specifically choose to wholeheartedly see themselves (or in other words, with regards to how they specifically choose to describe and define themselves). Likewise, a “chaste identity” is an identity that is reflective of a heart that is fully open to growing in virtue (as best as one might know how), as evidenced by one’s specific choice to strive to elevate Christ above themselves with regards to how they specifically choose to wholeheartedly see themselves (or in other words, with regards to how they specifically choose to describe and define themselves).

*Going forward in our mission of clarity, we encourage people to ensure the degree of chastity (and all virtue) is attributed specifically to the state of the heart, and not the identity that might be embraced on account of said state of heart. In other words, the phrases “unchaste identity” and “chaste identity” should not be used. Further, the degree of openness to the fullness of virtue overall (which includes chastity and humility, among others) is able to be revealed to some degree, at the onset of the appropriate invitation to “die to oneself” by way of voluntarily relinquishing the wholeheartedly embraced identities that we create for ourselves that do not order Christ as first. That is, this invitation to “die to oneself” with regards to embraced identity can be used as a reasonably effective tool by which to reveal one’s attachment to any particular identity of this world, whether it be sexual in nature or not. **End of Note]***

Note that to imply that a relationship is *closed* to the fullness of love is a different story. A closedness to growing in the fullness of virtue (such as being closed to the virtue of chastity) is a commitment to a closedness to the fullness of love, for virtue is an element of love. Therefore, a *commitment* to an unchaste identity label (which is implicitly a *committed closedness* to growing in the fullness of virtue) is also a closedness to the fullness of love. Likewise, to pursue fruition in ways in which one becomes *further invested within an unchaste identity*, is to pursue fruition along a trajectory that is not necessarily *devoid* of love, but **is necessarily closed to the fullness of love**. That is, it is closed to the fullness of love via one’s implicit closedness to growing in the fullness of virtue (namely, the virtue of chastity), as evidenced by their specific choice to not only embrace an unchaste identity and resultant self-concept but to also strive to come to fruition *within* that unchaste identity and resultant self-concept.

A Chaste Identity

Identity labels such as “gay” or “straight” are unchaste in their nature if they are used to *define* oneself in one’s core identity because in that case they would be reflecting one’s specific choice to *not abstain* from elevating themselves above God with regards to how they first and foremost *wholeheartedly* see themselves. Those identity labels are *not* unchaste in their nature if they are being used to merely describe oneself while remaining open to growing in the fullness of virtue. In either case, those types of identity labels are spiritually dangerous because for many people, merely *describing* themselves in this way leads them to come to *describe and define* themselves in this way. **That is, though merely self-identifying in that way may not reflect a closedness to the fullness of virtue, it often *leads* people to a closedness to the fullness of virtue, as they become more and more invested within those types of identities and resultant self-concepts.** In addition to that, those types of identity labels are also incapable of reflecting the fullness of who we are as persons as they reduce us to our sexual attractions and or inclinations, and or our romantic desires.

We Influence Our Climate

We must become aware of the reality that even if we merely self-identify (*without* defining ourselves) in this way, it may **lead others** to come to self-identify *and define* themselves in this way. This is because as more people tend to do this, the more socially acceptable it becomes. This gradual shift in what is socially acceptable continuously influences the formation of our social climate going forward. However, because we each have a role in the formation of our social climate, **we each play a role in how this will unfold in the future**. Simply sitting back to “let things happen” will lead to a further deteriorated situation for the Church and more difficulties for the remaining faithful. However, the proactive initiatives we must take to share the joy of (and to defend) the faith going forward must be grounded in sincere and fervent prayer – and an unwavering trust in God that He will have His plan unfold on *His* terms.

Climate Change

The behavior of choosing to self-identify as “gay” or “straight” and so forth seems to be spreading in an exponential fashion. Of course one cannot “catch” “being gay”, but one can definitely “catch” a particular worldview as it becomes more socially acceptable to embrace (namely the worldview that promotes the idea that people should self-identify and or define themselves and others according to attractions and or inclinations experienced). The cultural climate that contributes to the furthering of the movement that draws persons to self-identify in this fashion is formed and strengthened by every singular person who thinks it is a “good” thing to self-identify as “gay” or “straight” – even if it is intended to merely describe the attractions and or inclinations that one might be experiencing.

