

## Engaging with Catholic Sexual Conversations in a Diverse Church 25 June, 2021

I am very happy to note that the Theological Committee of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics aims to name and nurture the richness of LGBTIQ+ Catholic realities.

On the question of theological methodology, I would like to underline two aspects that you have already mentioned:

- Embracing human experience in the diversity and complexity of all sexual orientations, and gender identities.
- The assertion that Catholic sexual wisdom is an evolutionary process.

While this is a very laudable premise, in the introduction to the New Content, you have made a statement, which in my opinion is a bit problematic, that is: *“We seek not to counter or tinker with institutional church teachings”*.

If these conversations are geared at broadening the scope of catholic theology in a way that will nurture the ‘richness of LGBTIQ+ Catholic realities’, I am afraid that it cannot be done without challenging some of the established theological notions. This is because much of the institutional Church teachings come from an exclusively heterosexual framework and have been developed mainly by male, white and celibate theologians.

While we do not counter anything for countering sake, it becomes necessary if a particular situation demands it. The greatest role model on the how of doing this we have in the person of Jesus Christ who was bold and free to question and even break many sacrosanct norms of the Jewish tradition when it became necessary to do it for revealing the deeper truths about God and human life.

On this basis, following the feminist and other liberative theological methodology, I would suggest a three tier approach:

- Critique/challenge the defined gender binary and the consequent hetero-normativity that is foundational to Christian anthropology in Catholic teaching. This calls for a critical analysis of Scripture, tradition and the defined theological arguments that legitimize hetero-normative positions regarding gender and sexuality.
- Affirm and assert the pluralities of gender/sexual experience at the level of human understanding and point out how this relates to the divine.
- Articulate the knowledge of the divine perceived through the plurality of gender and sexual diversity. Through this articulation, you move into the Content.

For this, it is necessary to hear once again the question Jesus asked his disciples: *Who do you say that I am?* (Mt:16: 15). When the answer given by the disciples did not satisfy him, he insisted that they speak for themselves and hence the repetition of the question: *What about you? Who do you say I am?*

Underlining this you is important, because your experience is unique and different and consequently your knowledge of the divine is unique and needs to be heard by the church. Through this you are affirming how your human experience of sexual diversity mirror divine love and thus attest that Catholic sexual wisdom is an evolutionary process.

In articulating the theology of incarnation, Fathers of the Church have affirmed that Jesus' incarnation not about maleness but humanness and what is not assumed is not redeemed. Following this conventional theology, it is important to affirm that Jesus Christ incarnation has assumed the humanity of LGBTQ+ persons and it is up to you to assert it.

In my opinion, the outcome of the 'Catholic Sexual Conversations in a Diverse Church' could be the emergence of a **Rainbow Theology**. I think it is a fitting expression than Queer Theology, which is widely used as a politically radical alternative by LGBTQI+ groups. Since the Rainbow is a powerful symbol that is not confined to limiting boundaries, but opens itself to ever widening horizons, Rainbow theology can be very inviting as it gives a fresh lease of life to theological imagination. It could help deconstruct and re-envision conventional theological categories in a way that leads us to understand a little more the unfathomable mystery of God while affirming the full humanity of people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

A few comments on the different points under New contents

1. **Love is love** (can come under reflections on marriage and family)
2. **Marriage and family:** Need to spell out how marriage and family is redefined from the perspective of LGBTQI+ Catholics. *Love is love:* can be the starting point for elaborating how you see marriage and family.
3. **Multiple Sources** from which you draw theo-ethical wisdom can be part of methodology.
4. **Recognition of human failings:** I think a 'mia culpa' position is uncalled for. Instead this could be put as **Reconciliation and Healing** and express the uniqueness that you would bring into reconciliation and healing like compassion, greater understanding of vulnerability, flexibility and readiness to see from another's perspective, openness to fluidity, plurality etc.
5. **Role of Catholics in global conversation on sexual ethics:** I think the change in perspective elaborated is very pertinent. However, in the last sentence, instead of 'what if' it could be stated as '*in narrating our personal stories of upholding truth and justice and affirming love and life we hear the Church speaking.*' This tone will communicate to the listener that you are not doubting your experience but speaking from the conviction that You are Church.

Structures of inclusion and structures of dialogue within the Church could be envisioned.

#### **Two general Observations:**

- The desire to bring about a revolution of love and justice by the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics is highly commendable. However, expressions such as "Such offerings are made with humility" betray a sense of feeling 'unworthy'/'small' before the mighty ecclesiastical powers, which in my opinion is not a right attitude for theological assertions.

- I notice a leaning towards the need for approval as 'morally correct' persons. This comes across strongly in the conclusion in expressions such as ... 'enrich moral life', ... 'enhance the Catholic moral tradition', and ... 'shaping of catholic' morals' (no.3 contents). Wouldn't be better to assert the truth of our lives and of our understanding of God with greater boldness and freedom as Jesus did?

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