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Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies

How Should Members of the LGBTQ+ Community be Allowed in Positions of Ministry in the Catholic Church

By Federico Guillermo (Memo) Rodriguez Hernandez

Abstract: The Catholic Church has had an inconsistent approach to the LGBTQ+ community. The Church speaks of respect, compassion, and sensitivity, while at the same time terminates the employment of workers who openly identify themselves as LGBTQ+, without any other cause for termination. The Church also frequently hinders opportunities for ministry for members of the LGBTQ+. This article calls for a consistent application of Catholic doctrine, so that the respect, compassion, and sensitivity the Church teaches we are to show to members of the LGBTQ+ community is not obscured with unjust discrimination. Based on solid Catholic doctrine, I will establish the moral good of including members of the LGBTQ+ community in ministerial efforts, especially to other members of the community. I will also present some of the pastoral needs of the members of LGBTQ+ community, which include issues of self-acceptance, family rejection, socioeconomic disadvantages, discrimination, recognition of same-sex unions, violence, and suicide. All of these are recognized as valid fields for Catholic ministry, and it should be no different for members of the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, issues of violence and suicide are directly related to the “sanctity of life,” a preeminent area of concern for the Catholic Church. I will argue that it is imperative for the Church to approach the LGBTQ+ community with a renewed commitment to building bridges that will make it easier for members of the LGBTQ+ community to come to our family of faith, and experience welcoming and love.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, Discrimination, Ministry, Pastoral Needs, Building Bridges

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the issue of allowing members of the LGBTQ+ community in positions of ministry in the Catholic Church as a moral problem. Currently, we still see a strong and heated debate as to whether sexuality or gender identity should disqualify a person for ministry or employment in the Church. The purpose of this study is to constructively contribute to this discussion, which goes deep into the hopes and aspirations of a non-negligible number of people. Before

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we can approach the moral aspects of this issue, we must first realize this is also a problem of language and definitions.

Meeting and Understanding the Member of the LGBTQ+ Community

The subject of this study, who we have identified as a “member of the LGBTQ+ community” is someone who publicly manifests a non-conforming sexuality or gender identity. In terms of sexual or romantic orientation, “non-conforming” means anything other than exclusively or strongly predominant heterosexuality. This includes, but is not limited to homosexuality, bisexuality, pansexuality, etc. In terms of gender identity, “non-conforming” means anything other than cisgender (an individual whose gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth). This includes transgender, gender-fluid, non-binary identities, etc.

The “member of the LGBTQ+ community” collective name may not be universally considered a perfect fit, but I am proposing it as inclusive of all the members of this group, and I believe it is mutually acceptable to the majority of both the members of the group and those who are not members of the group.

As a first step, we will define “biological sex” as the anatomic and physiological characteristics of an individual that dictate endocrine and reproductive functions. In our culture, we assign a sex to an infant at birth based on these characteristics. Human sexuality is much more complex than just the biological sex, and for the purposes of this study, we will define sexuality as sexual or romantic orientation, which refers to the physical and/or emotional attraction experienced by the individual, and the actions motivated by such attraction toward other consenting adults. Gender identity on the other hand, refers to the self-perception of the individual as a gendered person within their respective culture.

For the sake of brevity, we will not include in this study issues specific to individuals with a non-binary biological sex, because in our cultural context, it is generally accepted that biological sex is not publicly manifested. They are included to the extent that their life situations can be assimilated to the life situations of persons with non-conforming sexual orientations or gender identities. In a similar way, we will not include in this study issues related to individuals who choose not to publicly manifest their non-conforming sexual orientation or gender identity. Their pastoral needs are no less important, but whatever obstacles they face in fulfilling those needs or in contributing to fulfilling the needs of others, cannot be related to a personal characteristic that is not publicly observable. Also not included in this study are issues related to gender expression, such as clothing, tonality of voice, personal appearance, etc., since these are performative, mutable, and not pertaining to the person’s lasting, stable self-identity, as sexuality and gender identity are. Finally, we will not include issues related to behaviors such as

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pedophilia, bestiality, polyamory, etc., because they do not involve two consenting adults. We will never justify sexual abuse by anyone, regardless of their biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or any other personal characteristic.