This is why people who self-identify as “gay and Catholic” or “straight and Catholic” – even without wholeheartedly embracing those identities as a means of *defining* themselves, are still indirectly contributing to the strength of our current social climate, which has led us to this very point. While it is true we must always receive people where they are at – and this might include using language in that way, we must be astutely aware of our responsibility to not become stagnant in that way of thinking about how we should self-identify and or define ourselves and others. If we do, we put ourselves and our loved ones at risk of being unintentional agents (albeit indirectly) of the deterioration of the Catholic Church, via our unintentional influence within our localized social surroundings.

Important Pastoral Consideration

With that being said, we must be careful to acknowledge that just because someone is using language in that way, it may be in the context of pastoral ministry that is deemed necessary at the time. For that reason, the degree to which a person speaks in terms of “being gay” or “being straight” cannot alone be the metric by which to determine the degree to which their heart is open to growing in virtue. Rather, it is *the fruits of their efforts* that must be evaluated. We should be asking this: **“Are the fruits of their efforts drawing people to open themselves to grow deeper in the virtues?”**

Nonetheless, at all times appropriate, we must make an effort to elevate the conversation so that we can draw people to come to desire *on their own accord* a **specifically chosen disengagement** from the wholehearted embracing of those types of identity labels. As this begins to occur within our cultural climate (this counter movement is currently gaining steam), the movement that is drawing people to find their identity first and foremost within their sexuality, is being weakened. Given that the overall fruits of the unchaste movement of our world are that of an *increasing closedness* to growing in Christian virtue, we know that **one cannot wholeheartedly support this type of movement while also being true to their Catholic faith**. To attempt to do so, would place a person in a state of contradiction.

A Better Way

The fruits of this movement have also been devastating to the Church because many have been drawn to (falsely) believe that they are not loved by the Church on account of the attractions and or inclinations that they might experience (and or perhaps on account of the identities they might be specifically choosing to embrace). While it is true many Catholics have acted uncharitably (and apologies are warranted in some cases), the actions of persons must be considered to be distinct from what the Church actually upholds as true. Though it is true that many Catholics have contributed to the situation we face today, many more are beginning to recognize that **we simply need to receive people where they are in their lives so that we can walk together with each other to the Lord**. These are the people who have been quietly transforming the discussion surrounding this topic for the last number of years – only very recently has this approach reached the mainstream media.

With the fruits of this movement being ever more evident in our world today, as concerned Catholics who desire to defend our faith, we need to be honest with ourselves about our social positioning. We are in a world that has been trained to “follow the heart” and yet so much of our response to this topic has been aimed at the intellect and re-explaining what the Church understands to be objectively true (in some ways, this article is no exception). However, now that our culture is coming to know a greater degree of objective truth (especially around this topic), we can strategically transition the angle of approach within our responses to this topic on the whole such that we can aim first and foremost at the heart instead of the intellect, all the while not sacrificing the truths upheld by the faith..

Pastoral Summary

If we do not shift our focus towards striving to become the living examples as to why someone might desire to love Jesus Christ above all else in this world, then wherever this overarching cultural movement has taken root, the situation will only get worse. However, if we strive to be the living example as to why someone might want to desire the love of Jesus Christ *first and foremost*, only then – and by the grace of God – might people come to disengage (on their own accord) from those types of identities. This will be true regardless of whether those identities were embraced non-wholeheartedly as a means of describing oneself, or wholeheartedly as a means of describing and defining oneself.

We Begin To Let Go – On Our Own Terms

Once a person comes to desire growth in a chaste and holy love (a virtuous love), they will come to evaluate *on their own terms* whether other facets of their lives are compatible with their desire to continue to grow in virtue. That which *is* compatible, a person will eventually permit to flourish. That which *is not* compatible, a person will begin to wrestle with, and eventually desire to let go – if and only if they specifically choose to continue to be open to growing in the fullness of virtue. That is, once a person begins to experience the joy that is found in being fully open to the virtue of *chastity*, their heart will yearn for that joy even more – even if their bodies are immersed in an unchaste cycle of living, or if their hearts and or minds are bombarded with unchaste temptations. In striving to be the living examples of joyful chastity in our daily lives, it becomes possible for us *to reveal to others with our own lives* the joy (and peace) that can be experienced on account of opening our hearts to growing in the fullness of virtue. In this way we can receive people where they are along *their* journeys, while hopefully being the living reasons as to why they might specifically choose to orient themselves first and foremost towards Christ and His virtues.

Is it a Marriage?

