

## Philia, Purity Codes, and Psychology

*By David Pence MD*

Pope Benedict's first encyclical (*Deus est caritas*) teaches the character of Christian love:

*“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. St John’s Gospel describes that event in these words ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should... have eternal life.’ (3:16)*

The right ordering of love is a central task of the Church in response to the two great commandments that “Jesus united into a single precept.” The pope’s encyclical reflects on the purification of *eros* by *agape*. With a name like Benedict, the great reformer of monastic fraternal love, we might expect a future papal reflection on the purification of *philia* whose sacramental form is the male priesthood.

Such a reflection would begin with Christ, Peter and the Twelve. The anthropological investigation of *philia* is considerably more difficult. It is the intellectual and spiritual teaching concerning

masculine friendship though that is needed in the present crisis of the priesthood in America and Europe. What we know for sure is that we should not begin any study of male relationships by asking modern psychologists and psychiatrists to reflect on male homosexuality. One does not learn the nature of a thing by reflecting on its distortion. Sociobiologists and neurobiologists actually have more to say about men in social groups than modern psychology. In their godless atomized world the psychologists have neither retained the Church's ancient insights nor kept up with the best of the new social evolutionary thinkers. Indeed several of the most destructive seminary programs fostering a lavender clergy depended on the "science" of psychology and theories of moral development which defined psychological maturation as achieving intimacy between males. This ripped male relationships not only from the brotherly fellowship of traditional religion but also from mammalian biology. Almost all of the original experts that bishops relied on in dealing with clergy sex abuse were defenders of the homosexual pathology in which *philia* is not purified by *agape* but polluted by *eros*. Many of the church's errors came from depending on psychologists and psychiatrists committed to the structural incoherence of defending homosexual relations. Psychologists who think of God as merely a concept in the human brain cannot be doctors of the human soul. They are

missing too big a player in the drama. This became embarrassingly apparent as the experts abandoned man's mooring in God and soon after gave away his grounding in natural teleology.

The bizarre rise of "homosexuals as experts" in male relationships is the ultimate absurdity in this saga. It is as if a brother and sister in an incestuous relationship set up a clinic to deal with "boundary issues". Homosexuality is to the *philia* of the priesthood what incest is to the corporate love of *familia*. It is not a vice we want to get comfortable with.

When the U.S. bishops gathered at St. John's in Collegeville, Minnesota, in 1985 to first deal collectively with sexual abuse, the emerging expert was the notorious Michael Peterson- psychiatrist, priest, and homosexual. He was a dandy con man and most bishops eventually accepted his expert card to send offenders to his St. Luke Institute. He died of AIDS in 1987. St. John's Abbey was soon submerged in its own homosexual abuse scandal that included Abbott John Eidenschink (abusing fellow monks) as well as a dozen homosexual abuser monks living now on campus under pseudo house arrest. St Luke's Institute is still doing business and St. John's campus is host to the Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute. The expert hoax continues-now with an ecumenical wrinkle.

The Church will figure this all out before the American Psychiatric Association or the American theologians. The purity codes of the church lead us to maturity by conforming us to the self sacrificing love of Christ. The purity codes are built on the natural inclinations of man and woman to mate and men to bond in protective communities. Our purity codes build on the universal taboos against incest and homosexuality while correcting the male tendency toward promiscuity and polygamy. The celibate masculine priesthood and monogamous heterosexual marriage are the two great purified sacraments of love culminating in the Eucharist. The Church lives out these codes in a worldwide dialogue with traditions as diverse as Chinese Catholics and the African Anglicans. Though diverse, these groups are both sexually sane and think the northern white folks have gone quite mad. We should trust them before the experts.

The proper teacher of *philia* purified by *agape* is not the abnormal psychologist but the “expert on humanity”(the Church). The lived experience of Vatican II brought the bishops of the world in face to face contact with each other under the Holy Father in worship of God. This experienced worldwide *philia* was a sacrament of masculine communion—“does it not bear witness to a community of brotherly love, and shine as a visible sign of it. We are giving witness that all men are brothers, whatever their race or

nation.” (opening message of Vatican II, October 11, 1962). This sacramental understanding of the council was deepened with the Eucharistic emphasis of the local bishop and his priests in the *communio* of the local church. This was lived out by the renewed practice of concelebration. Once resisted by “conservatives,” concelebration was soon shunned by “progressives” because it was too vivid a reminder of the all- male priesthood.

**Praxis** means learning from living or putting an idea into action. The great paradox of those who now properly want to learn the praxis of Vatican II is that they are evoking the personal dynamism of patriarchy and male fraternity. The real praxis of Vatican II is to more faithfully live out the ecclesial forms of *philia*—of Peter and the apostles, the pope and the bishops(which was the lived experience of Vatican II), and the bishop and his priests. The joyful lesson of a Holy Spirit with a sense of humor is that the orthopraxy of orthodoxy is the restoration of patriarchy and fraternity.

*Dr David Pence is a radiation oncologist and member of the docsociety.*