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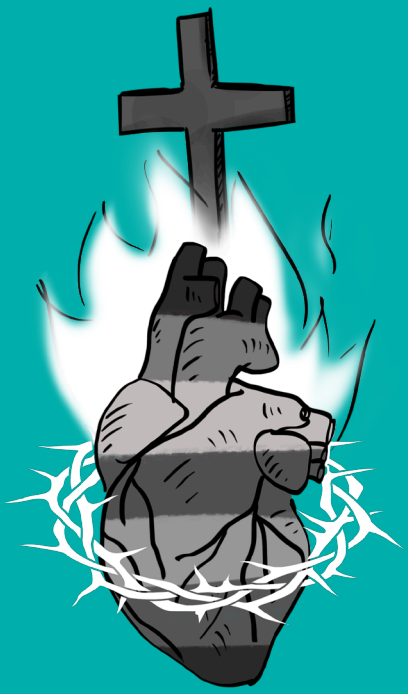
Foreword by James Martin SJ



RECOGNITION OF LGBTIQ+ PERSONS IN THE CHURCH

Montserrat Escribano Cárcel and Enric Vilà Lanao
Foreword by James Martin sj.

Montserrat Escribano Cárcel. Doctor of Philosophy, with extraordinary recognition. Master in Ethics and Democracy. Bachelor of Theology and Bachelor of Humanities. Professor at the San Vicente Ferrer Faculty of Theology. She is on the board of the European Society of Women in Theological Research (ESWTR) and is a member of the Association of Spanish Theologians (ATE) and the Bioethics Research Group of the University of Valencia (GIBUV). She forms part of the editorial board of the journal *Iglesia Viva* and also of the formation team of the diocesan Cáritas of Valencia.

Enric Vilà i Lanao. Licentiate in Theology from the Theology Faculty of Catalonia. Master of Business Administration (MBA) from ESADE and Master in Management of Non-Profit Entities from the University of Barcelona. Deputy Director of the LGBTI Center of Barcelona. Member of the Christian Association of Lesbians and Gays of Catalonia (ACGIL) and of the European Forum of LGBTI Christian Groups. Collaborator of Cristianisme i Justicia and the journal *Iglesia Viva*.

James Martin. Jesuit. Writer and editor at *America* magazine. In 2017 Pope Francis appointed him consultant to the Vatican Secretariat for Communication. His book *Building a Bridge* (2018, HarperOne), in which he explains how the Catholic Church and the LGBTIQ+ community can establish a relationship of respect, compassion, and sensitivity, sparked an intense debate within the church. In 2021 a documentary about his LGBTIQ+ ministry, also called “Building a Bridge,” premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival (New York).

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INTRODUCTION: THE PASTORAL SERVICE OF THE CHURCH TO LGBTIQ+ CATHOLICS

James Martin sj.

Why has it been so difficult for the Catholic church to reach out to LGBTQ people? Why does the church lag so far behind secular organizations, and even other churches, who have made this community feel more welcome? And why is the church so slow to try to help and protect a group of people who are often at risk of harassment, beatings and violence? Why is it so hard for Catholics to see LGBTQ people as beloved children of God?

Now, this is not the case everywhere in the world. Some Catholic dioceses, parishes and schools sponsor vibrant ministries to LGBTQ people, where the feel welcome in what is, after all, their church, too. And as more Catholics are open about their sexual orientation and feel less embarrassed by the way that God has created them, more families are affected. And as more families are affected, more parishes and schools are affected. All this means that there is a greater desire for more welcome.

Another small but important influence has come in the families of bishops and priests, whose nieces and nephews are more likely to "come out" to them than even a few years ago. This enables bishops and priests (as well as brothers and sister in religious orders) to LGBTQ people not simply as categories or stereotypes, or even as theological categories who have an "objectively disordered" sexuality, but as people, as individuals, as family members. With such small steps towards greater understanding and love, the church moves ahead.

Also, in the past few years, Pope Francis has taken some small but significant steps regarding his own outreach to LGBTQ people in the church.

First, the Holy Father has appointed many cardinals, archbishops and bishops who are more welcoming to LGBTQ Catholics. Second, Francis himself has spoken warmly about the need to welcome LGBTQ people in the church, in various venues. (In fact, he is the first Pope ever to use the word "gay" publicly.) Finally he has written encouraging letters to Catholics who minister to LGBTQ Catholics around the world (including myself). Taken together, Pope Francis's efforts have made LGBTQ people feel that the church is more of a home for them.

But there are still places where LGBTQ people come in for the severest criticism from church leaders (both clergy and lay), who consistently label them as "sinners." In some places they are made to feel unwelcome in parishes, fired from positions at Catholic institutions, and even denied the sacraments.

The label of "sinner" is especially offensive since all of us are, in one way or another, sinful. None of us is perfect, all of us sin, and all of us need of forgiveness and repentance. But no other group is treated with as much contempt, even when their lives are not fully in conformity with church teaching.

For example, many married couples today use birth control. Yet when I give talks to married couples, no one asks, "Why are you speaking to sinners?" Likewise, many students in colleges and universities are sexually active, which is also not in conformity with church teaching. And yet, again, when I give lectures to college students, no one says to me, "Why are you speaking with sinners?"

It is only the LGBT person who is labeled as such. With almost every other group, even where many people in the group are not living fully in accord with church teaching, people treat them with respect, assume that they are following their consciences and welcome them into the church.

Why is that? Mainly it is because we know them. We know married couples who may be struggling with the teachings on birth control but who, we know, are using their consciences as best they can to help them come to a moral decision. Likewise, we know college-age students and know that they are trying their best to live a moral life. We know these people, we love them, and so we trust them. We see them in the complexity of their lives, as we see ourselves in the complexity of our lives.

The same is not true for LGBTQ people, who often remain unknown, mysterious and "other" to many people in the church, including many church leaders. They are not individuals with consciences, trying their best to lead loving lives, but stereotype and categories. So they are rejected, excluded and condemned.

The key is the "Culture of Encounter" that Pope Francis often highlights: coming to know people as friends, in their "joys and hopes" and "griefs and anxieties," as the Second Vatican Council says in its beautiful document "Gaudium et Spes." Indeed, the "joys and hopes" and "griefs and anxieties" of all people, says the church in that document, are the joys and hopes and griefs and anxieties of the "followers of Christ." Why? Because "nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo

in their hearts." In other words, the church is close to all people.

Yet it is closer to some people than to others. Naturally, we are close to those whom we know. This is one reason for the church to reach out to LGBTQ people, so we can come to know them, love then and accompany them.

This is the church's task today. More fundamentally it was Jesus's mission: to reach out to all those who felt neglected, excluded or marginalized. Jesus did this repeatedly in his public ministry: reaching out to a Roman centurion, a Samaritan woman, a tax collector named Zacchaeus. All people who for different reasons, were on the margins. A Roman centurion was not even Jewish. A Samaritan woman with a strange sexual history, ostracized by her own people. And a tax collector colluding with the occupying power of Rome, most likely hated by his fellow Jews. Yet Jesus reaches out to them and reminds his disciples that these are not stereotypes or categories, these are people.