In summary, for the purposes of this study, a “member of the LGBTQ+ community” is an individual with a publicly manifested non-conforming sexual or romantic orientation, a non-conforming gender identity or both, regardless of their gender expressions or biological sex.

The Moral Nature of Inclusion in Ministerial Activity

We will now explore the reasons why the matter of including members of the LGBTQ+ community in ministerial activities are a moral problem. We begin our analysis from the perspective of St. Thomas Aquinas, who shows a clear argument in favor of the idea that all agents act for a good:

For that every agent acts for an end clearly follows from the fact that every agent tends to something definite. Now that to which an agent tends definitely must be befitting to that agent, since the latter would not tend to it save on account of some fittingness to it. But that which is befitting to a thing is good for it. Therefore, every agent acts for a good. Further, the end is that wherein the appetite of the agent or mover is at rest, as also the appetite of that which is moved. Now it is the very notion of good to be the term of appetite, since good is the object of every appetite. Therefore, all action and movement is for a good.¹

It is clear, therefore, that the desire of a member of the LGBTQ+ community may have to participate in the life and ministry of the Church is likely motivated by the pursuit of a good end, or at least an end which that person perceives as good. It can be shown that the good found in participating in the ministry of the Church is an actual, objective good. Moreover, it is a responsibility of all the members of the people of God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly states: “Jesus Christ is the one whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit and established as priest, prophet, and king. The *whole* People of God participates in these three offices of Christ and bears the responsibilities for mission and service that flow from them. [emphasis added]”²

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton Charles Pegis (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), 432.

² Catholic Church, “The Vocation to Chastity,” in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (The Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), article 783 (hereafter cited as Catechism).

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Christian ministry is not only a good, but it is also the source of good for others. Martin Luther offers a helpful insight. Speaking specifically about the ministry of preaching he states: “To preach Christ means to feed the soul, make it righteous, set it free, and save it.”³ What is said about preaching can easily be extended to other forms of ministry, because all forms of true ministry have the goal of announcing the Gospel of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

Furthermore, Luther very aptly identifies the experiential nature of preaching when he states that “[Christ ought] to be preached to the end that faith in him may be established that he may not only be Christ, but be Christ for you and me, and that what is said of him and is denoted in his name may be effectual in us.”⁴ Luther is saying that the most effective announcement of Christ is one that brings Christ to the life experience of those who are ministered to, and strongly implies that those in the best position to minister in such a way are the ones who share similar experiences with those they are ministering to. Members of the LGBTQ+ community are naturally better suited than anyone else to minister to other members of the LGBTQ+ community, by virtue of their shared experiences. More clearly, Luther affirms that, just as Christ put on our humanity to bestow on us grace, “the good things we have from God should flow from one to the other and be common to all, so that everyone should ‘put on’ his neighbor, and so conduct himself toward him as if he himself were in the other’s place.”⁵ This opportunity for ministry within the LGBTQ+ community in no way should exclude members of the LGBTQ+ community from ministering to the entire people of God, for we all share a common humanity and a common baptism. Any attempts on limiting or preventing a member of the LGBTQ+ community to participate in the life and ministry of the Church is, therefore, an attempt to limit or prevent their access to something which is good, and which can also bring good to others. That this is a moral issue should be sufficiently clear.

Let us now explore what happens when such participation is limited or restricted. To do that, we will draw a comparison between the experience of the member of the LGBTQ+ community who is segregated from Church life and ministry with the experience of people of color in the times of segregation in the United States. Before we begin, we need to acknowledge that a person’s race is almost always manifested in public, while sexuality and gender identity may not always be. Therefore, the comparison is valid and helpful only up to a certain point.

Just like race, sexuality and gender identity pertain to the person’s lasting, stable self-identity. Discriminating against someone because of sexuality or gender identity is perceived, just as racial discrimination is an aggression against who the person is and not only against what the person does. Just

³ Martin Luther, *Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 55.

⁴ Luther, *Selections*, 66.

⁵ Luther, *Selections*, 79.