Regardless of the degree of love expressed in a same-sex relationship, according to the Catholic understanding of the word marriage, a same-sex relationship is *structurally incapable* of fulfilling the required conditions that need to be met in order for a marriage to occur. That is, *because a same-sex relationship is*

intrinsically (structurally) closed to the transmission of new life, it is a relationship in which a marriage is simply not able to occur.

As well, not only is a same-sex relationship intrinsically (by structure) closed to the transmission of new life, it is closed *with the foreknowledge* of that closedness. As we all know, one's degree of foreknowledge influences one's degree of culpability. **This is important because this culpability extends to those who affirm others into pursuing fruition within these types of unchaste identity labels via these types of relationships.**

Note: Though marriage between opposite-sex couples is possible in the eyes of the Church, it does not relinquish our responsibility to do all we can to ensure that opposite-sex couples do not become entrenched in the way of thinking that would lead them to define themselves as "straight". That is, with regards to identity embraced, both opposite-sex and same-sex couples are no different.

We Accelerate the Problem

To self-identify as "straight" or "heterosexual" is to indirectly validate the identities of "gay" and "homosexual" as being the means by which persons should self-identify and possibly define themselves. That is, for as long as people commonly speak in terms of "being straight" or "being heterosexual", we are further entrenching within our culture the idea that "being gay" and "being homosexual" are *also* ways people should self-identify and define themselves. **For as long as we communicate in that fashion, we are part of the problem;** we are implicitly supporting the dangerously false idea that the *particular* attractions and or inclinations that we experience *are our nature*, as opposed to reflecting the truth that the attractions and or inclinations that we experience *are a derivative of* our overarching nature *to be in relationship*, and that the particular attractions and or inclinations that we experience are exactly that – ***something that we experience.***

For as long as we speak in terms of who "*is gay*" and who "*is straight*", we further contribute to the cultural movement that promulgates the idea that people should be described (and possibly defined) according to those types of unchaste identities. That is, when we affirm others into embracing the identities of being "straight" or "heterosexual", we are assisting our culture as it spreads this ideology throughout the world and onto our youth. This is ultimately dangerous to the state of souls because it implicitly embeds a closedness to the fullness of virtue by way of the type of identity embraced, and a closedness to the fullness virtue is a closedness to Christ.

Once again, it all comes down to our openness to grow in the fullness of virtue – and this applies to all persons, regardless of attractions and or inclinations experienced.

Self-Concept and the Pursuit of Fulfillment

Same-sex romantic relationships are pursued as a means of fulfillment only after persons have *first* come to define themselves to some degree as "gay" (as though it is "who they are"). However, because we know *that*, we know that the moment someone specifically chooses to wholeheartedly embrace this type of identity they have also embraced an implicit closedness to the fullness of virtue. Therefore, we know that *any relationship* that is sought out as a means to come to fruition within that type of identity (whether it be "gay" or "straight"), is also implicitly closed to the fullness of virtue. This critical point directly shines a light on the truth that it is a matter of specific choice as to whether or not we are open to growing in the fullness of virtue (most notably in the virtues of chastity *and humility*), because it is a matter of specific choice as to how we self-identify and define ourselves. In other words, despite the attractions and or inclinations which we *have not* specifically chosen to experience, we still have power over the state of our own hearts. That is, no matter the origin of the attractions and or inclinations we may experience, we still are able to make the specific choice to place Christ *below* ourselves in whatever way we come to self-identify and define ourselves.

What cannot be ignored is the counter position which is to put Christ *above* ourselves, with regards to all facets of our being (which includes how we specifically choose to self-identify and define ourselves). If you look towards people who have specifically chosen to place Christ first in their lives, you will see within them a desire to grow in virtue that is more powerful than their desire to turn away from it. Though temptations may exist, these persons perceive their journey towards fulfillment as being one in which virtue is amplified. These persons, who wholeheartedly self-identify and define themselves first and foremost according to their relationship with God – *as beloved sons and daughters of the Most High* (while still being honest with themselves about the attractions and or inclinations they experience), are far-underrepresented in this world (and are often pressured into silence). However, these people shine brightly with joy stemming from their openness to strive to fully abandon themselves to the Lord, and to become *fully open to growing in the fullness of virtue*.