Thus, reaching out to those on the margins—and there is no one more marginalized than LGBTQ people in the church—is not only the task for the church, but the ministry of Jesus himself. Pastoral outreach, then, to LGBTQ Catholics is not simply a fad, or a passing trend, or even something responding to "pressures" from the culture, but a constitutive work of the church and a mission that finds its ultimate roots the Gospels.

RECOGNITION OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION: THE DIVERSITY OF SITUATIONS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Enric Vilà i Lanao

"I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

People's sexual orientations are diverse. Homosexuality (sexual orientation towards people of the same sex) has been a constant in time, in space, and in different cultures. The experiences of persons are quite diverse, and this diversity should be taken into account when it is encountered in the Church. Members of the Church have historically lived their sexual orientations in a variety of ways, and they continue to do so today

Sketch of a Diverse Global Landscape

According to the Pew Research Center,[1] people living in Western Europe and North America are generally more accepting of homosexuality than those in Eastern Europe, South America, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa. People in Asia and the Pacific region are divided in their attitudes, depending on religious beliefs, political attitudes, and a country's economic development. No matter where they live, though, persons who are homosexually oriented suffer a threefold stigma: crime, disease, and sin.

Between Life and Death

Some homosexual persons are subjected to daily violations of their human rights; they are constantly criminalized and live under the threat of the death penalty. Such persons suffer what is called "status homophobia." Accord-

ing to ILGA-World,[2] the death penalty is the certain legal punishment for consensual same-sex acts in six member countries of the United Nations: Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Nigeria (the twelve northern states only). In five other countries such acts will possibly result in the death penalty: Afghanistan, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, and Somalia (including Somaliland). In 30 countries, consensual same-sex acts are considered crimes punishable by up to eight years in prison, and in 27 countries the punishment ranges from ten years to life.

The countries that still impose the death penalty for consensual same-sex acts claim that they are observing the provisions of Sharia or Islamic law, a religious legal system with a set of moral codes derived from Islamic tradition. Traditional Islam strongly disapproves of non-heterosexual sexuality, even though there is a growing number of dissenting scholars and imams.

The Survivors Around You

In 67 countries of the United Nations, homosexual persons live in a permanent state of discrimination, pathologization, and lack of protection. In a second group of 43 countries, they are not criminalized, but neither are their rights protected. In all these countries, there are restrictions on freedom of expression and on organizations that provide assistance to these people who are stigmatized as sick and sinful.

Various "conversion practices" are becoming more common, according to ILGA-World,[3] but no single term has been consistently and universally adopted to refer to these efforts to change a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. "Conversion therapy" has become the most common umbrella expression, but there is also talk of "reparative therapies," becoming "ex-gay," "gay cures," etc. Such efforts can take many forms, using various methods such as lobotomy, castration, hormone intake, aversion therapies (e.g., electroshock and chemical aversion), masturbatory reconditioning, hypnosis, internment in clinics or camps, psychotherapy, and counseling. All these methods are questionable, but some are positively abusive, such as those involving nudity, contact therapy, bioenergetics, religious indoctrination, exorcism, and miraculous spiritual cures. Though these practices are still allowed in many countries or religious denominations around the world, efforts to eradicate them are increasingly being made by survivor groups, civic organizations, professional associations, and some religious institutions.

Recent studies[4] point out that adolescents with a homosexual or bisexual orientation are highly likely to think about some type of suicidal behavior. This tendency is due to the general stress experienced by sexual minorities, combined with the additional risk factors typical of adolescence. At that stage young persons undergo changes in conduct and ethics and feel a new sense of responsibility, but they are also are at increased risk of acquiring toxic habits. Compared to their heterosexual peers, homosexual adolescents are up to 40% more likely to entertain suicidal thoughts or attempt suicide.

Achieving a High Quality of Life

In a third group of countries, the LGBTIQ+ movement and its allies are mobilizing to achieve full acceptance and a high quality of life, according to ILGA-Europe. Their objective is to achieve equal rights and complete inclusion in society, both for those who are homosexual or bisexual and for those who are transsexual or intersexual. Data show that much progress that had previously been taken for granted has become increasingly fragile and subject to attacks by anti-human rights forces. In Europe, for example, if the degree of compliance with LGBTIQ+ rights is scored from 1 to 100, the three best countries in 2021 were Malta (92%), Denmark (74%) and Belgium (72%), while the worst were Armenia (7%), Turkey (4%), and Azerbaijan (2%). In 2021 Spain scored 62%, placing eleventh, but it declined from 67% and fourth place in 2020.[5] The strong resistance to improving LGBTIQ+ rights and equality over time is deeply concerning. It seems to be part of the general offensive against democracy and civil society, especially in countries like Poland and Hungary, but not only there.

In Spain hate crimes continue to increase, according to the Ministry of the Interior. There were 1,802 registered complaints in 2021, 5.6% more than in 2019, before the pandemic. Some 477 of the complaints, 26.5% of the total, were for reasons of sexual orientation or gender identity. This percentage was exceeded only by hate crimes for reasons of racism and xenophobia (37.6% of complaints). The majority of the victims (and also of perpetrators) were men between 26 and 40 years of age. The most frequent criminal acts were threats, insults, hostility, discrimination, and public incitement to hatred. The Internet and social networks are the means most often used means to commit these acts. These public communications highways have become the preferred place for assaults.[6]

The figures are actually higher when we include discriminatory incidents that may not constitute a crime, according to various organizations, including the State Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Trans and Bisexuals (FELGBT), the Networks against Hate, and the Observatory against Homophobia in Catalonia. The Ministry of the Interior data report only complaints made to the police, while these organizations also record complaints made to other agencies, many of which do not result in a formal complaint to the authorities. Many in the LGBTIQ+ community are still quite reluctant to make formal denunciation for several basic reasons, such as fear of being identified as LGBTIQ+, distrust of authorities and security forces, and the belief that denunciation is useless.[7]

Because unreported hate crimes cannot be investigated or prosecuted, the result is impunity, and perpetrators become emboldened. Their numbers are unknown, so the true scope of the problem remains obscured. But there is still an urgent need for action. Victims who do not report hate crimes receive neither redress nor the support they need. The crimes are not reported because most victims think that reporting them would not change anything. The procedures are too bureaucratic and time-consuming, and often they

simply do not trust the police. The number of unreported hate crimes remains high.[8]

In Europe, too many LGBTIQ+ persons live in the shadows, afraid of being ridiculed, discriminated against, or even attacked. Although some countries have made progress in LGBTIQ+ equality, the last seven years have seen little evidence of progress. Most LGBTIQ+ couples still avoid holding hands in public, and many say they have already suffered harassment. Most LGBTIQ+ persons are rarely or never open to expressing their sexual orientation. A third of the LGBTIQ+ population always or frequently avoids certain places for fear of being mugged, threatened, or harassed. This is especially true among 15-17 year olds, who are almost never open to being LGBTIQ+.[9]

