



I'm Not "Intrinsically Disordered!"

"Intrinsically disordered acts, while always destructive to ourselves and to others, do not put us outside of the eventual reach of grace and mercy..."



I have met several priests over the years who ended up leaving the active ministry of the priesthood. Two of them have been on my mind and in my prayers recently, having left the priesthood and the Church over issues connected to homosexuality. I ran into one of them some time ago by chance as we were boarding the same flight. Filling me in on the decisions he had made, he shared: "I was never happy with the Catholic Church's view that homosexuality is inherently..." and then he paused, "...what's the phrase they use?" I replied: "homosexual acts are *intrinsically disordered*." "Ah, yes, intrinsically disordered," he replied. "It's a harsh institution that would call me intrinsically disordered, and I couldn't remain in a Church that held those views." The second priest who left had similarly decried how the Church, on account of his homosexuality, saw him as intrinsically disordered — which he took to mean that he was an *evil person*.

I was saddened at the way both of these former priests misconstrued the teachings of the Church, and disappointed that they couldn't see how we are not defined by our inclinations and proclivities, even if some of them may be disordered and in need of purification. As fallen creatures, every person

faces disordered desires within, and no one is perfect except, we Christians believe, Jesus himself.

Once when I was speaking with a person who was paralyzed, he shared how members of the disability community had given him some good advice after his accident:

"Don't say you are a *disabled* person, because that lets the disability define you. Say instead that you are a person with a *disability*."

With a similar emphasis, people shouldn't pigeonhole themselves by saying: "I'm a *homosexual*," but instead say: "I'm a person with *homosexual inclinations*." Our inclinations don't define us, since we are free to decide whether we will act on them, or resist them. The process of resisting our disordered desires can be very difficult, but contributes significantly to our own growth and spiritual maturation.

When referencing men and women "who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies," the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasizes that such individuals must be accepted "with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in

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their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition." These persons, thus, are children of God, unique and loved by the Lord and called to the pursuit of goodness, chastity and holiness.

The notion of an "intrinsically disordered" act (sometimes also called an *intrinsically evil* act) has been part of the Church's moral teachings for millennia. Such acts, as Pope John Paul II noted in his 1993 encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, "are by their nature 'incapable of being ordered' to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image." Even the best of intentions, he stressed, cannot transform an act that is intrinsically evil into an act that is good or justified.

Many kinds of acts fall under the heading of an "intrinsic evil," representing seriously damaging choices for those who pursue them and for those around them. A few randomly chosen examples would include: prostitution, torture, slavery, trafficking in women and children, adultery, abortion, euthanasia, and homosexual acts. As noted in the *Catechism*,

homosexual acts "are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity." Or as noted in another important teaching document called *Persona Humana*, "homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality."

Even though men and women may engage in intrinsically disordered acts at various points in their lives, that fact clearly does not make them "intrinsically disordered persons," or "evil individuals." We're reminded of the old adage that we are to *love the sinner* and *hate the sin*. The *Catechism* sums it up well:

"Man, having been wounded in his nature by original sin, is subject to error and inclined to evil in exercising his freedom," but the remedy is found in Christ and in "the moral life, increased and brought to maturity in grace."

Thus, intrinsically disordered acts, while always destructive to ourselves and to others, do not put us outside of the eventual reach of grace and mercy, nor beyond the healing effects of repentance. Rather those

acts and their harmful effects should beckon us towards the loving gaze of the Lord as he invites us to seek a higher path, one in which we renounce wrongdoing and resolutely embrace the freedom of the sons and daughters of God.

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