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The Granick - Nugent Affair

by

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I am totally chagrined over the reactions of liberals to the Granick-Nugent affair on sexuality and homosexuality. But at least as liberals they have come to the correct conclusion: separate procreation from sexuality, as Paul VI put it so brilliantly in *Humanae Vitae* way back in 1968, and all aberrations in sexuality become acceptable, including homosexuality.

First, the Granick-Nugent affair was correctly diagnosed by CDF. There seems to be no real dispute that these two people disagreed with the traditional teaching of the Church on homosexuality, namely that homosexual acts are intrinsically evil, not just immoral. Some have surmised that their case is one of conscience which the CDF was trying to coerce. They compare it to the case of St. Thomas More. But the Granick-Nugent case is radically different from that of Thomas More. His was a matter of conscience before the law which has no power to sound the conscience of a person. The teaching of the Church is different: of those who officially teach doctrine and are in a position to be so considered, the Church has a right to know whether they hold one of her teachings to be true *vel non*? There is dissent possible from official noninfallible teaching which I shall consider in a moment. But here we have a point of doctrine important for the teaching function of the Church.

In *Building Bridges* both authors state "that homosexual acts might be morally acceptable" (p. 44) and if a homosexual relationship is stable and faithful, this fact can possibly justify homosexual acts within such a relationship (pp. 61-63). These are two basic errors which the authors have doggedly refused to recant even after more than fifteen years of due process. Perhaps the authors meant these statements as the lesser of two evils, but that was never made very clear.

The real problem lies in the authors' refusal to categorically affirm that homosexual acts are intrinsically evil (not just immoral) and therefore

can never be justified just as intentional abortion and euthanasia can never be justified because they are intrinsically evil acts (See *Evangelium Vitae*). Something may be immoral without being intrinsically evil if the circumstances change. Thus if an unmarried man and woman fornicate, that would be immoral because if they marry, their intercourse would no longer be immoral. But an intrinsically evil act can never be moral no matter what the circumstances. Thus, direct abortion, infanticide, euthanasia and homosexual acts are all intrinsically evil acts.

Of course a Catholic may dissent from noninfallible teaching. But honesty demands that it be done in good faith, openly, publically and humbly, taking all consequences with an openness and willingness to change one's view if shown better in the future. It is a little like civil nonviolent disobedience. Sister Granick and Father Nugent both refused to do this, which I find puzzling. If it is true, as one author put it, "that in their heart of hearts Nugent and Granick do not give internal assent to the whole of the Church's current teaching on homosexuality," then they have, as official teachers in the Church, the obligation to say so and suffer the consequences. As many theologians did in the past, some of whom were proven wrong (Luther, Rosmini, Jansanius) and others right in their dissent (Cougar, J.C. Murray, Rahner). This takes courage and entails a risk worth while taking if a person is convinced of his or her own position. He or she must trust the Spirit.

Secondly, this brings us to whether this teaching on homosexuality is infallible moral teaching. Father Nugent, in his own words has "difficulties in determining whether a particular teaching has in fact been taught infallibly by a nondefining act of the ordinary and universal magisterium" That is strange and could be answered by any first year theological student. The doctrine of the intrinsic evil of homosexual activity is taught in Scripture; has been taught for two thousand years in the Church, East and West, with no dissent; and it is held today by the universal episcopate united with the Bishop of Rome without dissent. If that is not a definition of infallibility, then there is no universal infallible ordinary magisterium. They should all be better theologians than to doubt this simple proposition. The only dissent comes late in the 20th century by some liberal laymen and women who believe that the Church's view on sexuality is arcane, out of step with modern psychology, patriarchal and with not enough emphasis on the unitive factor separated from the procreative dimension of sexuality.

Which brings us to the last and most important aspect of this whole affair. Paul VI warned explicitly that to separate intentionally the procreative from the unitive dimension of human sexuality would result in terrible abuse. You know the reality of a thing by its effects seen by results. The result of this separation has produced a sexual desert which is

all about us culturally: widespread adultery (people could care less about Clinton's adultery), unmarried living arrangements, sex as early as fourteen, massive abortion as backup for contraception, euthanasia (PAS), the massive use of women as objects in pornography on the Internet, and of course, public support for homosexual "union" even in marriage. Any glance at our movies, TV and popular culture shows this deep sexual corruption – all from the contraceptive mentality over the past thirty years. Scandalously for the liberals, *Humanae Vitae* was right! That teaching of the Pope is as counter cultural as you can get, *pace* Father Greeley.

This sexual desert does not *prove* that separation of the procreative/unitive aspects of sexuality brought about this devastation, but by analogy it seems to be a strong indication. It all started in earnest with the pill in 1960 and has cascaded ever since with a slow but sure decline in the moral tone. Logically, once you separate the two dimensions, contraceptive love must also justify homosexual love and perhaps other forms of love considered perversions in the past.

Lately, Sister Granick and Father Nugent both have come to a turning point in their lives in the Church. It seems that each generation confronts a stumbling block when some leave the Church and others remain, knowing that Christ is present therein even when they think it has gone astray.

The history of the church is replete with such crises: Docetism in the first century, Gnosticism in the second century, Ariansim in the fourth century, Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism in the fifth and sixth centuries, the terrible corruption of the papacy in the eight and ninth centuries, Albigenianism in the twelfth century, church and state in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, indulgences, scandal of the clergy and the doctrine of good works and justification in the sixteenth century, Jansenism in the seventeenth century, rationalism, Marxism, radical democracy in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and a whole host of problems in our century, not least of which are Darwinism and Freudianism. These are only a few of the ordeals which thinking people in the Church had to confront, even some times in the face of opposition of the Church herself. The problem for many Catholics in the last part of the 20th century is the Church's view on sexuality: contraception, marital relations, abortion, homosexuality, premarital and extramarital sex, etc. Some of these Catholics will leave as disciples have always left from the time of the first gospels: "This is intolerable teaching. How can anyone accept it:...After this, many of his disciples went away and no longer accompanied him (*John* 6:60, 66). Things have not changed a bit since the first century: shall we stay with the spouse of Christ, the Church, even if she is bruised and sinful? Or shall we no longer walk with her? That is the question Sister Granick and Father Nugent must ask.

The teaching on homosexual activity is not going to change, not now, not ever. *Sentire cum ecclesia* is now before Catholics like them. One of the signs of authenticity of any teaching is when a doctrine is countercultural in a particular society. If there is any teaching which is anathema and politically incorrect for liberals in and out of the Church, it is this teaching on homosexual activity. It's a terrible choice to make: with the Church or with our culture. But choose we must.
