

Catholic Bishops' Statement
on Homosexuality,
NARTH's Response
by Dale O'Leary

On September 10th, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops released a pastoral letter. "Always Our Children" (AOC). The message reaches out to parents who are trying to cope with the discovery of homosexuality in a child. The message has many positive aspects, particularly the concern and compassion shown by the bishops for those with a sexually questioning child.

However, because the statement touched on the question of the origins and treatment of homosexuality, NARTH believed that it was important to make certain clarifications.

History of Church Teaching

The Roman Catholic Church has been struggling for more than two decades to find a way to express clearly its teaching on homosexuality. The problem is that the Church does not want to make a definitive statement on a matter that is currently still under debate in the scientific community, since that statement must take these scientific theories into consideration.

The AOC statement never refers to the Catholic teaching that homosexual inclinations are "intrinsicly disordered." Instead, the AOC message references the 1975 "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics," which reads: "Church teaching acknowledges a distinction between a homosexual 'tendency' which proves to be 'transitory,' and homosexuals who are definitively such because of some kind of innate instinct."

After the 1975 Declaration was issued, there was concern among traditionalists that "an overly benign interpretation was given to the homosexual condition itself, some going so far as to call it neutral or even good." In an effort to correct that misunderstanding, the Catholic Church issued another statement in 1986, which made it clear that "the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder."

In addition, the statement on homosexuality in the Catechism of the Catholic Church was recently revised, and the word "innate" which appeared in some translations was replaced with "deep-seated," and stress was placed on the Catholic teaching that homosexual inclinations are "intrinsicly disordered." The Catechism now reads: "The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, intrinsicly disordered, is a trial for most of them."

"Always Our Children"--NARTH's Concerns

NARTH issued a four-page statement outlining its concerns, accompanied by references to the research available on the subject. The following are excerpts from that statement:

"The AOC message counsels parents whose adolescent son or daughter is experimenting with homosexual behaviors that, 'Sometimes the best approach may be a 'wait-and-see' attitude.' In our opinion, nothing could be more dangerous. Same-sex attraction is a symptom of an underlying problem that requires attention."

"The AOC message uses the phrases 'innate instinct,' 'basic homosexual orientation,' 'a fundamental dimension of one's personality,' and 'relative stability,' which mistakenly imply that this is invariably an unchangeable condition. To leave the public with such an impression when scientific evidence does not support such conclusions is, to say the least, irresponsible, particularly when such a false impression

denies hope to those who experience this condition as contrary to their authentic nature, and a source of suffering.

"The document fails to point out the evidence that homosexual inclination is developmentally disordered and more highly associated with pathology."

Courage, a support group for Catholics struggling with homosexual inclinations, also prepared a critical analysis of the AOC message, which is available from the Courage office or on its website. Courage can be reached at (212)421-0426.

Courage's statement, prepared by the ministry's founder, Rev. John Harvey, reads in part:

"Men and women who sincerely desire to develop their heterosexual potential should not be in ignorance of the opportunities for help to move toward their God-given masculinity or femininity. We do not say that every individual who makes such an effort will be able to complete the journey, but he should at least be given the knowledge that many people have been able to do so..."

"This 'wait and see' attitude is very dangerous. If someone is attracted to drugs or alcohol, we do not accept that attraction as a given, or indicate that it is beyond their power to reject. The truth is that we are dealing with an objective disorder within the person. The parent should do everything possible to help the youth to move away from this particular attraction, and from the surroundings which encourage him to act out..."

"Neither can homosexual attraction be considered as a gift from God, except in the sense that suffering can be considered a gift...Given the epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV disease, among male homosexuals, advising parents to adopt a 'wait and see' attitude to same-sex experimentation among adolescents is an invitation to tragedy."

Father Harvey's statement concluded, "We believe that the document needs substantive revision."