

ITALY

Diocese of Florence reinterprets bible to promote homosexuality

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'Four Steps of Inclusion' is the title chosen by the Diocesan Centre for Family Pastoral Care of the Diocese of Florence (Coordination for the Pastoral Care of Inclusion) for a series of meetings dedicated to the issue of homosexuality. Last 22 November, Don

Gian Luca Carrega, Professor of the New Testament at the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy (Turin section), was invited to speak on "Faith, the Bible and Homosexuality"; however, as the priest was unable to attend for health reasons, he was replaced in the presentation by Sister Fabrizia Giacobbe, a Dominican, member of the same Coordination for the Pastoral Care of Inclusion in Florence, who commented on the slides prepared by Don Carrega.

The main aim of the talk was to reinterpret some fundamental texts that condemn homosexuality, to show how they are in fact the fruit of a cultural context that relativises their universal and perennial scope.

Sister Fabrizia Giacobbe began by explaining the cardinal principle of the talk, which is that the biblical texts "inferred" cannot be separated from the whole of Scripture; it is therefore necessary to offer an interpretation of these verses, as of every passage of Scripture, within the whole of the inspired texts. The principle is correct but incomplete, and it is precisely from this incompleteness that serious errors will arise. This bias in the criteria of interpretation is already evident in the fact that the Dominican nun refers to the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, **The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church**, only to point out the fallacy of the fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible, an approach which, in order to defend the truth of the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture, ends up sacrificing its historical dimension, while the same document makes no mention of the role of the Magisterium in the interpretation of the sacred text.

The approach of Don Carrega and Sister Jacob proposes an analysis of the texts in the Book of Leviticus that condemn acts of sodomy (cf. Lev 18:22 and Lev 20:13). The condemnation found in these texts would be based on three assumptions that characterise the culture in which this biblical book originated: first, for the Bible, there are only heterosexual persons and there is no reference to homo affectivity in it; therefore, since there are only heterosexual persons, homosexual relations are necessarily connoted as being against nature. Secondly, from the Israeli point of view, fertility is a matter of life and death, because the Jews have always been in danger of extinction; sexuality was therefore seen as a function of procreation, with the consequent stigmatisation of all acts that are not open to the gift of life. Finally, the culture of Israel regarded the cosmic order willed by God as an order that we cannot change in any way.

The crucial point is to clarify whether these cultural connotations are limited to this context, thereby relativising the consequent condemnation of homosexual acts, or

whether they have a universal value, even if they are located in a specific cultural fabric. The speakers seem to lean towards the first hypothesis: 'the norms we find in Leviticus are not absolute, but linked to a precise context'. This is supported by a quotation from the book *Il Corpo e la parola, (The Body and the Word)* by the biblical scholar Rosanna Virgili: The matrix of these laws is obviously cultural and not natural. [It is dangerous to change this reason and make it the law of nature.

But the solution cannot be to reject these texts, because otherwise we would be the ones to decide what is valid in Scripture and what is not. And so? Well, the magic word is always the same: we need to discern and understand that, as Sister Jacob explains, "these norms corresponded to a value that we may hold in a different way today". The nun clarifies her thoughts by recalling another text, *Una futura morale sessuale cattolica, (A Future Catholic Sexual Morality)*, by Father Basilio Petrà, in which the author, according to the speaker's reconstruction, states that "like slavery, which went from being something considered natural to something against nature, perhaps the opposite is possible with regard to homo-affective orientation", confusing both the Church's teaching on slavery ([see here](#)) and the fact that, according to Catholic doctrine, it is homosexual acts that are against nature, not the orientation, which is disordered.

Therefore, the main method proposed by Father Carrega and Sister Jacob is quite clear: the biblical texts must be unpacked in such a way as to keep the "value" they express, but not the norms they propose, and above all to avoid transposing the cultural norm into an absolute natural norm. There is no doubt that there are some Old Testament norms which the Church has recognised as limited to the *vetus* phase, and which therefore had value as signs and preparations and not in an absolute sense; but there are others whose perennity the Church has stressed as expressions of natural law.

This is precisely the serious point of the lesson: it forgets that the work of understanding which are the one and which are the other has already been done by the Magisterium of the Church, which alone has "the office of interpreting the word of God" (*Dei Verbum*, 10). This text of the Second Vatican Council is cited in the very document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to which Sister Jacob refers, but she forgets to mention the most important and decisive passage of the document, which, citing *Dei Verbum*, states that "it is ultimately the Magisterium which has the task of guaranteeing the authenticity of the interpretation and of pointing out, when the case so requires, that one or another particular interpretation is incompatible with the authenticity of the Gospel. Deviations will be avoided if the actualisation is based on a correct interpretation of the text and is carried out in the current living Tradition under the

guidance of the Magisterium of the Church".

It was a member of the audience, present in the room who, at the time of the questions, reminded the nun of this forgotten principle, arguing that the Magisterium had already made this "discernment" in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (and not only), which speaks openly about both homosexual acts and homosexual affective orientation (cf. §§ 2357-2359). And, we would add, also on the relationship between sexuality and procreation.

An absolutely correct recall, but one that irritated Don Giovanni Martini, parish priest of Santa Maria al Pignone, also a member of the Coordinamento, who reacted with colossal nonsense: "If it is true that Scripture can be interpreted [...] how much more must the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which is not inspired by God, be interpreted? Busily waving the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Don Martini did not notice that it says the opposite, namely that the Magisterium is the guarantor of the interpretation of inspired texts, and that the Magisterium is in no way subject to a process of endless self-interpretation leading to the overthrow of its own teachings.