According to Eurobarometer 493 survey on discrimination, most LGBTIQ+ persons in Europe say they are discriminated against for reasons of sexual orientation in their countries. Most women feel comfortable with showing affection to each other, but even then it is only 53%. As for men, only 49% feel comfortable showing affection, and of those over 55, only 37%. These figures increase for persons who have more education, are on the political left, or belong to a higher socio-professional category. Generally speaking, most Europeans feel comfortable with one of their children being in a same-sex relationship, with a homosexual person holding an important elected political position, or with having a homosexual person as a colleague at work. They also agree that there is nothing wrong in a sexual relationship between two people of the same sex. Some 69% are in favor of same-sex marriages, but the percentage is lower for persons who are retired, right-wing, or religious, and for those who have no homosexual friends,[10]

In conclusion, the LGBTIQ+ movement lives for the most part in conditions that are far from being fully just. Not only that, but rights have not advanced in recent years in many of the countries where a certain degree of recognition had been achieved and discrimination reduced. The road to full equality remains very long. In this post-COVID era, the increase in hate crimes and the threats of neoconservatives and neofascists cast a long shadow over the social landscape in the coming years.

A Church that Withholds Recognition

As the Pew Research Center points out,[11] religion plays a key role in the acceptance of homosexuality in many societies, affecting both people's lives and religious affiliation. Persons not affiliated with any religion, sometimes called "nones" (those identifying as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular") tend to be more accepting of homosexuality. In virtually every country surveyed in which their numbers were significant, the "nones" were more accepting of homosexuality than religious persons were, even though the views of the "nones" varied widely.

In the Catholic Church (including its faithful, LGBTIQ+ Christians, movements, hierarchical instances, etc.), we can see three "paradigms"

by which the Church is evolving in its acceptance and inclusion of LGBTIQ+ persons. These are the paradigms of fear, of mercy, and of recognition. (Following T. S. Kuhn, we use "paradigm" to mean a model or stage by which historical evolution progresses.)

The Paradigm of Fear

In this first ecclesial stage, literal interpretations of the Bible are generally presented as the main source of evidence for God's condemnation of the Sodomites. The most commonly cited passages are 1) the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, as an example of how God "reacts" to sodomy, and 2) Leviticus, where the term "abomination" is used to describe the act of "a man lying with another man."

"Homophobia," a term first used by psychologist George Weinberg in 1971, means aversion to homosexuality or homosexual persons. It is the basis of this first paradigm, which stresses the three abovementioned stigmas: criminality, disease, and "unspeakable" sinfulnesss. Historically sodomites became the object of exceptional repression, with the Inquisition as one of the main instruments and sources of testimony.

The Church has not taken seriously the scientific data of the World Health Organization (WHO), which eliminated homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses on 17 May 1990 (now celebrated as the International Day against homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia, and transphobia). Years before, on 15 September 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) had declared that homosexuality was not a "mental or psychiatric disorder," and by 1987, with the publication of *the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III-R), the psychiatric community in general no longer considered homosexuality a mental disorder .

The Paradigm of Mercy

A second ecclesial paradigm does not criminalize LGBTIQ+ persons, but it continues to see their lifestyle in terms of illness and sin. This paradigam is charactrized by the neologism "homosexual," which appeared in 1869, coined by Karl Maria Benkert ("homo-" is from the Greek *homoios,* 'the same,' and "sex" is from the Latin, *sexus*).

Paul VI and the Church's magisterium addressed the issue of homosexual persons in the *Declaration on Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics, issued on 29* December 1975.[12] The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith stressed the importance of trying to understand the homosexual condition and stated that the culpability of homosexual acts should be judged with prudence. At the same time, the Congregation took into account the distinction commonly made between a condition or tendency and concrete homosexual acts.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, issued in 1992 by John Paul II,[13] states that "the psychological genesis of homosexuality remains largely unexplained" (no. 2357) and that homosexual persons "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should

be avoided" (no. 2358). Nevertheless, the magisterium ratifies its position in no. 2357, where it affirms that Sacred Scripture presents homosexuality as a serious depravity and that Tradition has always held that homosexual acts can in no case be approved because they are intrinsically disordered and contrary to natural law.

On 4 November 2005, under Benedict XVI, the ordination of homosexuals as priests was explicitly prohibited by an instruction of the Congregation for Catholic Education.[14] The instruction proposed criteria for vocational discernment with regard to persons with homosexual tendencies before their admission to the seminary and to holy orders. Moreover, the Vatican refused to sign the UN Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity,[15] approved on 18 December 2008. This French initiative condemning discrimination against LGBTIQ+ persons was backed by the EU, presented to the General Assembly of the UN, and signed by 96 of the 193 member states. As pointed out in various Reports on Human Rights Trends,[16] the Holy See plays a key role in promoting the anti-rights agenda in international human rights forums; the other main opponents are the Alliance Defending Freedom, the World Congress of Families, Family Watch International, the World Youth Alliance, the Center for Family and Human Rights, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation.

On 15 March 2021, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ruled on the question of whether priests could bless the unions of homosexual couples, pointing out that such unions are not "lawful" because "God cannot bless sin." Pope Francis, for his part, has endorsed civil protections for same-sex couples. Seeing a magisterium that strongly defends traditional doctrine and observing only timid signs of possible change, LGBTIQ+ persons have been deciding in conscience to come out of their ecclesial catacombs and closets. They have organized themselves in networks and movements, and they are openly active in parishes and movements. Characterized by an attitude of mercy, this pastoral approach considers that, if chastity is not possible, then monogamous union can be tolerated as a "lesser evil."

The Paradigm of Recognition

The paradigm of recognition was inaugurated by Francis with his already famous words, "If a person is gay and seeks the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge? […] Having this tendency is not a problem. We must be brothers."[17] This was the first time that the word "gay" was mentioned by a Pope.

However, the inclusion of the diverse sexual orientations, genders, and sexes in full equality within the Catholic Church is a paradigm that the rest of the hierarchy has not yet been accepted. For decades Christians from all walks of life have been working within this third paradigm: they are active in Christian Life Communities (CVX) and other Christian communities made up specifically of LGBTIQ+ persons, such as the Christian Association of Lesbians and Gays of Catalonia. Many Catholic groups relate to the larger LGBTIQ+ movement, and they also network internationally with

organizations like the European Forum of LGBTIQ+ Christian Groups and the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics. All these local and international groups, communities, movements, and networks are both ecclesial and specifically LGBTIQ+.

The paradigm of recognition is already a reality in other Christian churches; they are fully inclusive and liberating, and they refuse to be either heteropatriarchal or paternalistic. For example, in those churches the sacramental blessing of same-sex marriage has its place and is fully accepted. The Catholic Church continues to distance itself from its ecumenical Protestant sisters such as the Anglican and the Lutheran Churches, which decades ago adopted this paradigm. The example of these older sisters is instructive, though it has not been free of difficulties.