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like race, sexuality, and gender identity are not chosen by the individual, they are not chosen as a preference over other equally accessible option. Just like a person cannot chose to be black or white, a person cannot choose to be heterosexual or homosexual, cisgender, or transgender. Individuals discover, not choose, these aspects of their identity at various stages of their socio-intellectual-emotional development. Discriminating against someone because of sexuality or gender identity is perceived as based on a characteristic the person cannot choose or change. Even people who have in the past been involved in attempts to change individuals' sexuality or gender identity now accept this change is impossible, no matter the techniques or resources employed in these attempts. The attempts themselves have lasting traumatic effects in the recipients of such "therapies." Most famous among these is Alan Chambers, former president of Exodus International⁶, an infamous, now defunct organization dedicated to providing these treatments, which are now considered illegal in many places. Just like race, sexuality and gender identity are routinely being used, in some cases even by the Catholic Church and affiliated organizations, to deny people employment, education, healthcare and other services. Just like race, sexuality and gender identity are statistically significant risk factors for violence, suicide, homelessness, drug use, sexual abuse and State-sanctioned and State-sponsored repression and murder.

In times of the segregation, a person of color was considered less valuable than a white person, as powerfully expressed by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when he wrote: "Today another curious formula seems to declare he is fifty percent of a person. Of the good things in life, the Negro has approximately one half those of whites. Of the bad things of life, he has twice those of whites."⁷ In our day, members of the LGBTQ+ community are also scapegoated as "the other," someone who does not belong in human society, less than a person... an abomination.

The Catholic Church is not exempt from these injustices. Even though the Catechism of the Catholic Church is clear in stating that members of the LGBTQ+ community "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided;"⁸ The reality is that many in positions of power in the Church do not seem to have any regard for this article of the catechism. In 2019, the media provided extensive coverage of the case of Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School in Indianapolis, which was pressured by their archbishop to dismiss a teacher who entered a same-sex civil marriage. When the school declined the archbishop's request, he issued a decree stating that Brebeuf could no longer call itself a Catholic school. The complaint made its way to

⁶ GeekyJustin, *Former "Ex-Gay" Leader Alan Chambers: "No One Changes Their Sexual Orientation. It Doesn't Happen,"* YouTube video, 1:07:47, July 2, 2019, <https://youtu.be/IJOCO8c1cRk?t=1613>.

⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1992), 170.

⁸ Catechism article 2358.

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Rome and Rome decided not to back the archbishop's decree but failed to issue any other statement of support for the school or the teacher. This was a highly publicized case, but there are countless others of employees or even students at Catholic institutions who have been harassed and dismissed because of their sexuality or even that of their parents. I find intellectually impossible to reconcile these facts with the article of the catechism quoted above. In these cases, and many others, the theory and the praxis are completely at odds with each other.

Actions speak much louder than words. These inconsistencies have caused a mutual estrangement between the Catholic Church and a vast majority of the members of the LGBTQ+ community, and mutual misunderstandings multiply. Particularly insidious among these are the misunderstanding around the words of the catechism, when it calls homosexual inclinations "objectively disordered."⁹ It is exceedingly difficult to convince those offended by these words that the Church is talking about acts, not persons and is using a philosophical term, not its psychological or clinical homonyms. The offended individuals do not hear "you should not do that," instead they hear "you are an abomination." Who can blame them for leaving this Church?

It is clear now that we have a problem and one of an undeniably moral nature. Solving this problem is therefore an imperative if the Church has any hope of keep bringing the Good News to members of the LGBTQ+ community. The stakes cannot be higher. If we fail, we will have alienated an immense number of our brothers and sisters. If we succeed, then the members of the LGBTQ+ community could join in with the persons of color when Dr. King declares "We Negroes have replaced self-pity with self-respect and self-deprecation with dignity."¹⁰

Pastoral Needs of the Member of the LGBTQ+ Community and the Response of the Catholic Church

Self-Acceptance

One of the basic tenets of the Christian faith is that God loves us unconditionally (which does not mean that God's love for us is without consequences). It could be argued that none of the other truths of the Christian faith can be properly and fully understood without a firm assent to this underlying assumption. In many contexts, this is a difficult truth to accept, because in many ways, our contemporary Western society is built around a different assumption, namely, whatever is good needs to

⁹ Catechism article 2358.

¹⁰ King, Jr., *I Have a Dream*, 5.

