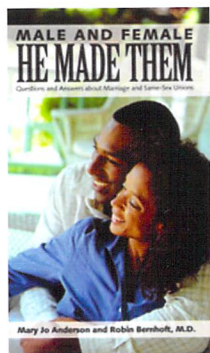


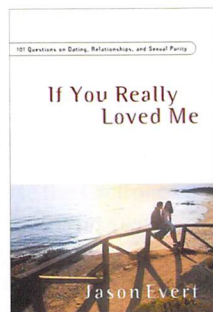
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By Mary Jo Anderson and Dr. Robin Bernhoft

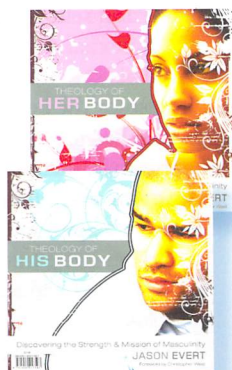
Using a Q and A format, this book offers a clear explanation of the Catholic Church's teachings on marriage and same-sex unions. Drawing upon theology, biology, and sociology, this work offers compelling evidence of God's plan for marriage and the family.



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The world tells people who have same-sex attractions that they have two options: They can hide in the closet out of fear, or come out, embrace their sexual identity, and do whatever they wish. One man who had lived a gay lifestyle later remarked, "In retrospect I would have appreciated a cultural alternative to the extremes of either walking around afraid of anyone finding out that I lived with same-sex attractions or defining myself as gay and hitting the party scene."¹

Such individuals, especially when they come from a Christian upbringing, often feel trapped between these choices. They desire intimacy with God and their families, but they feel as if they're being asked to deny who they are in order to achieve this. As one man said, "A lot of people in my position feel like religion presents them with a choice between death by damnation or death by desolation."²

To make matters more challenging, the media expects everyone to believe that if you can't have sex with whomever you want, then your freedom has been robbed, you are being judged, and you will never be loved or understood. Sex is equated with love, and because no one should have to live without love, the logical conclusion is that no one should live without sex.

It is true that no person should be asked to live without love. Pope John Paul II remarked, "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This is why Christ the Redeemer 'fully reveals man to himself.'"³

What Is Love?

Because people should not live without love, what are those who experience homosexual attractions to do? The first step is to turn their hearts to God, inviting him to teach them the meaning of love. No one will

disagree with the fact that our world has many false notions of love. For some it is a passing attraction. For others it's a burning lust. For a Christian, it is to live in imitation of Christ, who gave his life as a sacrifice for others. To love is to will the good of another, regardless of the cost. As Mother Teresa said, "Love to be real, it must cost—it must hurt—it must empty us of self."⁴

If two members of the same sex are attracted to and love one another, they will do what is best for each other. They desire union because of their love, but love requires more than a temporary physical and emotional union. Love desires the good of the other. Ultimately, it leads one person to desire heaven for the other. For this reason, those who love should encourage the virtue of chastity in each other.

"Homosexual persons are called to chastity... by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection."

—CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 2359

Despite the modern notion of chastity as a repressive, unnatural, and unhealthy burden, chastity is actually a virtue that frees a person to love with an undivided heart. Because of original sin, every person experiences a battle within his heart between sacrificial love and selfish lust. The function of chastity is to order one's sexual desires according to the demands of real love. This sometimes requires heroic sacrifices to do what is best for the beloved. But, as Mother Teresa reminds us, "True love causes pain. Jesus, in order to give us the proof of his love, died on

the cross. A mother, in order to give birth to her baby, has to suffer. If you really love one another, you will not be able to avoid making sacrifices."⁵



No matter what a person's state in life—married, single, or religious—chastity is demanding. To be chaste, the person who experiences same-sex attractions chooses to forgo sexual activity for the love of God. Although same-sex temptations, like temptations in general, are not sinful in and of themselves, Scripture condemns homosexual actions (Lev. 18:22–30; Rom. 1:26–27; 1 Cor. 6:9; Jude 7). Although the words of Scripture may be difficult to read at times, Saint Augustine reminds us, "If you believe what you like in the gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself."⁶ One man added, "There are few better tests for whether or not someone lives a life in submission to God than what he or she does with their sexuality. Sex is such a powerful and meaningful desire that to give it up and obey God in that area is a true sign of worship."⁷

Isn't the Church Discriminating Against Gays?

Because the Catholic Church does not recognize gay marriage, it is often accused of being unfair. However, what is marriage, and who has the authority to define it? If two women are allowed to marry each other lawfully, on what grounds can the state legislate against a woman marrying her brother, her cousin, or two men? Who has the right to determine these matters? Who is the ultimate authority? In the eyes of a Christian, marriage is God's idea. The Church didn't create marriage and so the Church doesn't have the right to redesign it.