A Pending Task

The Rainbow Index of Churches in Europe (RICE) for 2020[18] provides a panoramic view of the reality. Using 47 indicators that yield a total score 47 points, the LGBTIQ+ index measures inclusivity in 46 European Christian confessions, belonging to the three main families: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. The Catholic Church in Spain, for example, occupies 39th place out of 46, scoring only 5 points of a possible 47. The three most inclusive churches are the Metropolitan Community Church in Finland, with 45.5 points and the highest score; it is followed by the Church of Sweden (41.5 points) and the Protestant Church of Switzerland (38.5 points).

The report also recommends a path to be followed, consisting of 24 positive and realistic steps toward greater inclusion in all the churches, regardless of their ecclesiastical character or national identity. These steps range from affirmation of the unconditional and inalienable human dignity of all persons as children of God to explicit support for LGBTIQ+ couples when they adopt and raise children. Other steps include allowing openly LGBTIQ+ persons to attend the seminary and theology school, blessing their marriages, and involving LGBTIQ+ persons in the formulation of equality and non-discrimination policies.

For the Catholic Church, recognition of LGBTIQ+ persons is a pending task. It has much to learn from other Christian denominations, especially Protestant churches. As the Jesuit Pablo Romero[19] points out, such recognition by the magisterium is a slow process requiring a new vision and an appreciation of how Catholic tradition evolves: the Truth has been revealed to us, but we continue searching. This is especially so when an important part of the ecclesial community continues to resist this recognition. A renewed vision of the role of the magisterium is badly needed, but this will require an internal transformation of the hierarchy, especially since many bishops come from areas of the world where people are still debating about whether homosexuality is a crime.

THE BIBLE AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Enric Vilà i Lanao

"That you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

The Church's recognition of LGBTIQ+ persons is in part related to the way the Bible is interpreted by the Magisterium. Good exegesis of the texts is important ("exegesis" is the branch of theology that investigates and expresses the true meaning of the Holy Scriptures). Pope Francis took the initiative of asking the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) to prepare a document[20] on biblical anthropology as the authoritative basis for developing the philosophical and theological disciplines. In considering homosexuality, this 2019 document states that the narrative traditions of the Bible contain no clear indications regarding homosexual practices; they neither condemn such practices, nor do they view them tolerable or acceptable.

As the Jesuit biblical scholar Xavier Alegre points out,[21] the silence of the Bible on homosexuality and, more specifically, the silence of Jesus (as far as the four gospels tell us) are fundamental in any discussion of this issue. Every text has to be read within the literary, sociological, and cultural context in which it was written and subsequently incorporated into the Bible. We should especially bear in mind that the concept of "homosexual" appeared only in the 19th century and did not exist in biblical times. For a Christian interpretation of the Bible, knowledge of the behavior and the "philoso-

phy" of Jesus is a key element helping to orient us within biblical pluralism.

Texts Used to Condemn Homosexuality

The Accounts of Sodom (Genesis 19) and Gibeah (Judges 19)

In story of the sin of Sodom, which belongs to the Abraham cycle, divine judgment brings about the total destruction of the city (Genesis 19:1-29). This story serves as a counterpoint to the history of Abraham, a man marked by blessing. As the PBC points out, what is denounced in the account is the inhabitants' social and political refusal to welcome foreigners with respect; instead they humiliate the foreigners and treat them shamefully. This disgraceful behavior also affects Lot (v. 9), who is responsible for "sheltering" the foreigners in his home (v. 8). The moral evil of the city of Sodom is revealed not only in its refusal to offer hospitality, but also in its punishment of citizens who open their homes to strangers. Lot had, in fact, received the two angels with the same traditional gestures of hospitality (v. 1-3) that Abraham had performed with the three "men" who passed by his tent in the previous chapter (Genesis 18:1-8). These acts of hospitality obtain salvation for Lot (Genesis 19,6) and the blessing of fatherhood for Abraham (Genesis 18,10).

The account in Judges 19 offers further, and even stronger, confirmation of this interpretation. The story is, in a certain sense, parallel to that of Sodom: it is the same sin, but now it is committed by "brothers" (Judges 19,23.28) against the members of another tribe of Israel. The travelers in the narrative are a Levite from Ephraim and his concubine. When they arrive in Gibeah, they are greeted by an old man (Judges 19:16-21), who receives them with the same gestures of hospitality as those made by Abraham (Gen 18:1-8) and Lot (Gen 19:1-3). But some citizens of Gibeah, "wicked people," appear at the old man's house and request to "meet" the guest (Judges 19,22). In the end, the citizens inflict violence on the Levite's concubine, leaving her near death (v. 28). Clearly, then, they were not sexually attracted to the foreigner, but only wanted to humiliate him, perhaps with the ultimate intention of killing him (cf. Judges 20:5).

In conclusion, the stories recounting the sins of Sodom and of Gibeah are a condemnation of the sin of inhospitality. They show that hostility and violence toward strangers should be judged and punished severely. The rejection of defenseless foreigners and others who are different, especially when they are needy, leads to social disintegration and deadly violence and deserves proper punishment.

A very different interpretation of these stories did not originate until the second century of the Christian era. At that time the city of Sodom was denounced for a shameful sexual practice called "sodomy," understood as erotic relations with a person of the same sex. At first glance, this misinterpretation might seem to be supported in the biblical accounts. In Genesis 19 we are told that two angels (v. 1) are spending the night in Lot's house when they are besieged by the "men of Sodom," young and old (v. 4), who want to sexually abuse these outsiders (v. 5). The He-

brew verb used is "to know" (*yāda'*), a euphemism indicating sexual intercourse,. This is confirmed by Lot, who in an effort to protect the guests is willing to sacrifice his two daughters who "have not known man" (v. 8).

The concept of "sodomy" comes from an incorrect interpretation of this Sodom story, which has been used to condemn LGBTIQ+ people for their supposedly "nefarious" sin (a sin that cannot even be named).

The Holiness Code in Leviticus (Leviticus 18,22 and 20,13)

The PBC points out that Leviticus contains a detailed list of prohibitions, among which are Leviticus18,22, "You must not lie with a man as with a woman; that is an abomination" (*tō'ēḇāh*), and Leviticus 20,13, "If a man lies with a man as with a woman, they have both committed an abomination. They must surely be put to death; their blood is upon them." The seriousness of the abominable act is reflected in the death penalty. There is no indication that such a sanction was ever applied in Israel. In any case, the legislator offers no reasons, either for the prohibition or for the severe penalty imposed.

