

Accepting Our Sexual Orientation Without Letting It Define Us: The ABC of Human Sexuality

The debates about human sexuality often confuse and conflate three important and distinct things.

Attraction: Am I attracted to men or to women? The science increasingly recognises that human sexuality is more fluid than we usually realise. Some people who are primarily attracted to the opposite sex also experience attraction to the same sex, and vice versa. Our sexual attractions seem to sit on a spectrum, which can change over time.

Behaviour: Am I bound to act on my attractions? The Church has always taught (as with all appetites) that we should not always accede to our attractions. There are those who should not act on their sexual attractions, for example those who are unmarried, and those who are married (when attracted to someone outside their marriage). Indeed, the Church has taught that the only place in which it is right to act on sexual attraction is in a marriage between a man and a woman.

Culture and Identity: Am I straight or gay? All of us form cultural identities around our experiences. For minorities, this is often shaped in response to rejection from the majority culture around them. To challenge the behaviour is therefore to challenge a culture from which people can draw a strong sense of belonging and identity. There can of course be positive things about this way of drawing our identity: the same process happens to Christians in a predominately non-Christian culture!

An alternative vision

Our attractions are part of our human nature: they are made good, reflecting the good of the God who created us, but we are also all fallen and broken. As the people of God we are called to behave in patterns of holiness, often in ways which are countercultural and self-denying, as a witness to the coming Kingdom of God. Our cultural identity is principally in Christ, becoming more like him by the transforming power of his Spirit. So, we can acknowledge our patterns of sexual attraction and accept ourselves just as God accepts us, without letting that define our identity.