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be earned and sometimes that includes acceptance, support, and affection. A significant number of evangelizing efforts in the Catholic Church have made “God loves you” one of the first ideas to be announced and discussed with their audiences as an implicit pre-requisite for the kerygmatic proclamation of the Paschal Mystery.

Unfortunately, the member of the LGBTQ+ community faces an almost unsurmountable amount of mixed signals about this: God loves you, but at the same time God hates an essential aspect of your personal identity; God loves you unconditionally, but not really, for you have to renounce your sexuality or your gender identity if you ever want to move out of square one in this game; God created everything in wisdom and love, except you, for your sexuality or your gender identity are a mistake and therefore cannot come from God and therefore, you are an abomination.

It is extremely challenging for a cis-heterosexual person to convey the unconditional love of God to a member of the LGBTQ+ community in the context of the Catholic culture. There always seems to be an implicit or explicit sense, at least a suspicion, of “yes... but.” It would be much more effective to have a member of the LGBTQ+ community witness to their own experience of God’s unconditional love: “If God loves me, God surely can love you.” That is, after all, the way it is supposed to be done.

Family Rejection

Lack of self-acceptance is not unusually inflamed by family rejection. Frequent Los Angeles Religious Education Congress speaker, Dr. Arthur Fitzmaurice is generous in sharing his bone-chilling testimony: He was living in California, when he gathered enough courage to travel to Boston to “come out” to his parents. The religiously motivated couple made no effort to conceal their disgust and disappointment at their son. After his flight back to California, Dr. Fitzmaurice called his mother to let her know he arrived safely. Her response was that of disappointment, for she was hoping his plane would crash and that way she would not have to deal with having a gay son. Indeed, this is not the Catholic response to the situation, but who is there to tell that to these parents or to the many who act like them? Who is there to properly catechize them? Who is there to medicinally require them to refrain from receiving the sacraments until they take a hard look at their values and their actions and contrast them to the Gospel? Yes, most attendees at Congress express our dismay at this story and our solidarity with Arthur, but unfortunately, Congress attendees are not really a representative sample of members of the Catholic Church in this, and in many other respects.

Family disintegration for members of the LGBTQ+ community takes yet another form in the Catholic context, and that comes from the firm opposition the Church has to adoption of children by same-sex couples. It is difficult to match the discourse about the importance of the family with the

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vehemence in denying some children access to a family, just because the composition of the family is not the traditional one. The message is clear: If you are a member of the LGBTQ+ community, your family is not a real family; you are not capable of love in the self-transcending way required to have a meaningful relationship with your partner or to raise healthy children; you are “less than.” By the way, to add insult to injury, we only need to see the number of cis-heterosexual individuals who do not give any indication whatsoever of being capable of such love. There is a clear need to listen to the voices of LGBTQ+ parents and to objectively evaluate their experiences. These findings would have much more relevance than any theoretical framework of assumptions imposed on them.

Socioeconomic Disadvantages and Discrimination

According to the Office of Socioeconomic Status of the American Psychological Association, members of the LGBTQ+ community are especially susceptible to socioeconomic disadvantages. To cite a few: 29 percent of bisexual women and 23 percent of lesbians are living in poverty, compared to 21 percent of their heterosexual counterparts. When it comes to men, the percentages are 20 percent and 25 percent, compared to 15 percent. Transgender adults are nearly 4 times more likely to have a household income of less than \$10,000 per year compared to the general population. 90 percent of transgender individuals reported experiencing harassment, mistreatment, or discrimination at work due to their gender identity.¹¹

Just as in the case of racial discrimination, a sustainable improvement in these differences based on sexuality or gender identity will only be possible when the members of the LGBTQ+ community are empowered to be their own principal advocates. It is a matter of justice and the Church needs to be an instrument in attaining those improvements, but the Church will only be able to do so if members of the LGBTQ+ community are listened to and valued as they are and where they are.

Same-Sex Unions

The Catholic Church has been unequivocally opposed to the idea of a same-sex marriage. The Church believes she does not have the authority to re-define an institution that has been elevated to the dignity of a sacrament. The argument is solid, and it would be an infringement in religious liberty to impose anything to the contrary. On the other side, it should be just as evident that for non-celibate

¹¹ Socioeconomic Status Office, “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Persons & Socioeconomic Status,” American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/LGBTQ>.

