

A Philosophical Perspective from the World's Religions

In past issues of the Bulletin, we have explored the positions of traditional Christianity and Judaism on homosexuality. The moral reasoning of these ancient faiths evolved over centuries.

In the last 25 years, the social-science professions have proclaimed that homosexuality is healthy. In doing so, they have boldly repudiated the teachings of all of the world's major religions. Here, another well-known faith explains its teachings on this subject:

The Baha'i Teachings on Homosexuality

(Statement published in QAWL B.E. 152, November 23, 1995, addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, excerpted below):

Dear Baha'i Friends:

We are instructed to provide the following guidelines...for assistance in guiding the believers.

It is important to understand that there is a difference between the Baha'i attitude toward, on the one hand, the condition of homosexuality...and, on the other, the practice of homosexual relations by members of the Baha'i community.

As you know, the Baha'i Faith strongly condemns all blatant acts of immorality, and it includes among them the expression of sexual love between individuals of the same sex...

In a letter dated March 26, 1950, written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi, the authorized interpreter of the Baha'i Teachings... explicates the Baha'i attitude toward homosexuality. It should be noted that the Guardian's interpretation of this subject is based on his infallible understanding of the Texts. It represents both a statement of moral principle and enerring guidance to Baha'is who are homosexuals. The letter states:

"No matter how devoted and fine the love may be between people of the same sex, to let it find expression in sexual acts is wrong. To say that it is ideal is no excuse. Immorality of every sort is really forbidden by Baha'u'llah, and homosexual relationships He looks upon as such, besides being against nature.

"To be afflicted this way is a great burden to a conscientious soul. But through the advice and help of doctors,

through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap."

... Human nature is made up of possibilities both for good and evil. True religion can enable it to soar in the highest realm of the spirit, while its absence can, as we already witness around us, cause it to fall to the lowest depths of degradation and misery."

A distinguishing feature of human existence is that we have been given the capacity to know and love God and to consciously obey Him. Thus we also have the converse: the ability to turn away from God, to fail to love Him and to disobey Him. Indeed, left to himself, man is naturally inclined toward evil. Human beings need not only assistance in defining acceptable behavior of one person toward another, but also guidance which will help them to refrain from doing that which is spiritually damaging to themselves.

"Whether deficiencies are inborn or are acquired, our purpose in this life is to overcome them."

---Baha'i Teaching

The material world, in relation to the spiritual world, is a world of imperfections. It is full of dangers and difficulties which have been greatly aggravated by man's neglect and misuse of his responsibilities. Human society itself, which exists in the material world, is in disastrous disarray.

Genetic variations occur, producing conditions which can create problems for the individual. Some conditions are of an emotional or psychological nature, producing such imbalances as quickness to anger, recklessness, timorousness, and so forth; others involve purely physical characteristics, resulting not only in unusual capacities but also in handicaps or diseases of various kinds.

Whether deficiencies are inborn or are acquired, our purpose in this life is to overcome them and to train ourselves in accordance with the pattern that is revealed to us in the divine Teachings.

The Guardian has stated that "through the advice and help of doctors, through a strong and determined effort, and through prayer, a soul can overcome this handicap."

The statistics which indicate that homosexuality is incurable are undoubtedly distorted by the fact that many of those who overcome the problem never speak about it in public, and others solve their problems without even consulting professional counselors.

Nevertheless there are undoubtedly cases in which the individual finds himself (or herself) unable to eliminate a physical attraction to members of the same sex, even though he succeeds in controlling his behavior. This is but one of the many trials and temptations to which human beings are subject in this life. For Baha'is, it cannot alter the

basic concept taught by Baha'u'llah, that the kind of sexuality purposed by God is the love between a man and a woman, and that its primary (but not its only) purpose is the bringing of children into this world and providing them with a loving and protective environment in which they can be reared to know and love God.

If, therefore, a homosexual cannot overcome his or her condition to the extent of being able to have a heterosexual marriage, he or she must remain single, and abstain from sexual relations. These are the same requirements as for a heterosexual person who does not marry. While Baha'u'llah encourages the believers to marry, it is important to note that marriage is by no means an obligation. It is for the individual to decide whether he or she wishes to lead a family life or to live in a state of celibacy.

"Homosexuality...is regarded by the Faith as a distortion of true human nature."

To regard homosexuals with prejudice and disdain would be entirely against the spirit of Baha'i Teachings. The doors are open for all of humanity to enter the Cause of God, irrespective of their present circumstances; this invitation applies to homosexuals as well as to any others who are engaged in practices contrary to the Baha'i Teachings.

Associated with this invitation is the expectation that all believers will make a sincere and persistent effort to eradicate those aspects of their conduct which are not in conformity with Divine Law. It is through such adherence to the Baha'i Teachings that a true and enduring unity of the diverse elements of the Baha'i community is achieved and safeguarded.

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