In addition to shining brightly with joy, these people also radiate a profound sense of peace, for they have come to wholeheartedly embrace an identity and resultant self-concept *that is in agreement* with the identity that was authored into their beings at the point of their creation. That is, there is very a evident sense of peace in the hearts of those who have come to see themselves first and foremost according to their *created* identity (as beloved sons and daughters of God). In embracing *this* identity, they have come to realize that they can reflect a greater degree of truth of who they are, all the while still being fully honest with themselves about the existence of the attractions and or inclinations that they are experiencing.

Sadly though, these people are often undermined and attacked because their way of living represents the truth that growing in the fullness of virtue is a possible way to live a joyful and fulfilling life. Their lived example is so radically different from the overarching hyper-sexualized cultural schema that has enveloped the globe, and because of this, they are most often misunderstood and are also often characterized as persons who are lying to themselves or who are living in a state of self-denial. The truth though, is that most people in the world fear what they don't know or understand, and thus most people respond to persons who elicit this fear (even subconsciously) in ways in which their own schema will go unchallenged. However, in the name of equality for all persons, it would make sense for us to open our hearts to the stories of these persons who are open to (and striving towards) growing in the fullness of virtue. However, their stories (and thus their reasoning) will make little sense to those who are not sincerely willing to expand their understanding of this topic.

Affirmed Towards Holiness

Regarding the matter of a union being a *holy* marriage (which is the only type of marriage the Church affirms *anyone* to grow into), persons would need to be open to growing in *holiness* – which implies an uninhibited openness to grow in the fullness of virtue. However, this is the precise reason why the Church cannot affirm persons towards *entering the pursuit* of same-sex romantic relationships to begin with – because that pursuit originates from one's prior choice to embrace an *unchaste identity*; an identity that is not only *counter* to virtue, but is also reflective of an implicitly committed closedness to the fullness of virtue. That is, the Church cannot affirm a person towards becoming further invested in pursuing fruition within an unchaste identity (and resulting unchaste self-concept), for that would entail that the Church would have to affirm persons along a trajectory which includes a closedness to the fullness of virtue.

Hearts Will Be Revealed

When people embrace unchaste identities, many of them begin to define themselves according to their expectations of what those identities mean to them. In doing this, they begin to pursue fulfillment in their (unchaste) perception of self, which is now anchored on a diminished openness to the virtue of chastity by way of the overarching identity they are specifically choosing to embrace. This diminishment is reflected not

when someone is simply honest with themselves about the existence of their sexual attractions and or inclinations (which is in itself a good thing), but rather it is reflected when a person begins to say “I am gay” or “I am straight”, and “this is [fundamentally] *who I am*”.

Holy Marriage

The intrinsic (structural) openness to the transmission of new life is central to what makes a marriage possible in the eyes of the Church, but it is a unified spousal commitment to strive to love and serve one another *second only to Christ*, that elevates a *marriage* into being a *holy marriage*. As mentioned earlier, a *holy marriage* is the only type of marriage that the Church affirms us into pursuing. That is, regardless of whether we are talking about a same-sex union or an opposite-sex union, the Church invites us to hold a standard that is anchored on growing in holiness. When embraced, this standard will draw persons into a more in-depth and self-sacrificial relationship in which spouses serve one another (and their children) *second only to Christ*, which implies within that relationship, a continued openness to grow in the virtue of chastity among the other virtues.

Persons who have *wholeheartedly* embraced unchaste identities (and who have thus formed their self-concept according to their embraced unchaste identities), have made a specific choice which results in a significantly weakened receptivity to growing in virtue, and because of this, their unions cannot be considered to be *fully open to growing in holiness*, whether those unions are considered by the surrounding culture to be “marriages” or not.

This is not a matter of discrimination against any one group of people, but rather it is a reflection of the state of the hearts of the persons within *any* particular union. As alluded to earlier, regardless of who is in a union, the Church upholds virtue as something to be striven for, and thus the Church cannot affirm anything that is an obstacle to virtue. That is, because the Church upholds that virtue is to be striven for, the Church cannot affirm *any* person’s decision to continue along a trajectory that is implicitly detrimental to growing in virtue, and thus the Church cannot affirm any activity whatsoever that further invests a person into an unchaste identity and resultant unchaste self-concept.

Regardless of the attractions and or inclinations we might experience, the matter of whether or not we will permit ourselves to grow in a *chaste* identity and resultant *chaste* self-concept will illuminate the state of our hearts.