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members of the LGBTQ+ community, entering a faithful, stable, and legally protected relationship is better than any other alternative. It is solid Catholic doctrine that a “lesser evil,” even assuming it remains an evil, as a “better” choice than a greater one.

It should follow that the Church’s opposition to same-sex marriage should not necessarily extend to same-sex civil unions, but unfortunately, for many Catholics, this difference is too nuanced, and many consider a person in a same-sex stable union to be in less condemnable situation than someone who is routinely involved in casual sex with no serious commitments or attachments to their partners. This is backwards! The Catholic Church should allow and even encourage members of the LGBTQ+ community in stable relationships educate the rest of us about their experiences, their joys and hopes, their griefs and anxieties, so we can have a clearer and more accurate picture about the realities of same-sex unions and then formulate our theological reflection based on those experiences, illumined by the Word of God. Theology may not depend intrinsically on social context, but it certainly does not happen outside of it.¹²

Violence and Suicide

In 2009, a study published in *Pediatrics: Official Journal for the American Academy of Pediatrics*, found that “lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to report having engaged in unprotected sexual intercourse compared with peers from families that reported no or low levels of family rejection.”¹³

According to a 2010 study published in the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, while religious affiliation in LGBTQ+ children and adolescents was generally positive for that individual’s wellbeing, family religious affiliation is linked to lower family acceptance. “Participants who had low family acceptance as adolescents were more than three times as likely to report both

¹² Note: This section was written in May of 2020, before news broke about Pope Francis’ endorsement of same-sex unions, LGBTQ persons’ right to be in a family and other remarks expressed in the yet unreleased documentary film *Francesco*. Coverage for the news item can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhOuFEa52KA>. The documentary’s main website can be found here: <https://www.francescofilm.com/>.

¹³ Caitlin Ryan, David Huebner, Rafael M. Diaz, and Jorge Sanchez, “Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults,” *Pediatrics: Official Journal for the American Academy of Pediatrics* 123, no. 1 (Jan 2009): 346-352, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/123/1/346?download=true>.

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suicidal ideation and suicide attempts compared with those who reported high levels of family acceptance.”¹⁴

These are just two of many studies that point to the same conclusion: Members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially youth, are much more likely to be victims of violence and suicide than their cis-heterosexual counterparts. These are life-or-death issues, and they should be considered issues involving the sanctity of life by the Catholic Church. Some Catholics and even some Catholic leaders seem to concur with that notion, but there does not seem to be an official pronouncement of the Church in this regard. If the Church’s unequivocal concern for the life of the unborn is based on the *Imago Dei*, shouldn’t the Church show the same concern for the life of the member of the LGBTQ+ community? Or is the Church’s position that the *Imago Dei* we find in an unborn child is not to be found in the member of the LGBTQ+ community?

We need to be clear: It is not within the scope of this study to challenge or dissent from the Church’s position or teaching regarding the morality of homosexual activity. The intention of this study is simply to present some of the facts that are a permanent feature of the daily lives of members of the LGBTQ+ community in our society and evaluate the Church’s response to them from an ethical perspective. This is not a call to change our doctrine, it is a call to convert our heart in favor of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters.

This study does not advocate for an inconsistent application of Catholic Moral Teaching. If the Church deems it appropriate that a member of the LGBTQ+ community cannot participate in the ministerial life of the Church or be employed by the Church because of their non-compliance with Catholic teaching, then it must also follow that the same restrictions should apply to those who are in common-law or civil marriages, those who have extra-marital affairs, employers who pay unjust wages or otherwise exploit their employees, landlords who charge unjustly high rent to their tenants, people who are untruthful or who fail to attend Sunday Masses, people who espouse racist ideas or behaviors, etc. If complete adherence to Catholic moral teaching is going to be a requirement, then it should apply evenly to all.

Issues and Models for the Inclusion of the Member of the LGBTQ+ Community in Church Life and Ministry

Building Bridges

¹⁴ Caitlin Ryan, Stephen T. Russell, David Huebner, Rafael Diaz and Jorge Sanchez, “Family Acceptance in Adolescence and the Health of LGBTQ Young Adults,” *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing* 23 (2010): 205-213, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2010.00246.x>.

