

IN MEMORIAM: REV. JOHN F. HARVEY, O.S.F.S. (1918–2010)

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The severe public criticism of the Church for her moral teachings is not a news flash. For decades now, we have seen and heard a massive rejection of magisterial positions on abortion, contraception, homosexuality, and many other issues. In the case of abortion, opponents of Church teaching claim, incorrectly of course, that ecclesial opposition is rooted in an outlook that is biased against women. There is no surprise, then, when critics take aim against the Catholic teaching on homosexuality, referring to the Church as homophobic.

For some who oppose the Church's moral positions, there is an extremely high bar for the Church to clear when it comes to conduct and personhood. For these critics, a condemnation of behavior is tantamount to a condemnation of the persons who commit the transgressions. In their way of looking at things, the Church cannot acquit herself on the moral issues because how we act and who we are cannot be distinguished from each other.

Never mind that Catholic moral theology makes distinctions and that the Church abides in an ethic of hating the sin and loving the sinner; nonetheless, there is a perception in some quarters that distinctions are not germane to our moral reasoning and that condemnations must be sweeping to have any validity at all. Distinctions, we know incontrovertibly, are pertinent to moral analysis and evaluation. And condemnations, we would insist, are not all univocal. Still, perceptions do linger until someone can break through and re-cast them.

While he was no iconoclast, Fr. John Harvey, who died late last year, was an important figure in changing perceptions of homosexuality. Through his work in founding Courage, an organization with now more than 100 chapters in the United States and other countries, Fr. Harvey showed that Catholic teaching on homosexuality gets it right with regard to both acts and persons.

It seemed as if Fr. Harvey, an Oblate of Saint Francis de Sales for more than 70 years, was preparing all along to found Courage. He obtained his doctorate in moral theology from the Catholic University of America in 1951. He then embarked on a long teaching career at several academic institutions in Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., which also included visiting professorships in Australia and New Zealand.

Teaching and writing in journals and magazines over several decades afforded Fr. Harvey, a member of the Society of Catholic Social

Scientists, the opportunity to think through homosexuality as completely as few ever have. In 1987, he published his best-known book, *The Homosexual Person: New Thinking in Pastoral Care*. In it, he critiqued the views of revisionist theologians who argue that the Church's longstanding prohibition of homosexual acts is wrong. Offering a robust defense of the traditional Catholic position, Fr. Harvey went on from there to contend that persons suffering from same-sex attraction are deserving of compassionate pastoral care. Members of Courage find this compassionate pastoral care today in days of recollection, retreats, chaste friendships, and the sacramental life of the Church, all part of the plan of life recommended by Fr. Harvey to Catholics struggling against same-sex attraction.

What will always be regarded as Fr. Harvey's greatest legacy then, the creation of Courage, is a faithful witness to the counsel contained in the *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986). The Instruction from the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith reminds Catholics that "depart[ing] from the Church's teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral. Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral" (no. 15). For achieving the proper balance between orthodoxy and orthopraxis in his apostolate undertaken at the urging of Terence Cardinal Cooke, Fr. Harvey's approach won the endorsement of the Pontifical Council for the Family.

In person, Fr. Harvey was gentle, soft-spoken, and unfailingly patient. He had the right combination of thinking with the Church and being kindly disposed to all who are made in the Lord's image and likeness. He was greatly admired for the strength of his convictions, and not surprisingly, was the recipient of multiple honors, including the Founder's Award presented by the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars only three months before he died.

Tu es sacerdos in aeternum. Requiescat in pace.