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Blessing of gay unions: Vatican says "No", but a problem remains

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A statement released by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) entitled "Responsum of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a dubium regarding the blessing of the unions of persons of the same sex" says blessings of gay

unions are not acceptable. This decision was made clear, even if some bishops (particularly the majority of the German episcopate) would like to see approval granted. Hence, the CDF statement reaffirms Catholic teachings on this particular matter.

However, there is a part of the CDC note that requires clarification. It is the following sentence: "The presence in such relationships of positive elements, which are in themselves to be valued and appreciated, cannot justify these relationships and render them legitimate objects of an ecclesial blessing". We are interested in the first part: "The presence in such relationships of positive elements, which are in themselves to be valued and appreciated ." This deserved greater elucidation. Let us try to explain.

Can there be positive elements in homosexual relationships? A general answer, which we will specify later is this: if these elements are connected to the homosexual relationship, they are not positive; if they are disconnected elements, they may be positive. All this is explained in the light of the criteria for determining whether any behaviour or condition is morally right or wrong. Let us turn our attention now to human action. The morality of any act is given by the nature of the act, i.e. its object, its proximate cause. Let us give some examples using this situation as a starting point: John and James are a homosexual couple. John lends a sum of money to James solely on the grounds that James has debts to pay. The act in itself is good and has no connection with the homosexual relationship. Their relationship is merely a context (circumstantial) for the act (the loan of money) taking place.

Here's another example. John gives James a book as a sign of his affection. In such a case, this act of giving is wrong because it expresses "homosexual affection". This is its cause. Given that homosexuality, as the Catholic Catechism teaches and as the recent CDF response reminds us, is a disordered condition. In other words, it is a condition that cannot be oriented/ordered to man's proper nature, and therefore cannot be ordered to his authentic good and, therefore, ultimately to God. It follows that everything that flows from this condition – including homosexual affections - is itself disordered. In short, if homosexuality is disordered, so too will be all that is directly associated with this condition: homosexual affections, homosexual feelings, homosexual relationships, homosexual couples, etc. These are "elements", to use the term chosen by the CDF, which cannot be positive.

Let us take still another example. John, who is a nurse, gives daily injections to James because of an illness he suffers. John gives these injections to James for a twofold purpose: to cure James and to express his affection for him. In this case a single material action is simultaneously informed by two ends. The first - the therapeutic end- is morally

licit. The second – expressing his homosexual affection- is illicit.

One last scenario. John and James quarrel over a wrong that John has done to his partner. John then gives James a bottle of wine to make it up to him and, thus, strengthen their union. In this case we have a morally permissible proximate cause: to apologise for having committed some wrongdoing. We also have an ultimate cause, to which the proximate cause is also directed. This ultimate causality - to strengthen the homosexual relationship - is morally illicit. The action as a whole is wrong because any cause - whether proximate or ultimate - which is objectionable is sufficient to render the entire action illicit (it would have been fine if John had apologized to James and broken off the homosexual relationship with him). Similarly, all actions that strengthen the couple's relationship, such as increasing mutual trust, a spirit of cooperation and partnership, etc., are morally objectionable, precisely because the homosexual relationship in and of itself is not good for the persons involved in it.

Therefore, wanting to do things to strengthen it is not good. For example, sharing the cost of apartment maintenance and utilities ensures that the cohabitation can continue and, thus, permitting the very same relationship to persist. So, in addition to a good purpose, such as that of paying what is due for incurred expenses, there may be a morally reproachable purpose: I pay in order to continue living with my you as my partner. If, on the other hand, John leaves James and, out of a sense of justice, pays his share of overdue rent, this action is morally valid in itself because it lacks the second purpose: to continue living together.

In short, in homosexual relationships one can distinguish between actions ("elements") that do not pertain to the homosexual nature of the relationship and can, therefore, be morally legitimate, and others that emanate from it and are, therefore, objectionable. The phrase "the presence in such relationships of positive elements, which are in themselves to be appreciated and valued" is therefore highly problematic because it is ambiguous. In fact, it is not clear whether the CDF is referring to behaviour devoid of any homosexual connotation or to behaviour specifically characterised by the term "homosexual". This ambiguity is dangerous because it could imply that affection, bonds of solidarity, imagery, feelings, emotions, etc. that represent the direct effects of the homosexual relationship are acceptable. If this were the case, the only morally objectionable acts would be carnal homosexual acts. But this would be illogical: in fact sexual conduct between two persons of the same sex is reprehensible precisely because it is homosexual. If this is the reason, the same reason must also be applied to all other non-sexual acts characterised by homosexuality, precisely because they are improper

for two persons of the same sex.

If, therefore, a homosexual couple cannot be blessed, neither can those "elements" that strengthen the couple's relationship or directly express homosexuality likewise be blessed ("appreciated/valued" to cite the two verbs used by the CDF).