

A ZENIT DAILY DISPATCH

Same-Sex "Marriage" and Mental Health

Interview With Dr. Rick Fitzgibbons of Catholic Medical Association

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A recent meeting of the American Psychiatric Association calling for the legalization of same-sex marriage shows a political agenda that disregards scientific data, says a psychiatrist.

Dr. Rick Fitzgibbons was a major contributor to "Homosexuality and Hope," an essay by the Catholic Medical Association, and co-author of "Helping Clients Forgive: An Empirical Guide for Resolving Anger and Restoring Hope" (American Psychological Association Books, 2000).

Fitzgibbons shared his views with ZENIT about the APA's definition of same-sex marriage as a mental health "need" for the stability of the partners and the children they adopt.

Q: Is the opinion of the APA on same-sex unions and adoption consistent with the research on the medical and psychiatric difficulties in those with same-sex attractions and on the developmental needs of children?

Fitzgibbons: No. The APA has chosen to ignore the significant medical research which has documented serious psychiatric and medical illnesses associated with those same-sex attractions and behaviors.

This research and that on the needs of children for a father and a mother have been reviewed in several important recent papers from the University of South Carolina School of Medicine and the University of Utah School of Medicine.

The peer-reviewed literature demonstrates that an inability to maintain committed relationships and rampant promiscuity are the norm in the homosexual lifestyle. To illustrate this, one recent study in Amsterdam, by Xiridou, demonstrated that 86% of the new cases of AIDS came from those in committed relationships, and that those in casual relationships averaged between 16-28 sexual partners per year.

Q: What else does the research show in regards to psychiatric and medical health risks for those living the homosexual lifestyle?

Fitzgibbons: Well-designed research studies have shown that many psychiatric disorders are far more prevalent, three to five times, in teen-agers and adults with same-sex attraction [SSA]. These include major depression, suicidal ideation and attempts, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, conduct disorder, low self-esteem in males and sexual promiscuity with an inability to maintain committed relationships.

It is important to note that "homophobia" is not the cause of these disorders, as many of these studies were done in cultures in which homosexuality is widely accepted.

Another recent study has shown that a high percentage, 32%, of males with SSA have been abused by other males with SSA.

In addition, those with SSA have a shortened life expectancy. The sexual practices in the lifestyle,

particularly sodomy, are associated with numerous serious medical illnesses. All this research was ignored by the APA.

Q: What do the social and medical perspectives of scientific research indicate about the needs of a child for a father and a mother?

Fitzgibbons: Dr. Reekers and Dr. Byrd's summary of some of the vast literature on child development demonstrates the vital importance of a father and a mother for the developmental needs of a child.

In effect, the social science research supports the recent statement of the Vatican that to deliberately deprive a child of a father or a mother through adoption by those in the homosexual lifestyle would inflict severe harm onto those children.

The APA's statement ignores the vast scholarship on the needs of children such as Henry Biller's "Fathers and Families: Paternal Factors in Child Development," which includes a bibliography of almost 1,000 separate articles or books on the positive effects of fathers on children.

These studies were not done as part of a political campaign, but as serious scholarship to increase our knowledge of child development. The literature on the needs of a child for a mother is even more extensive, and was equally ignored.

Q: If the opinion of the APA in support of same-sex unions and adoption is not based on medical, psychiatric and social science research, then what do you think it is based upon?

Fitzgibbons: I believe that the decision is an ideological and a political one, not one based in medical science or on the protection of the health of adults or of children.

The unscientific position of the APA brings to mind the warning of Pope Benedict XVI in regards to the dictatorship of relativism in the West.

In my professional experience as a psychiatrist with expertise on the nature and treatment of excessive anger, the APA's decision is strongly influenced by a long standing bias toward Judeo-Christian and, particularly, Catholic morality. The recent legal recognition of same sex unions by Canada and Spain which is not based on medical science or on the well-being of adults and children is another illustration of this bias.

This bias has led to the experience of not a small number of Catholics with mental health professionals in which their faith and morality have been blamed for either their emotional struggles or those in their child, or in which attempts were made to change their moral code in regard to sexuality.

Q: What advice would you give to other psychiatrists, psychologists and counselors, faced with this ideological trend in their fields?

Fitzgibbons: A number of colleagues have told me that they plan to leave the APA because of its abandonment of medical science and its caving in to an ideological and political agenda.

Personally, in this struggle I have been encouraged by, and have encouraged some of my colleagues, with the words of John Paul II, "Prayer joined to sacrifice constitutes the most powerful force in human history."

Catholic mental health professionals need to trust that the Lord will act to protect the sacrament of marriage, but we need to do our part.

Also, regardless of the APA's unscientific statement, doctors have a responsibility to inform their patients of the dangers of the homosexual lifestyle.

In his study "The Health Risks of Gay Sex," an internist and colleague, Dr. John R. Diggs Jr., wrote, "As a physician, it is my duty to assess behaviors for their impact on health and well-being. When something is beneficial, such as exercise, good nutrition or adequate sleep, it is my duty to recommend it. Likewise, when something is harmful, such as smoking, overeating, alcohol or drug abuse, it is my duty to discourage it. As a physician, it is my duty to inform patients of the health risks of homosexual sex, and to discourage them from indulging in harmful behaviors."

Q: What advice would you offer Catholic parents in regard to the attempt to redefine marriage and establish same-sex civil unions and adoption?

Fitzgibbons: Catholic parents today need an understanding of homosexuality in view of both the attempts to redefine marriage and of the crisis in the Church.

This knowledge is available in the updated brochure of the Catholic Medical Association, and at the Web site of the National Association for Research and Treatment of Homosexuality (<http://www.narth.com>).

Contrary to the media and professional organizations' political propaganda, same-sex attractions are not genetically determined and are preventable and treatable.

Parents would be helped by reading Pope Benedict's recent statement on marriage and civil unions when he headed the Congregation for Doctrine and Faith. He wrote, "The marital union of man and woman has been elevated by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament. The Church teaches that Christian marriage is an efficacious sign of the covenant between Christ and the Church."

Other excellent family resources which can help parents present to their children the beauty of God's plan for marriage and for human sexuality are "The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality," from the Pontifical Council for the Family; "Humanae Vitae"; "Love and Responsibility"; John Paul II's "Theology of the Body"; and the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

In response to the recent APA statement, Catholic parents need to monitor more carefully their children's education, because many educators will now intensify their present efforts to initiate required curriculum on homosexuality from grades 1-12.

These programs fail to present the truth about the homosexual lifestyle, including the inability to maintain commitment, the rampant promiscuity, the medical and psychiatric illnesses and damage done to children who are denied their right to a father and a mother.

Instead, these biased efforts attempt to falsely portray homosexuality as a healthy alternative lifestyle. Parents should request that the truth be presented to their children.

Many of these educational programs attempt to mask their true goals by the use of names such as

diversity, tolerance or "no name-calling weeks" when, in fact, they attempt to undermine the Church's teaching on marriage, human sexuality and, now child-rearing.

Catholics should also act in the political arena to influence elected officials to learn the truth about homosexuality and to support the basic unit of society upon which the well-being of a society is founded, the family, based on a marriage between a man and a woman.