The Bigger Question (Again)

When faced with the question of why the Church won’t “let” two people of the same sex get married, we do well to redirect the focus to a bigger question – namely, “Why are people specifically choosing to self-identify and define themselves (and possibly others) first and foremost as “gay” or “straight” (and so forth), in our culture today?” That is, “Why are people affirming themselves and others into embracing unchaste identities?” **Only by focusing on this bigger question can we begin to see the role and significance of embraced identity and how our self-concept is formed according to that embraced identity, and how our perception of what will be fulfilling is formed by our self-concept.**

In other words, because the pursuit of a same-sex relationship as a means of fulfillment generally occurs after persons have already come to self-identify *and define* themselves to some degree according to their sexual attractions and or inclinations, we must address the topic of same-sex marriage by first addressing the *motives behind the pursuit of a same-sex relationship as a means of fulfillment* – while recognizing that these motives are *rooted in* and are *formed by* one’s self-concept. Thus, **the matter of how our self-concept is formed will be, overall, one of the most fruitful starting points** when responding to questions regarding same-sex marriage, and or sexuality overall.

A New Awareness Is Here

As more people journey into a deeper understanding of this topic, the role and significance of *embraced identity and resultant self-concept* is being more widely understood. However, this deeper understanding is rightly being perceived as a threat to unchaste advocacy groups as well as the greater unchaste movement itself, because it challenges the social constructs in which people have invested themselves.

Only very recently have people begun to make the distinction between one's ***non-specifically chosen attractions and or inclinations*** and one's ***specifically chosen way of self-identifying and defining themselves***. This critical distinction is now being spoken about across the whole world and it is a truth that reveals that one's identity is not defined by the attractions or inclinations experienced, unless a person specifically chooses that to be the case. However, still embedded within our language, is the falsehood that those two contradictory items need not be considered distinct. **This culturally-embedded inhibition of truth is reflected in every instance where we use words like "gay", "straight", "heterosexual", "homosexual", "transgender" (and so forth) without clarification as to whether those words are being used to refer to our *non-specifically chosen attractions and or inclinations* or our *specifically chosen way of self-identifying and defining ourselves*.**

One might consider it ironic that our world purports to value "honesty", when in reality our world seems content to inhibit from being known, the truth that *attractions and or inclinations experienced* (which are *not* specifically chosen) **are not the same thing** as *identities embraced* (which are specifically chosen). In addition to that, our world seems quite content to promote the idea that the existence of a particular attraction *necessitates* the *embracing of a particular identity* in order for a person to be honest with themselves. What our world *does not* present as reasonable (or even possible) is the reality that we can be fully honest with ourselves about the existence of our attractions and or inclinations while specifically choosing to *not* self-identify and define ourselves as "gay" or "straight" (or by some other similar type of identity label), **and that in specifically choosing to disengage from those types of identities, we can still live joyful and fulfilling lives in which we are fully honest with ourselves about the attractions and or inclinations that we experience.**

More and more people who experience same-sex attractions and or inclinations are specifically choosing to *not* self-identify according to the attractions and or inclinations they experience. They are doing this without suppressing the reality of the existence of those attractions and or inclinations, and are living joyful and fulfilling lives with their identity and self-concept anchored first and foremost in Christ. In being first and foremost anchored in Christ, they have become more and more open to His calling and that *always* includes an openness to continue to grow in the fullness of His virtue.

In short, if it is true that our world values honesty, then we should *all* be compelled by our own commitment to honesty, to forevermore consider **and to express through our language** that *attractions and or inclinations experienced* need to be considered distinct from *how we self-identify and define ourselves*. **This distinction is the lynchpin of the entire world-wide unchaste advocacy movement.**

Without this distinction known, particular attractions and or inclinations experienced are perceived as "who we are" (and are thus perceived to be "our nature"). However, *with* this distinction known, *particular attractions and or inclinations experienced* can be perceived to be exactly that, "something we *experience*" (and thus with this distinction known, attractions and or inclinations can be more accurately perceived to be *not* "our nature", but rather *a derivative* of our overarching nature to be in relationship, as explained earlier). This distinction is important because it drastically transforms the landscape surrounding the matter of embraced identity and resultant self-concept. If this distinction became known, the conversation surrounding all of sexuality (let alone homosexuality) would be transformed; it would be elevated to a whole new level.