How are we to interpret these texts? Xavier Alegre says that we obviously should not understand them literally, just as we do not read literally what Leviticus 19:27 commands: "You must not cut off the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard." These texts are part of the so-called "holiness code" in chapters 17 to 26 of Leviticus. These laws were aimed at preserving the Jewish people from idolatry and helping them maintain their religious and cultural identity, which was being threatened, especially after the exile in Babylon. Initially, the laws were perhaps part of the taboos of a nomadic tribal society, but in a later stage of Judaism they were "canonized" by being included in the Hebrew Bible. The prohibition of sexual acts between men—nothing is said about women—may have been related to the condemnation of foreign cults (cultic prostitution of males was common in other nations, e.g., Ugarit). Homosexual acts were seen as "unnatural" because they contravened God's command to procreate, an obligation that was very important for a nation often defeated by the more powerful and numerous peoples that surrounded it.

Modern biblical scholars are not certain, on the one hand, whether the acts described in the Old Testament were prohibited in themselves or because of their relationship with cultic prostitution. On the other, they find it surprising that the prohibition was not supported by arguments and that no attempt was made to establish a relationship with the order of creation to justify the prohibition. Finally, the Old Testament, unlike other texts, such as those of the Greeks, never seems to reflect deeply on the matter. It can therefore be concluded that the Old Testament does not establish any "general" principle about the prohibition of homosexuality as we know it today.

Romans 1,24-27

The PBC also discusses the initial section of Paul's letter to the Romans, which was attempted to demonstrate the universal guilt of all human beings,

who had become the object of divine wrath (Romans 1,18). Paul's aim was to show that everyone needed justification in Christ (Romans 3,21-26). He first presents a general discourse (Romans 1,18-32) that allows us to see how homosexual behavior was understood and judged in the early Christian communities. Paul introduces his reflection with a severe condemnation of "impiety and injustice" and laments the suffocation of "truth" by injustice (Rom 1,18).

Textually, Romans 1:26-27 reads: "For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error."

How should this text be interpreted? Xavier Alegre points out that Paul's letter to the Romans was a programmatic work; it may even be considered his theological testament. What Paul wants to show in the section of the letter that goes from 1,18 to 3,30 is the fact of universal sinfulness. He does this by using a rhetorical procedure of that time called the "diatribe," a type of fictitious dialogue with a supposed interlocutor, who in this letter would be a traditional Jew. Paul wants to challenge his Jewish and pagan interlocutors because he believes they are arrogant and too convinced of their own holiness; they do not realize their own sinfulness and their need for salvation through faith in Christ. Seeking to help the Jews understand that they are as sinful as the pagans, Paul makes use of Jewish prejudices against pagans; he starts in 1:18 and continues in 1:19-32. Adopting the negative image that the Jews have of pagans, he states that the latter's impiety (their idolatry leading them to pervert the created order) and their injustice (the consequence of their disordered passions) have led them to practice aberrant sex. The list of pagan vices that Paul recites is of Stoic origin, and it includes, among other things, a criticism of homosexuality in Romans 1:27. Paul does not seem to be criticizing here homosexuality as a "natural," biological inclination (nowhere in his work does he seem to be aware of such a possibility, though it was known to Hellenism). Rather, he is condemning what he sees as unruly, sinful passion and as such obviously reprehensible. In any case, this is not the present-day understanding of the same-sex inclinations of LGBTIQ+ people. It can thus be concluded that Paul does not reflect explicitly on the question of homoerotic love and that he therefore offers no adequate answer, either positive or negative, about gay or lesbian relationships.

1 Corinthians 6,9-10 and 1 Timothy 1,9-10

Xavier Alegre considers that 1 Corinthians 6,9-10 and 1Timothy 1,9-10, unlike the texts in Romans, are unclear in their meaning; specialists do not always agree on their interpretation. Nevertheless, all three texts relate to Pauline communities, which were doubtlessly influenced by anti-Hellenistic Jewish reflection.

The first problem arising in 1 Corinthians 6,9-10 has to do with the words translated as "perverted" (*malakoi*) and "having relations with other men" (*arsenokoitai*). These words are taken from a traditional catalog of vices that Paul has incorporated into his letter, but it is not so clear that the words Paul uses here refer to homosexuality. The term "perverted" does not always have a sexual connotation, but it may here, given the context. The fact that it is found after adulterers and before "having relations with other men" seems to imply such a connotation. The second word (*arsenokoitai*) is a neologism that appears for the first time precisely in 1 Corinthians 6,9. It is a compound word that could have been inspired by Leviticus 18:22 as translated in the Septuagint Bible. If in Paul's list the two words form a unit, as seems to be the case, then Paul is referring here not to homosexual relationships in general, but rather to relationships in which there is abuse or rape. He is not reflecting on the relations between two free and responsible persons.

Written by a disciple of Paul, 1 Timothy 1:9-10 is also lacking in clarity. According to scholars, the words translated as "immoral" (*pornois*) and "those having sexual relations with other men" (the same word as in 1 Corinthians 6,10) refer to the sixth commandment. They are found in the context of a catalog of vices that refers to adulterers and to abusive relationships with other men. The author of the letter uses the catalog of vices to discredit the adversaries who are destroying the community. This text provides no clear arguments shedding light on the current theological debate on homosexuality.

Texts That Inspire a New Paradigm

The Bible also offers some inspiring texts[22] for LGBTIQ+ persons and for all those seeking the truth with good will. These texts inspire us to create a new paradigm that recognizes the diversity of sexual orientations within an inclusive Church.

David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18,1-4 and 2 Samuel 1,26)

> "How distressed I am for you, my brother Jonathan! How greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." (2 Samuel 1,26).

The two books of Samuel, which were originally a single book, contain a great variety of ancient traditions describing the period from the birth of Samuel to the time of David's succession to the throne (from approximately 1070 to 970 BC). When Jonathan, son of Saul and heir to the throne, meets David, he feels profound affection for him (1 Samuel 18,1). Jonathan and David make a pact of friendship because Jonathan loves David as his own soul (1 Samuel 18,3). Jonathan takes off his cloak and gives it to David, and also his armor, sword, bow, and belt (1 Samuel 18:4). In their last meeting (1 Samuel 20,41-42), David and Jonathan "kissed each other and wept with each other; David wept the more. Then Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, that the Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever'."

David's sorrow at Jonathan's death (see 2 Samuel 1,26 above) is expressive of the great love (*'āhābâ*) that existed between the two men.

As Xavier Alegre points out,[23] the Old Testament has no problem in describing the relationship between David and Jonathan with details that seem to indicate a homosexual love between these two men who are basically bisexual.

Ruth and Naomi (Book of Ruth)

> "But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!'" (Ruth 1,16-17).

The book of Ruth receives its name from its protagonist, a Moabite woman who was married to a Jew who had emigrated to the country of Moab. After her husband's death, Ruth decides to follow her mother-in-law, Naomi, who is returning to her home in Bethlehem. After a series of situations relating to the Jewish laws of marriage, Ruth marries Naomi's relative Boaz and has a son, Obed, who becomes the father of Jesse and the grandfather of King David.