Those who insist that the Church is discriminating against gays often do not realize that the Church does not allow even heterosexual couples to marry if they are known to be permanently and incurably impotent at the time of the marriage. Not to be confused with sterility (where a couple is able to have intercourse but unable to have kids), impotency is when a person is incapable of having intercourse. Ever since the beginning, the marital act has been an integral part of marriage. In Genesis we read, "A man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

Two people do not become one flesh simply by engaging in some form of sexual activity. In the case of two members of the same sex, the inability of their bodies to unite in a sexually complimentary way expresses the deeper reality that they were not meant to give themselves to each other in marriage.

The modern world proclaims tolerance as the greatest virtue. Therefore, the Catholic Church is often attacked for failing to accept homosexuality. The Church agrees that people with homosexual attractions should be accepted with love, respect, and sensitivity.⁸ However, it is a false form of compassion to condone homosexual acts. It is unloving to lead people to believe that they can find ultimate fulfillment outside of the will of God. Perhaps the greatest injustice that can be done to those with same-sex attractions is to encourage them to think that pleasing God brings despair and unhappiness. Therefore, Christians are called to not merely tolerate others, but to practice the virtue of charity. Sometimes this means loving others enough to speak the truth, even when it's difficult for them to hear—and more popular for Christians to remain silent.

By looking to the examples of unmarried people such as Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, and Jesus, a person with same-sex attractions can see that it is possible to

"Jesus loves you always, even when you don't feel worthy. When not accepted by others, even by yourself sometimes, he is the one who always accepts you. Only believe, you are precious to him. Bring all you are suffering to his feet, only open your heart to be loved by him as you are. He will do the rest."⁹ —MOTHER TERESA

give up certain pleasures in this life in order to experience a deeper union with God, now and in the life to come.



What Should I Do?

If you have same-sex attractions, it does not mean that God is unhappy with you or that you are incapable of living a fulfilled life. Deepen your relationship with Christ and say yes to him no

matter what he asks of you. If you are unsure of how to begin, or if you feel intimidated by the idea of changing your entire lifestyle, just take one step toward him. Think of one thing in your life that could be changed for the better. For example, if you've been away from the sacraments, come back. Make one change for love of him, and the next one will become clearer.

Realize that living a pure life does not mean living in isolation. Like any person, you need community and authentic friendships with those who bring out the best

"After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you." —1 PETER 5:8–10

in you. You are not alone in what you are experiencing, and so you may want to consider learning about the support offered through organizations such as Courage (couragerc.net) and the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuals (narth.com).

When modern culture labels people as "gay" or "lesbian," it often results in people identifying themselves based on their sexual desires rather than on their true identity as sons or daughters of God. Attractions make up part of who we are, but they are not the sum of our identity. When we love as God loves, we find our true identity.

Sexual purity is not the only expression of love to which God calls you. He has also given you numerous talents that you can use to serve humanity. Use those gifts to build up the kingdom of God. The Catholic Church has canonized saints who have struggled with every sin and temptation imaginable. St. Francis de Sales was prone to anger. St. Pelagia was a harlot. St. Paul was a murderer. St. Margaret of Cortona lived with her boyfriend and became a single mother. Do not think that anything you may have done disqualifies your call to sainthood. In fact, one can reasonably expect that the day is coming when the Catholic Church will canonize some known to have struggled with same-sex attractions, and who gave themselves unreservedly to God. Do not be afraid to show the world that such holiness is possible.

For more information, visit www.chastity.com. This online resource offers a wealth of information on how to practice the virtue of purity. On the site, you can read answers to your specific questions, watch videos, download inspirational audio files, browse a library of articles, shop online, and more.

(Endnotes)

1 David Morrison, as quoted in "Learning to Live Chastely With Same-Sex Attractions," Arlington, VA, January 9, 2003 (Zenit.org).

2 Anonymous man, as quoted by Fr. Vincent Serpa, O.P., "The Courage to Do What Herod Didn't Do: He Left the Gay Lifestyle for the Church," *This Rock* (March 2009).

3 John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

4 Michael Collopy, *Works of Love*, 30.

5 Jose Luis Gonzalez-Balado, ed., *Mother Teresa: In My Own Words* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1996), 31.

6 St. Augustine, *Sermons* 20:2 (inter a.d. 391–430).

7 Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries in Dating* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 252.

8 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2358.

9 Michael Collopy, *Works of Love Are Works of Peace* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), 197.