Unjust Shaming and A Need To Apologize

If we became more completely honest with ourselves and began to reveal this aforementioned truth with regards to how we approach this topic, we would come to quickly realize that because the attractions and or inclinations we experience are not specifically chosen, their mere existence is not a “committed sin”. This is important because no matter the amount of reasoning a person might do with regards to explaining what the Catholic Church upholds as truth, there are people who are living with hearts that have suffered due to misappropriated shame – shame placed onto them by another, on account of merely experiencing their sexual attractions and or inclinations. We do well to apologize to those who have suffered because of this misappropriated projection of shame, which has been placed onto them for experiencing something they did not specifically choose. Furthermore, we must strive to bring such shaming *on account of one’s experience of attractions and or inclinations* to an end.

The Committed Sin

To knowingly place the finite (sexuality) above the infinite (Christ), and then to live our lives according to that disordering of logic, is a *committed* sin because it is a compromising of truth *with consent of the will*. To embrace a reality anchored on the falsehood that the finite is greater than the infinite, is to embed within the way we live our lives, the falsehood that we will somehow achieve a greater degree of fulfillment while being anchored on the finite, instead of being anchored on the infinite. It is our own dishonesty (first and foremost with ourselves) about what could provide a greater degree of fulfillment, that is a committed sin. This choice to commit to the dishonest idea that the finite could provide more than the infinite (and that we should thus anchor our lives on the finite if we want to experience a greater degree of fulfillment), is a choice that separates us from God. It separates us from God because it separates us from that which is objectively true.

Note also that just as the Church does not “invent” truth, neither does it “invent” falsehood. Rather, the Church recognizes that which is false to be false, and then confirms this by stating clearly that “this is false”. In other words, the Church, who invites us to grow in relationship with God (the *Author* of Truth in our universe), has the wisdom to affirm the truth that: if we embrace falsehoods *as if they were truths*, we impair our relationship with God by committing ourselves to upholding a falsehood *in the place of* truth.

Again, for us to believe that we will achieve a greater degree of fulfillment via pursuing a life that is anchored on *that which is finite* as opposed to *that which is infinite*, is to believe that *that which is finite* could provide more than *that which is infinite*, and this is to believe that *the finite* is therefore greater than *the infinite*... which is false.

That is, when in our lives we place sexuality (which is one facet of finite creation) **above God** (who is the infinite Creator), especially with regards to how we see ourselves as persons, we commit ourselves to a disordering of that which is objectively true, and thus commit sin. It is the commitment to the disordering of objective truth (or the commitment to falsehood being upheld as objective truth, *in the place of* objective truth) that is a committed sin.

In other words, *a rejection of objective truth* (by way of a commitment to falsehood) *is a rejection of God* (because God is the Author of objective truth). To approach from the opposite angle, since the rejection (or subjugation) of God is a committed sin (and since God is the Author of objective truth), the rejection of God *is the rejection of objective truth*.

With regards to embracing unchaste identities, the “committed sin” is idolatry. This committed sin reflects what our world has chosen to elevate above God, as “God”.

Look to the Peace and Joy

If we simply began to talk about what “is” instead of fighting about what is “right” or “wrong”, then maybe we might be able to come to grow with one another along a greater journey. Every person I have ever met, who has been permitted the experience of same-sex attractions and or other inclinations *but who has chosen to be open to growing in the fullness of virtue (which includes the virtues of chastity and humility)*, has carried this desire in their heart. These men and women simply want people to be open to hearing their story. They are so far beyond the place of squabbling about “gay marriage” or other arguments that merely serve to distract the real matter at hand, **which is embraced identity and how it forms us and our perspectives**. They are more motivated to simply pray that hearts may be softened, so that people of goodwill could one day come to the table *as one* and embrace the unity that comes from striving together for Christian virtue. They have moved beyond the circular arguments of our day and have chosen to simply live a life (misunderstood by most people) that is focused on growing in the fullness of virtue, while striving to be a good example *of* that virtue while permitting the peace and joy that they now experience in their hearts to become known to the world in a virtuous (humble) fashion.

Radiant Hope

Every person I have ever met who experiences same-sex attractions and or inclinations and who has specifically chosen to disengage from an unchaste identity and associated unchaste self-concept (to instead *wholeheartedly* embrace a *chaste* identity and associated *chaste* self-concept), is a joyful beacon of light and hope in the world today... to those who will open their hearts to them. The world seems to say that being open to growing in the fullness of virtue (in particular the virtue of chastity) is counter to our nature – because the world has not yet moved beyond the idea that we should self-identify and define ourselves according to the attractions and or inclinations that we experience.