Ruth, a Moabite and a foreigner, leaves her people and accepts the faith of Israel. Both the close relationship of trust and affection between Ruth and Naomi in a patriarchal society and the attitude of openness toward non-Jewish peoples make this story a source of inspiration for all kinds of women regardless of age, nationality, or religion. It is interesting to note that, when Ruth is said to "cling to" Naomi in 1,14, the Hebrew verb used (*davak*) is the same one that appears in Genesis 2,24 to describe the relationship of a man and a woman in marriage. Ruth's determination and faith are confirmed throughout the book.

Jesus' curing of the centurion's servant (Matthew 8,6-13 and Luke 7,1-10)

> "A centurion had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death." (Luke 7,2).

> "The centurion came to Jesus, appealing to him and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.' And Jesus said to him, 'I will come and cure him'." (Matthew 8,5-6).

This passage from the Q source about the curing of the centurion's servant has been reinterpreted in modern times by biblical scholars. The sick person, called a boy (*pais*) in Matthew/Luke and also a servant (*doulos*) in Luke, was "valued highly" (*entimos*) by the centurion. How was this possible for a pagan Roman official living in Capernaum? According to various scholars,[24] historical research shows that these pagan officials often had relations with other men; they had "sexual" slaves. Their servants were their lovers. But Jesus is not concerned about this; he just cures the boy. Are we sure that the centurion was homosexual? Of course not! But anyone might suspect it. The centurion is aware that his love for his

servant would be considered indecent and pagan, and that he is not worthy of having Jesus enter his house. Jesus praises his faith and does not ask any questions about the relationship.

Toward an Inclusive Exegesis

The PBC[25] concludes that proper exegesis of the texts of the Old and New Testaments brings to light many elements that should be considered in making an assessment of the ethical aspects of homosexuality. Certain formulations of the biblical authors, as well as the disciplinary norms of Leviticus, require intelligent interpretation in order to preserve the values the sacred texts seek to promote and to avoid taking literally things that pertain only to the cultural traits of that time. Though only outlined in this document, the contributions made by the human sciences and the reflections of theologians and moralists are essential for treating the problem adequately. Pastoral attention will also be needed, especially in the case of individuals, if we are to carry out this service of good that the Church has to assume in its mission in favor of humanity.

For his part, Xavier Alegre[26] concludes that careful study of biblical texts referring in some way to sexuality has shown that we cannot resolve the current debate on homosexuality on the basis of the Bible since it was not a question that concerned the biblical authors. None of the biblical texts that have been used to condemn homosexuality allows this interpretation. We must therefore radically rethink our moral judgments and our theological reflections on homosexuality, and we must do this in fidelity to the Bible (and to Jesus of Nazareth). As has been made clear, we must keep in mind the specific socio-cultural context of any moral norm or ethical prohibition. What is asked of us, then, is very deep and serious reflection on this topic; only this will help free us of our many prejudices and deepen our evangelical spirit. Such reflection will lead us to an authentic evangelical practice and to be "Good News" in a world that unjustly marginalizes homosexuals .

I would like to end with Paul's inspiring words to the Christians of Galatia in section 3:1-5,12 of his letter. Paul is seeking arguments to convince the Galatians that Jesus Christ has brought them freedom and that they should not let themselves be shackled again by the slavery of the Law. The promise of God is destined for all through faith in Jesus Christ:

> "There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female: you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Today, these words are also inspiring for heterosexuals, for gay and lesbians, for bisexuals, transsexuals, intersexuals, and *queer persons*. All of them deserve recognition in the Catholic Church. The words are also inspiring for Christians and non-Christians, all of whom are called to be free and equal, to build together a world of justice, with full recognition of all and without discrimination of any kind.

FAITH, THE HUMAN CONDITION, AND SEXUALITY

Montserrat Escribano Cárcel

The Church in this synodal epoch has the opportunity to go beyond the "welcoming framework" it has so far adopted with regard to women and the so-called "sexual minorities." It can now move toward a space of full recognition and of fruitful dialogue about the complexities of sexuality and gender, as well as the right of all believers to be treated with respect and dignity.

In his recent encyclical, Pope Francis states that "Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality" (*Fratelli tutti,* 7). Now that we are beginning to transition from the shock of the pandemic[27] to a different world, we wonder what the "reality" is to which the pontiff refers and what other meaning we can give to it as believers, so as not to deny it. On the one hand, we are certain that something new is beginning, but on the other, the contours of the world coming into existence are not known to us. Thus, knowing what reality consists of and how to situate ourselves in it is a complex task. However, the experience of believing and the dynamics of faith assure us that hope is a gift that "cracks open" reality and allows us to glimpse new circumstances that did not exist before. Hope "announces" what does not yet exist.

In this reflection, we want to appeal to that wonderful gift of hope, which is capable of guiding us in the midst of an uncertain reality. We have recourse also to the dynamics of grace that

transforms our inner vision and that is active in us and in the Church, inviting us to personal conversion and reform of the ecclesial body. When both gift and grace are poured out on us, they point to new possibilities and open up spaces for thought that were previously closed in our tradition. At this time, these are necessary channels for boldly affirming the reality regarding sexuality, for achieving full recognition of women and their rights as believers, and for reaching in this way the *consensus fidelium* .

Sexuality, Freedom, and Dignity

Marked by these years of pandemic, the current reality has drastically exacerbated the material poverty that already existed, but it has also exposed the fragile seams of dignity where the existential and the world of faith are woven together. These "seams" are many, and they shape our personal, cultural, and ecclesial existences. Sexuality, intimate relationships, and familial closeness are essential parts of these realities, but now they appear more exposed, in between these "folds" that were already weakened. Their importance lies in the fact that both dignity and sexuality completely pervade human life and the temporality of existence; therefore, they cannot be omitted from the reflection of believers when there is talk of freedom, autonomy, and defense of human rights.

Faith in the creation of humankind—made in the image and likeness of the loving God—is understood as gendered and therefore as a source of joy and pain. In our time, sexuality and intimate relationships are an inescapable theme. According to Eva Illouz and Dana Kaplan, they constitute a series of ideas, a matrix of values, and a cultural framework accompanied by practices that have a powerful impact on relationships and institutions. These sociologists even affirm that sexuality and sexual freedom have become "a fundamental principle of modern Western society, capable of condensing the value and practice of freedom or, more accurately, personal freedom."[28]

In our culture, sex and sexuality are attributes of the person and sources of identity that walk hand in hand with equality and human dignity (or at least they should),. At the same time, although sexual life no longer depends on traditional institutions of control, like the family or churches, the experience of salvation and the life of grace are for believers still closely related to sexuality, however this gets expressed. Thus, we should ask is the following questions: who legitimizes the sexuality of believers, and how do they do so? To answer these questions adequately, we must carefully consider these realities and people's behaviors; we must study the cultural representations responsibly and conscientiously. Many of us must struggle constantly with the implicit biases and prejudices that diminish our ecclesial credibility. Stereotypes have dangerous consequences in everyday life, such as loss of job opportunities, silencing, denial of full sacramental participation, or exclusion from the believing community.[29] We must seek a theological framework that goes beyond the good will expressed through simple "welcoming" or pastoral accompaniment. The

Christian values of freedom, equality, and justice must be safeguarded by the Magisterium, ecclesiastical law, and ecclesial institutions.

