
Them and us: a reply to Teofilo Pugeda

Gerard Loughlin
Durham University, UK

Theology
2022, Vol. 125(2) 97–100
© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/0040571X221081410
journals.sagepub.com/home/tjx



Abstract

A response to the article ‘A reply to Gerard Loughlin’s “Catholic homophobia”’ by Teofilo Pugeda highlighting the dichotomy between the welcome and rejection of LGBT people within the Catholic Church.

Keywords

Catechism of the Catholic Church, gender, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, LGBT, sexuality

Teofilo Pugeda is of course right to insist that the Catholic Church is more than its magisterium and to draw attention to the diversity of its members. It is constituted of people who vary with regard to age (young and old), marital status (single, married and divorced), gender and sexuality. This list of characteristics could be extended – say, to include race and class – but it comes from my own Catholic parish, where it prefaces every Sunday Mass, in the priest’s welcome to all, to those who are LGBT as well as those who are cis and straight. The parish priest welcomes everyone, but especially those who might otherwise feel excluded if they had heard only what the Church has taught – what it formally teaches – and had not encountered the pastoral realization of a different imagination. It is the difference so well figured in Pope Francis, as between his spirit of welcome and the letter of his formal teaching, which on the matter of homosexuality has not departed from that of his predecessors.

Corresponding author:

Gerard Loughlin
Email: gerard.loughlin@durham.ac.uk

Such a welcome is extended and lived elsewhere, with many gay men and lesbian women finding themselves welcomed to the Lord's table the world over. But they do so despite and not because of magisterial teaching. They are graced in having found such a welcome, a generous invitation to come and eat. But not everyone is so fortunate, and it is a fortune that might as easily pass away as it has arrived. This is not to say that its arrival was necessarily easy, but it is to say that it depends on the contingency of people and not on the stability of structures. It depends on the charisms of particular priests and the permissions (or blind eyes) of their bishops, and not on formal teachings and hallowed practices, written into canon law. The existing structures remain homophobic in the ways detailed in my earlier article,¹ and their persistence is evidenced by the fact that their abeyance – as in the parishes and sanctuaries just indicated – is so often experienced as a surprising grace.

One can find priests such as Father James Martin SJ who work tirelessly to make the Church a more welcoming place for LGBT people, and bishops who support them in this. But equally one can find bishops who are not so supportive, Catholic organizations that are not so welcoming, and the intensity of these oppositions varies between countries – as, for example, between Poland and the UK. It is good that there are bishops who stand up for 'at-risk LGBT youth' in the USA. But one of the reasons why such youth are at risk is precisely the teaching of other bishops in the Church. This dichotomy between welcome and rejection is well illustrated in Pugeda's quotation from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.² Pugeda thinks it tells against my analysis of church teaching. But I think it tells *for* it. It is an almost perfect example of the Church's institutional homophobia and of that doublespeak to which I drew attention, following Mark Jordan's critique of such pronouncements.³

Pugeda notes that the second sentence of the quoted paragraph from the Catechism will be a 'stumbling block' for those who do not share 'the same world-view as the magisterium'. Indeed it is, but Pugeda does not stumble and moves on to the following two sentences. These refer to those who have 'deep-seated homosexual tendencies', referring to them as 'they' and so marking them as not 'us' – the authors and readers of the Catechism. (There is no suggestion that *they* might be some of *us*.) We must have 'respect' for these 'objectively disordered' people, treat them with 'sensitivity' and show them 'compassion', for their disorder is a 'trial' to most of them. (No suggestion that what might constitute the trial is not so much their ordering of desire as church teaching about it, as in the Catechism.)

'Unjust discrimination' against homosexual people should be 'avoided' (not resisted). But what about supposedly just discrimination? *Discrimination* is not ruled out. Indeed, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, who guided the issue of the Catechism, as Pugeda reminds us, warned that when 'civil legislation' is passed that protects homosexual behaviour, then no one 'should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground and violent reactions increase'.⁴ Though quoted in my previous article,⁵ this text is not mentioned by Pugeda, and yet it precisely tells *for* ecclesial homophobia and not against it.

(Happily, the cardinal's warning was ignored by many legislatures that sought the flourishing of their homosexual citizens.)

Finally, the Catechism urges that those burdened by the 'trial' of their homosexual 'condition' (rather than the trial of a homophobic Church), though treated with 'respect, compassion and sensitivity' (but denied fundamental rights), should unite their 'difficulties' with 'the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross'.⁶ There is an irony in this final injunction, for with their suffering so united with that of Christ, his passion becomes one of people suffering at the hands of the Church. Thus, the Church's homophobia tells against its commitment to Christ.

What the Catechism gives with one hand, it takes away with the other. It is all very well to appeal to what Puggeda calls the Catechism's 'mandate on respect, compassion and sensitivity', but what LGBT people want and need is to be granted the same dignity and rights as everyone else. Such rights and dignity are now granted in many societies, but rarely because of and usually despite church teaching and intervention.⁷ (I have already indicated how Ratzinger sought to thwart such rights.) And such rights and dignity are never a foregone conclusion, for what is given can always be taken away. A Church that genuinely respected its LGBT members would not describe them as disordered, not have those who are clerics closeted.⁸ It would happily acknowledge that *they* are already *us*, that *we* include *them*. It would tutor our ministries, bless our relationships, and recognize our marriages.

Notes

1. Gerard Loughlin, 'Catholic homophobia', *Theology*, Vol. 121, no. 3 (2018), pp. 188–96.
2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), p. 505 (§2358).
3. See Mark D. Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: homosexuality in modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Chapter 2; Mark D. Jordan, *Telling Truths in Church: scandal, flesh and Christian speech* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003), Chapter 2.
4. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (London: CTS, 1986), §10.
5. Loughlin, 'Catholic homophobia', p. 191.
6. This repeats advice about the suffering homosexual in the CDF's *Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, §12. The letter predicts that the teaching will 'be met with bitter ridicule by some'.
7. But there are occasions when Christian Churches intervene for the better, as when, for example, both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church submitted reports to the Wolfenden Inquiry (1954–57), urging the distinction between crime and sin, with only sins that harmed the common good requiring criminalization. Both reports urged that homosexuality was not such a sin, and that its criminalization produced more harm than good. These submissions informed the final Wolfenden Report (1957), which led to the decriminalization of homosexuality in England and Wales in 1967. See further Brian Lewis, *Wolfenden's Witnesses: homosexuality in postwar Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), Chapter 4; Alana Harris, "'Pope Norman'", Griffin's report and

Roman Catholic reactions to homosexual law reform in England and Wales, 1954–1971’ in Mark D. Chapman and Dominic Janes (eds), *New Approaches in History and Theology to Same-Sex Love and Desire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), Chapter 6.

8. On Catholic homophobia as a means for clerical homosexuals to hide in plain sight, see Frédéric Martel, *In the Closet of the Vatican: power, homosexuality, hypocrisy*, translated by Shaun Whiteside (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

Author biography

Gerard Loughlin is a professor in the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University.