

## Tough Moral Questions: Speaking-out in Today's World

Most are familiar with the dictum, *"It isn't only what you say but how you say it that is important."* I'm not sure that there is an exact equivalent to this dictum anywhere in the Bible or from the teachings of our Lord, but it accords with common sense and human experience. If you truly want to be heard and understood, you need to accommodate your word to the intended recipient.

In their role as teachers of morality, the shepherds of the Church in today's world are faced with a terrible chasm between traditional concepts of Divine Law and Natural Law on the one hand, and Moral Relativism on the other. In a short-hand way of putting the matter: the official teachers of the Church often find that they are not speaking a language which is comprehended by the secular culture.

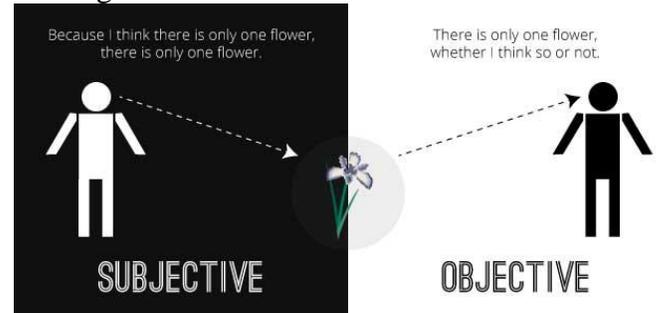
When for example, the Church proclaims in the Catechism: (CCC 2357) *Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered." They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.*

The 'conceptual world' behind these words is one to which God has given a particular order and structure tending toward a pre-ordained goal or destiny. However, to those who have been immersed in secular culture or, worse, the "gay" subculture, these words filter through an entirely different lens: Secularism has inculcated in modern, western society that people are absolute owners of their lives and defined, more than anything else, by their freedom. They interpret the words "depravity" and "intrinsically disordered" as attacks on their dignity and personhood; thereby they may feel rejected by the Church or come to regard the Church as the enemy.

The Catechism is quick to shift from the 'bald' pronouncement of the moral law to acknowledge the personal struggle of individuals in the sphere of their everyday lives: (CCC 2358)

*This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. . . These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives. . .*

Regrettably, it seems that these words of understanding and support are completely eclipsed by the those which precede . . . words which are perceived as condemnation. And this brings to the fore another problem which is the inability of modern people to appreciate distinctions: The Church distinguishes the fact of a person's 'inclination' and their 'acts:' The former is not condemned as something 'sinful' but, rather, 'disordered.' This sense of 'disorder' is not from psychological categories but from a sense of Natural Law; the sexual complementarity of male and female and the ordering of sexual acts within marriage between male and female.



Hence, we are faced with a terrible conundrum: We want to communicate in a way that welcomes those with same-sex attraction to full participation in the life of the Church. At the same time, we must express the truth about the human person as we have received it from the Creator. But our appeal to "objective truth" collides with a culture of "subjective freedom" and we end up talking past each other.

If church leaders struggle to express themselves between this "rock-and-a-hard-place," it is because they sincerely want to find a way to open the doors to people who should be sons and daughters of Christ's Church. In these efforts, it may seem to some that teaching is being 'watered down' or 'circumvented:' Indeed, this is a real danger. But, if we see this as struggle for human souls which begins with getting a 'hearing,' perhaps we can grant the benefit of the doubt and take a closer look at the fuller context of what the Pope or any other teacher expresses on the matter at hand or any other tough question.