Don't Deny Reality

Concepts like "freedom," "dignity," "equality," "religious belief," and "tradition" are all intertwined, and they make sense within the cultural contexts that legitimize them. In our westernized societies, each of these is related to concepts like "sex," "sexuality," "gender," "love," "consent," "free choice," "satisfaction," "desire," and "patriarchy." With believers, the possibility of "sin" also appears. Together these concepts make intelligible the faith in which we move and think about reality. Reality, however, harbors cognitive modes and unjust expressions that prevent the Church from being a merciful space of salvation for many personal stories. The intelligibility of faith flows out of a long history of of sexuality. These misunderstandings, as Javier Gafo points out, have been agreed upon and legitimized by Tradition and the Magisterium, and they cannot continue to be ignored.[30]

In order to legitimize the flawed understandings, we have spent much time focusing reflection on sexuality—whether heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual. We focus on practices, on biology, on social relevance, and especially on the discomfort they generate. It would seem that these reflections on sexual morality have been trapped in monocausal logical systems whose only concern is conduct. Throughout ecclesial history, it is this perspective that has shaped most of the discourse, language, and symbolism that stipulate acceptable sexual relations and distinguish them from those that are unacceptable. The dogmatic tradition and the Magisterium have stored up terms with which they have named, classified, and sanctioned all sexuality and sex, thus condensing Catholic morality into an article of canon law.

This normative way of distinguishing, classifying, and defining, which exists also outside the ecclesial sphere, has created cultural representations and elaborations of the ideas of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality and homosexuality. Each of these conceptions has its own genealogy and has developed within an ecclesial history. Underlying all of them is the idea of "universality," a concept that assumes an understanding of what is human and, most especially, what is not. That is to say, the normative idea of "universality" coincides with what we traditionally consider to be "male." It is striking that "maleness" has always been defined by opposition. Thus, "man" is that which is not a woman, not nature, not homosexual, or not black, and this list of things that are "not man" could be extended. The question then arises: what is this other that is not "male"? If this understanding of "universality" is true, then the exercise of endowing reality with universal value may have been the practice of those who held power and dominated ecclesial language. This power allowed them to define, limit, and legitimize whatever needed to be named, whatever was to appear in the sacred, institutional space, and ultimately whatever was to be loved and saved.

Creating "Spiritual Borders"

At the same time, we know that we as Church, as persons summoned by the Trinitarian God, have also been called to catholicity, for the holiness that dwells in the Church resides in its sacramental possibility. This sacramental dimension of catholicity contrasts with of "universality," an idea that is still strong and that gives rise to a homogenized vision of sex and sexual morality. The problem is that the idea of universality and the very definition of a human being have been formulated from a mythologized concept, namely, that of a white heterosexual male capable of displaying appropriate behavior.

This normative idea of universality underlying the Magisterium has often been confused with the idea of uniformity. If such is the case, then this overall framework ends up reducing sexual activity and the complexity of sex and our relational selves to "behavior." This way of thinking conceals and denies the diversity that characterizes sexuality, and it does so in order to grant some persons security and privileges within a clerical culture.

The intimacy and mutuality of human life cannot be reduced to behavior or external expression. Such a way of thinking produces "human asymmetries" that reinforce "borders" and project "a shadowy, closed world," as Pope Francis points out. Suffering, injustice, lack of recognition and care, exclusion, and silencing all point to lives that are forced into invisibility and condemned to disdain for their sexuality.

The ecclesial ideal for conduct has been heteronormativity, which for many people in our long ecclesial history has been an imposed ideology. The time has come, however, to demand the profound changes, reforms, and conversions that befit a Trinitarian God who manifests his compassionate closeness to all humankind.[31] Without such conversion, the asymmetric effects of heteronormative models and patriarchy can damage self-identity and self-esteem, both personal and ecclesial (Cf. FT 52); they could even deny the right of many believers to exist (FT 15). As Church, we must realize that we are facing a dangerous situation that creates "spiritual borders." Such a situation can lead to what philosopher Byung-Chul Han calls the "hell of the same,"[32] a society that blurs whatever is diverse and erases all that is different. Such a situation makes it very difficult to follow Jesus; it leaves the Church morally impoverished.

By virtue of its *sensus fidei fidelium and inspired* by the Holy Spirit, *t*he ecclesial community is able to recognize how reality must be transformed so that it does not end up being denied. Refusing to open ourselves to inspiration would prevent personal and ecclesial life from reaching its fullness and the *dynamis* to which it is called. In contrast, a graced view of sexuality allows us to perceive it as a space for the encounter, the caring, the solidarity, and the friendship that are needed if we are to rejoice in the sacramental and savor the boundless salvation that is offered to us.

Cracking Reality Open

When moved by the Spirit, the Church recognizes itself as a "restless body";[33] it is an ecclesial communion that is an

open, synodal reality containing within itself very diverse lives. The philosopher Simone Weil reminds us of the distance that exists between what a person is and what a person loves. This distance between ourselves and what is different from us, writes Weil, generates the possibility of the latter's being loved.[34] Realizing the "distance" that exists between humanity and the Trinitarian God, we understand that love is always inspired by what is different, by what we do not control, by what exceeds us. Thus, we ask the following questions: why are sexual diversity and LGBTIQ+ persons considered a nuisance within the Church? Why is the presence of these sexualities and these ways of being sexual considered objectionable? Why have some people's lives been reduced to a matter of conduct? Why are their identities that cannot be recognized or that are compressed into practices classified as deviant or sinful? Why are there so many people who are forced to keep silent or remain invisible in their ecclesial or religious communities?

The questions are many, and the answers are few, but we who are baptized cling to an evangelical hope that transgresses all limits, including those set by our tradition. There are many, too many, people who still live in fear, who are forced to hide or even lie because of their sexual orientation. Each of these situations casts "shadows" and erects cognitive and spiritual borders that sustain inequalities and asymmetries. Faced with this quandary, we have the hope that arises from grace, the hope that Saint Paul says is "against all hope" (Rom 4:18) because it springs from our relationship with a loving God who guides our lives and fills them with meaning. Hope does not happen without mobilizing our cognitive frameworks and beliefs. This existential mobilization is a way of cracking open and delving deep; it allows us to see that something different is emerging, even though changes and structures are required to make it a reality.

A "We That Is Possible" and Visible

In these times when reality is infused with uncertainty, fear, and misfortune, there is also the possibility of encountering the "bold" hope that allows us to magnify life, all life (FT 55). Nevertheless, neither conversion nor the hope I name can ignore the complexities of a creedal reality that blends with inherited tradition and the contents of transmitted doctrine, which is valuable but also can be harmful. At the same time, hope and conversion incite a critical gaze that opens up the possibility of "resolving" all difficulties, so that analyzing sexuality, sex, and human relationships in the light of the Gospel becomes not an attempt to "recover" what is missing or a simple effort to "improve" existing rules, but rather, as Pope Francis says, a valuable opportunity to re-orient ourselves towards the construction of the "we that is possible" (FT 17).