Though many in the world say that people who choose to anchor their identity and self-concept first and foremost on Jesus Christ are in a state of self-denial, and or are self-hating, and or are in a state of Church-indoctrinated suppression, the *peace* and *joy* expressed by these people (who serve as beautiful examples of letting go of the world for the sake of Christ) cannot be brushed aside as merely the fallout of some religious programming designed to turn “gay people straight”. (Note: The Church does not promote the idea that people should strive to make this their objective.) What we are saying is that we would all stand to gain much insight by opening our hearts to those who are seeking to find their identity first and foremost in Jesus Christ.

At risk of being rejected by essentially the whole world – including many who are in their faith community, these people exhibit a heroic showing of what it means to live in a self-sacrificial fashion, for they are motivated by their love for Jesus Christ, and have devoted their lives to reflecting their love for Him, in whatever way they are called to do so – *but in all ways, striving to reflect virtue – especially within their embraced identity and self-concept*.

Note also that these are not the people who are complaining about who the Church “lets” them love or how the Church won’t “let” them get married. And for this reason, we have something great to learn from them about virtue and about what it means to be fully open to Christ and the Catholic Church, especially in our increasingly hostile world. These are not the people complaining about how the Church needs to get with the times, or needs to become more “gay supportive” or “gay friendly”. Rather, their lives are living testaments that the Catholic Church is a place where they are loved, and is where they belong, as they journey alongside everyone else who is choosing to seek a deeper relationship with Christ. These people are also not trying to indoctrinate or force other people to promote what they *today* stand for. They simply *invite* us all to open our hearts to the love and truth that they have discovered to be upheld by the Catholic Church.

Many of these people today offer their lives to defend the very Church that the world has taught them to reject (and in some cases destroy). With nothing of this world to gain, they offer themselves in this way – out of their love for Christ.

Conclusion

The difference between those of us who experience same-sex attractions and who *defend* the Church compared to those who experience same-sex attractions and who *attack* (or try to “change”) the Church, is found in the matter of our self-concept. This is what motivates us into our respective behaviors – because our self-concept influences our perceptions of what will be fulfilling. In some strange sense, our whole world is unified in this way; we human beings are all seeking fulfillment, and how we do so arises out of how we see ourselves. Nonetheless, just as how people pursue same-sex relationships as a means of fulfillment once they have first come to self-identify and define themselves to some degree as “gay” or “lesbian” (or some other similar type of label), people who wholeheartedly find their identity first and foremost in Christ will pursue fulfillment in relationships in which virtue is amplified.

For this reason, *embraced identity and the formation of self-concept* needs to be the critical point of focus in all efforts relating to how we can elevate the standard of conversation with regards to this topic. As well, this focus can also elevate us beyond accusations of discrimination, because it can be applied to *all* persons, while giving each and every one of us the opportunity to move beyond the spectrum of identities anchored first and foremost according to sexual attractions and or inclinations experienced, and into an identity anchored on our openness to growing in the fullness of virtue.

It is important for us to realize that approaching from this angle might help preserve the Church (and other Catholic organizations and individuals) from future costly legal ramifications arising from potential discrimination lawsuits that may arise if we are reckless in how we address this topic.

Again, we know that our self-concept is formed first by how we *describe* ourselves (which is how we self-identify), and how we *describe* ourselves precludes how we come to *describe and define* ourselves (which is how we *wholeheartedly* self-identify), and the manner in which we come to *describe* or *describe and define* ourselves is influenced by the environmental climate in which we live. Therefore, we must do all we can to ensure that we educate our faithful (especially our youth) *with our lives* about virtue, identity, and what it means to be open to growing in a chaste self-concept. **Anything less will not be sufficient in preparing them to enter a world which shames people for upholding virtue.**

Finally, we must use this matter of self-concept to redirect conversations designed to immobilize us in our duties to pray and joyfully radiate the self-sacrificial love of Christ. If we elevate the conversation beyond the typical arguments of this day, we may help people come to see that the questions being asked by our world are simply “too small”, and thus we might be able to initiate a journey towards greater discovery for those who are sincerely open to growing in their understanding.

For those who are not open to growing, or who are diametrically opposed to that which is objectively true, we simply need to pray and fast, and *trust* God that His plan will unfold in His time.

He is calling all of us. *How will you answer?*