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Where do we go from here? If we are truly to convert our hearts in favor of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters, we need to start reaching out to them, especially those who have been alienated by Catholic discourse or praxis. Borrowing from Fr. James Martin's inexplicably controversial book on this subject,¹⁵ we need to start building bridges of mutual listening, dialogue, understanding and appreciation. Both sides need to work hard, both sides need to forgive and ask for forgiveness, but the Catholic Church needs to have the leading voice and the lion's share in this process.

How do we proceed? I would like to briefly explore two possible models for this process. Different Christian organizations have experimented with each model with different degrees of success. The Catholic Church will have to find her own way, but it is beneficial to take into consideration other communities' experiences.

The "Alcoholic" Model

The first model assimilates members of the LGBTQ+ community to alcoholics. This is evidently problematic because it assimilates the sexuality or gender identity of a member of the LGBTQ+ community to an illness. According to this model, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, just like an alcoholic, has a condition that lasts for the rest of the life of those affected. It is not curable; it is only manageable. Affected individuals may or may not be fully responsible for having this condition, but if they do not act on it and if care is taken not to expose them to unreasonable temptations, they are considered in good standing and can fully participate in the life and ministry of the Church. This model requires little, if any change to the doctrinal framework of the Church, however it may not fully appeal to the member of the LGBTQ+ community, who is still treated as defective, diseased, or clinically disordered.

The "Gentile" Model

The second model assimilates members of the LGBTQ+ community to the gentiles of apostolic times. According to this model, a member of the LGBTQ+ community is, just like the gentiles used to be, someone who is believed to be outsider, someone who, by their condition, had no access to the community of faith and to salvation. Back in the apostolic era, the Church witnessed the fruits of

¹⁵ James Martin, S.J., *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBTQ Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017).

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conversion in the gentiles and was forced to go back into Scripture and Tradition, to re-read and re-interpret God's revelation to find that the fullness of truth and good was not in exclusion, but in inclusion. After a period of struggle and heated debates, and once a bare minimum of conduct and decorum was established, the gentiles were received into full membership in the community of faith.

This model is likely to be much more appealing to the member of the LGBTQ+ community, but it would require the Church to go through an exercise that, although performed in the past, she seems to be unwilling or perhaps unable to go through today. The key to this model is having readily available testimonials of faith, conversion, and fruits of the Holy Spirit in those considered to be outsiders. The current situation with members of the LGBTQ+ community is such that is exceedingly difficult to make those testimonials easily visible to the Church, especially to those in authority within the Church. The assumption is that the sexually active member of the LGBTQ+ community is doing something wrong and everything they do will be judged from that perspective. Church authority is unlikely to see grace in these stories, because of their prejudice to see sin.

Reflections and Conclusion

When discussing the treatment members of the LGBTQ+ community have in his own Church, Matthew Vines says: "What can affirming Christians do to be agents of transformation on this central issue of our time? You can walk in the light you now have. You can speak the truth, beginning with your most powerful instrument of change—your life."¹⁶

In our Christian tradition, the ultimate criterion for discernment is the fruits, the ultimate consequences of a course of action. It is the quality of the fruit what ultimately reveals the quality of the root. Martin Luther expressed it as "Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works; evil works do not make a wicked man, but a wicked man does evil works."¹⁷ We have shown that the fruits of exclusion of members of the LGBTQ+ community from the life and ministry of the Church bears fruits of injustice, violence, alienation, unbelief and ultimately death. It should be clear this situation is wrong and needs to be corrected. The members of the LGBTQ+ community who seek to be part of the life and ministry of the Church are seeking not only something that is casually good for them. Their desire is to fulfill their rights and duties as followers of Christ.

This problem will not be corrected by capitulating our teachings and our values, rather by living them to the fullest. Christ is the model. He never rejected anyone; he never demanded perfection from

¹⁶ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014), 165.

¹⁷ Luther, *Selections*, 69.

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anyone before agreeing to meet them and treat them with respect and compassion. Zacchaeus repented from his wrongdoings after his encounter with Christ, not as a condition to have the encounter; the woman caught in adultery was told to sin no more after being told she was not condemned; Levi was made an apostle right at his tax collector's table; the Samaritan woman was not asked to regularize her complicated marital situation before being made a missionary to the people in her town.

This is our tradition. This is our way.

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