The Discomfort of the Restless Ecclesial Body

Certain intellectual frameworks harbor biased understandings of Christian sexual morality, or else they fail

to go deeply enough into the possibilities opened up by the Second Vatican Council. When dealing with certain sexual orientations, these narrow frameworks employ rhetorical terms and categories like "deviance," "disease," "mistaken orientation," and "sodomy," all of which are condemned as sinful and perverted behaviors. The constant use of such language by some pastors, priests, and believers perpetuates moral asymmetries even as it vilifies, denounces, and persecutes lives that are branded as reprehensible, thus reducing their chances of flourishing and denying their right to dignity.

Sexuality has often been perceived as a space in which contractual relationships can do what is necessary to earn salvation. According to the language used by canon law, the sexual life of married couples is understood in terms of the procreation or education of offspring. Apart from contractual laws, however, Saint Paul reminds us that the life of grace makes us temples of the *Ruah* and that we do not belong to ourselves (1 Cor 6:19).[35] This means that every personal history is embodied, like the body of the whole Church, and as such is a sacred space for savoring abundant and overflowing grace. The question we should be addressing, then, is how as Church we are reading the diversity of bodies and their relationships. We could even ask, in these synodal times, who are those who should legitimize corporality and what gender policies we should establish.

If the Church is to be a restless body of salvation, we need to change our theological frameworks for understanding sexuality, sex, relationships, and the ways in which the identities and subjectivities of believers are established. The paradigm we use cannot simply be one that classifies behaviors as acceptable or reprehensible. It is true that, for some years now, we as Church have been more "welcoming" of LGBTIQ+ persons and more respectful of women. Recourse is had to the symbol of the Church as a welcoming mother. Discomfort appears, however, when these marginalized groups point out that they are already Church and therefore do not need to be "welcomed" but rather recognized so that their ecclesial rights are respected. The paradigm of "welcoming" creates a narrow framework for understanding LGBTIQ+ persons, for they continue to be understood in terms of their sexual practice. In the case of women, the framework understands them mainly in terms of their reproductive and maternal capacity.

The cleansing of our theological frameworks from unjust, patriarchal, and homophobic conceptions must be accompanied by institutional and legal reorganization. Having recourse to Mother Church symbolism does not free us from the duty to recognize the subjective rights of all baptized persons and accompanying them with a practice that fully ensures their dignity and fundamental rights. The image of a welcoming Church must never forget that it is always "on the way" because it dreams, together with the Trinitarian God, of overcoming all harm, abuse, silencing, and violence.

Despite this new dynamism in the Church, however, part of our logic as believers is still rooted in ideals of purity and sacrifice. Portraying the Church as a mother who welcomes and forgives is not acceptable as long as ho-

mosexual persons suffer discrimination and as long as patriarchal stereotypes turn them into what Hannah Arendt calls "stateless beings."[36] This political concept of Arendt can be applied to many believers who feel that they are denied the possibility of a full ecclesial connection. Our understanding of sexuality must be expanded to accommodate the reality of LGBTIQ+ persons and the corporeality of women, which far exceeds their capacity to be mothers or wives. Women's bodies and their sexual expression have been subjected to abuse and violence, so that the beautiful image of the Church as mother and wife is a sign that today is contested and desperately needs to be reconceived.

As I mentioned already, Christian "hope" is provocative, and it often springs from discomfort, pain, and anger.[37] The presence of scandal can act in the Church as an evangelical lamp, and as Jesus tells us in Luke, "No one lights a lamp to keep it hidden, but places it on the lampstand so that those who enter may see the light" (Luke 11:33).[38] If the image of Mother Church makes us think of those who have power and who make the decisions, then the image of the lamp points to the presence of a simple reality that has the potential to illuminate the world. The totality of sexuality, sex, and family relationships needs to be contextualized and presented within a process of integral human promotion. The reality of women and LGBTIQ+ persons is now a light that shines brightly. Let it put on the lampstand!

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30. "It must be recognized that the tradition of the Church is situated in a cultural context, for which she herself is partially responsible since she is unable to perceive all the complexity of homosexual behavior (...). It is important to consider how the Church has been dealing with the problem of homosexuality over the centuries, but it must always be stressed that what the medieval authors or the Manuals had before them when discussing the problem of homosexuality was very different from what we as moralists have before us today when confronted with the difficult problem of homosexuality." Gafo, Javier (1981). "Cristianismo y homosexualidad. Luces y sombras de una interpretación histórica," in (1981). *Homosexualidad: ciencia y conciencia*. Cited by de la Torre, Javier (2020). "La Tradición de la Iglesia: Entre la sombra de Sodoma y las listas de pecados-vicios" in de la Torre, Javier (ed.). *Homosexualidades y cristianismo en el siglo XXI*. Madrid: Dykinson, p. 117.
31. Escribano, Montse and Torres, Pepa (2021). *Las mujeres y los liderazgos en la Iglesia. Memorias e identidades eclesiales.* Bilbao: Frontera Hegian.
32. Han, Byung-Chul (2017). *La expulsión de lo distinto*. Barcelona: Herder.
33. Noceti, Serena (2018), "Reformas que queremos las mujeres en la Iglesia" in Vidal, Mireia (ed.). *Reforma y reformas en la Iglesia. Miradas críticas de las mujeres cristianas.* Estella: Verbo Divino, pp. 107-126.
34. Weil, Simone (2021). *La gravetat i la grace*, Barcelona: Fragmenta.
35. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, which you receive from God and which dwells in you? So you do not belong to yourselves."
36. Arendt, Hannah (2002). "La Decadencia de la Nación-Estado y el Final de los Derechos del Hombre" in Arendt, Hannah (ed.). *Los Orígenes del Totalitarismo*. Madrid: Alianza, pp. 392-438.
37. Remedios Zafra writes that "there is no hope that does not arise from a diversion from what is forever the same" and that "there is nothing that has made us change that has not come from unease or discomfort," in Zafra, Remedios (2021). *Frágiles. Cartas sobre la ansiedad y la esperanza en una nueva cultura.* Barcelona: Anagrama.
38. The image of the lamp appears in several gospels: Matthew 5:15; Mark 4:21; Luke 8:16; 11:33; 11:36, and 15:8. These verses highlight this simple artifact that must find its proper place in order to fulfill its function. Thus, the evangelists stress that it would make no sense for its light to be hidden or covered up. On the contrary, it has to find its proper place, the lampstand. In this way, "those who enter" will encounter the light (Luke 8:11) that will dissipate the shadows. I consider this a beautiful image for those who are dreaming of new ecclesial paths.

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Roger de Llúria, 13, 08010 Barcelona (Spain)
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