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David A. Grenda

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Is God “Homophobic”?

by

David A. Grenda, A.B.

*The author is Associate editor of Peninsula,
a publication of Harvard College.*

Since the dawn of human history, mankind has asked the same basic questions: who are we, why are we on earth, and what is our purpose while we are here?

In answering these questions, religion has been crucial. Almost every major civilization has had some form of religion. They have attempted to standardize a way of living for their adherents, one which would reflect their particular answers to life's questions. As a result, religions have traditionally set down guidelines for behavior, deeming certain practices good (moral) and others bad (immoral).

The objective of this essay is to present the views of several major religious traditions on homosexuality, and to justify these positions. My point is not an across the board condemnation of homosexual persons, but it must be realized that condemning homosexual behavior is no different than condemning any other immoral lifestyle. We all have immoral lifestyles and none of us is any less immoral than the other. “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone,” Jesus said.

For most of history, Judaism has paid heed to a collection of writings known as the Torah. The Torah consists of the first five books of what Christians describe as the Old Testament and contains a history of the Hebrews and laws which dictate a moral lifestyle. The Torah is quite explicit in its admonishments against homosexual practices. There is no passage more clear than Leviticus 18, verse 22: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” Verse 13 of chapter 20 is equally, if not more, stringent in its rebuke of homosexuality: “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death.” While modern Judaism is not

quite so harsh in exacting punishment, Jewish tradition is clearly opposed to homosexuality.

Jewish authorities also interpreted other passages as being constraints on homosexual practices. The first of these is found in Genesis, chapter 19, verse 5. After Lot's angelic guests arrived to foretell the destruction of Sodom, its inhabitants ordered Lot, "Bring them out to us that we may know them." Lot begged them, "Do not act so wickedly." Leading Jewish interpreters then surmise that Sodom's destruction resulted in part from the homosexual behavior practiced by its inhabitants.

While the prohibitions against homosexuality are well-documented in Jewish scripture, how do Jewish scholars view the subject? Among the earliest scholars, the ban on homosexuality was thought a part of Noahide law, which was the law given to Noah by God after the flood, a "proto-Ten Commandments," as it is. Maimonides, one of the greatest Jewish scholars, recommended that unrelated men should not sleep in the same bed at any time, to avoid the temptation it might bring. Modern Jewish theology tends to be just as unbending towards homosexuality. "Jewish law holds that no hedonistic ethic, even if called 'love', can justify the morality of homosexuality, any more than it can legitimize adultery or incest, however genuinely such acts may be performed out of love and by mutual consent" (*Encyclopedia Judaica*). It should be noted, however, that modern Jewish law does not regard homosexual persons as evil or condemned, rather it renounces their lifestyle as unnatural and immoral.

From its inception, Roman Catholicism has taken a stand against the practice of homosexuality. Several passages in the Epistles of Saint Paul are used to undergird this stance. In the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul addresses the converts on the issue of homosexuality, stating that it is practiced by sinners who reject God: "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator... For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error" (Romans 1:24). The Church also draws on a passage from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor the idolators, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts... will inherit the kingdom of God" (Corinthians 6:9-10).

How do the Doctors of the Church (historically important theologians) view such practices? St. Augustine has written: "Those foul

offenses against nature should be detested and punished everywhere and at all times, such as were those of the people of Sodom (here a reference to Genesis 19), which should all nations commit, then would all stand guilty of the same crime by God's law, which has not made men that they should so abuse one another. For then even the very intercourse which should be between God and us is violated when that same nature, of which He is the author, is polluted by the perversity of lust" (*Confessions*). Furthermore, St. Thomas Aquinas writes that homosexuality is "in conflict with the natural pattern of sexuality for the benefit of the species." St. Thomas agrees with St. Augustine on one other point, that "of all kinds of unchastity that against nature is worst" (*Summa Theologie*).

Modern Catholic doctrine, especially since the Second Vatican Council, has addressed the issue of homosexuality repeatedly. In 1975, in the Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics, the Church stated, "According to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality... The judgment of Scripture does not of course permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved."

In 1986, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued an extensive letter, which read, in part, "To choose someone of the same sex for one's sexual activity is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention, goals, of the Creator's sexual design... This does not mean that homosexual persons are not often generous and giving of themselves: but when they engage in homosexual activity they confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination which is essentially self-indulgent."

Such arguments should not be interpreted as toleration of violence or hatred against people who are homosexual, only as a message that homosexual behavior is immoral. The letter also states that "It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs."

Today, almost a billion people are members of the religion of Islam, the fastest growing religion in the world. What does Islam as a religion say about the practice of homosexuality? For Muslims, the Koran is the divine, literal word of God, and its laws guide action. The Koran is quite explicit in its condemnation of homosexual acts. In Surah (Chapter) four, verse 16, the Koran says: "If two men among you commit indecency, punish them both. If they repent and mend their ways, let them be. God is forgiving and merciful" (Dawood translation, 1956). The Koran again addresses the issue in Surah 26:166: "Will you fornicate with males and abandon your wives, whom God has created for you" Surely you are great transgressors."

Finally, to quote Surah 7:82, "And Lot, who said to his people, 'Will you persist in these indecent acts which no other nation has committed before you? You lust after men instead of women. Truly you are degenerate people.'"

So we have seen the stands of three of the world's major religions on homosexuality. But why do all three concur so strongly in prohibiting homosexual acts? To answer such a question, the full meaning of the word "religion" must be grasped.

Religion sets forth principles for two reasons. First, as an attempt to explain unanswerable questions of nature by ascribing them to the supernatural deity called "God." Second, to guide people in their daily interactions, as a means of instructing them in what is natural and what is not.

Religions have determined certain ways of living based on their ability to draw adherents closer to their ultimate goal; such precepts are not simply conjured up out of thin air. All three religions acknowledge that their sacred scriptures, without exception, forbid homosexuality. God created male and female to be together to reproduce and bring new life into the world. Homosexuality directly contradicts this, and thus it is rejected.

The integrity of the family is also important to these religions. Homosexuality, by eliminating the procreative and reducing the family to cohabitation between members of the same sex, mollifies the traditional environment in which children have been raised. The histories of the world's great civilizations show that all went into irrevocable decline once the family unit disintegrated.

The final argument is that of compatibility, similar to the procreative argument. Religious scholars have argued that God would not have created distinct sexes and designed reproduction to require both if they were not meant to be together. The idea of sexes remaining independent of each other does not fit into this scheme of things.

In the end, what about the homosexual person? The three religions disapprove of the homosexual act and "way of life." But all three recognize the sinful state of all humanity, and none condemns homosexual people. The fact that all people are sinful influences these religions, and because of that, all grant that salvation is as possible for the homosexual as for anyone else.