

IS THE CHURCH HOMOPHOBIC?

The reality is that gay and same-sex oriented people have experienced a range of treatments and responses in the Church. Whilst some have not only been shown warmth and appreciation but encouraged into ministry and trusted with responsibility, others have been held back from ministry and even the sacraments because of their sexual orientation, even when they have been seeking to live faithfully according to the Bible's teaching regarding sex.

The reality is that for all of us our sexual desires can be distorted by sin and we are all equally in need of God's forgiveness and transformation. Thus treating a gay or same-sex oriented person differently to an opposite-sex oriented person because of their sexuality (as opposed to, say, how they choose to express it) is indeed homophobic. As well as direct discrimination like this, many gay people have reported hearing so-called 'jokes' and negative generalisations in the Church about gay people, which is clearly deeply damaging to them personally and a serious impairment to our witness. If we want gay people to trust the Church and feel safe as part of it, these behaviours must be acknowledged and challenged.

At the same time, there is a tendency in our wider culture to designate anything as homophobia which falls short of full acceptance and affirmation of same-sex sexual relationships. This is not credible, because the basis for not affirming such relationships is not a particular view about them as such, but the broader conviction that sex is only for marriage (and that marriage is between a man and a woman) – a conviction which is, of course, shared by many gay and same-sex oriented people.

So, there is indeed homophobia in the Church. This has made it harder for some gay and same-sex oriented people to be open about their sexuality and receive needed love and support. But upholding the historical teaching of the Church regarding sex as a good gift for marriage between a man and a woman is not itself homophobic, any more than being gay is itself to be in favour of same-sex sexual relationships.

RESOURCES:

['Is the Church homophobic?'](#), Sean Doherty

and see this constructively critical response:

['The Church is homophobic – true or false?'](#), Wesley Hill

Jenell Williams Paris, [The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are](#), IVP, 2011

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