

Ongoing Formation Workshop on The Issue of Homosexuality

Organizers: Episcopal Commission for the Clergy, Taiwan Catholic Regional Seminary (TCRS), and Taiwan Catholic Canon Law

Five Speakers: Fr. Stephen Chan (陳滿鴻神父) and Mr. Kevin Lai from Hong-Kong;
Fr. Ceasar Albert Rego (利志誠神父), Neocatechumenate;
Fr. Damien Lim (林源恆神父) Opus Dei;
Prof. Chi Ming (齊明老師), Fu Jen Catholic University Faculty of Theology

Numbers of attendees per Diocese:

Taipei Diocese: Most Rev. John Shan-Chuan Hung, SVD and 11 priests

Hsinchu Diocese: Most Rev. John Baptist Keh-Mean Lee and 7 priests

Taichung Diocese: 7 priests

Chiayi Diocese: 11 priests

Tainan Diocese: 2 priests

Kaohsiung Diocese: 9 priests

Hualien Diocese: 12 priests

Formation staffs of TCRS: 4 priests

Total of Attendees: 70 people

Date: August 18-22, 2014 (Monday to Friday)

Location: Taiwan Catholic Regional Seminary
No. 58 Santai Rd., Xinzhuang, New Taipei City [24255], Taiwan, R.O.C.

Reporter: Bro. Hoang-Chuong Nguyen (阮皇章修士)

Contents of the Workshop:

1. Given that the issue of homosexuality is fraught with complexity and controversy, the Chinese Regional Bishop Conference (CRBC) mandated the *“Episcopal Commission for the Clergy and the Taiwan Catholic Regional Seminary, in cooperation with the Taiwan Catholic Canon Law”* to organize the ongoing formation for clergy, especially for parish priests under the age of fifty.
2. First of all, during the five days of the workshop, the clergy became aware that the majority of political leaders in Taiwan do not oppose homosexual couples’ receiving greater recognition under the law. Indirectly, some of them even expressed their support to grant legal recognition for “same-sex marriages.” So, to ensure an understanding of the family, in accordance with natural law, the role of the Catholic parish priests is paramount, because they assert the core values of the Gospel message, in order to guide and support, not only local parishioners, but also friends and neighbors in the area.
3. The issue of homosexuality was also considered from a historical point of view.

Father Damien Lim pointed out that homosexuality is only part of a “cultural war” which began in some Western countries. History shows that homosexual behavior existed in the ancient Rome Empire. At that time, young men were subjected to homosexual acts as a form of slavery to the social hierarchy. In fact, the homosexual act is a disorder, because it is not in accordance with the natural law and it fails to follow the divine plan for creation. Therefore, it prevents a person from entering into a deeper union with God. As a result, this kind of disordered practice creates moral and social confusion in some traditional countries in Asia, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mainland China and Vietnam.

4. Another approach to the issue of homosexuality is Christian anthropology based on Pope John Paul II’s “Theology of the Body.” In line with the magisterial teaching, Father Caesar Albert Rego explained that men and women are created in God’s image, for the Divine image endows the physical being of the person with intellect and will, and men and women are both equal in dignity. This is a pure gift bestowed upon humanity by God. In light of this great gift, men and women have a responsibility to carry the message of God’s love to all people. Furthermore, one should differentiate “love and lust.” Pope St. John Paul II said, “The more lust dominates the heart, the less the heart experiences the nuptial meanings of the body. It becomes less sensitive to the gift of the person, which expresses that meaning in the mutual relationship of man and woman” (*Theology of the Body*, page 126). So, men and women are complementary, and the sexual act in the context of matrimony brings a man and woman closer to God, because they achieve true unity. Therefore, they become one flesh, one body, thus strengthening their pledge to each other, and this provides the much needed stability for a family.
5. Finally, being aware of the fact that the majority of Catholic parish pastors in Taiwan are not experts on counseling homosexuals, two speakers from Hong-Kong shared some of their practical knowledge based on their own pastoral experience. Father Stephen Chan explained that a pastor should have the ability to truly listen to those who seek his help. It is crucial to empathize with the struggles of homosexual and lesbian people. When providing any form of counseling, priests should be aware that the process can result in parishioners’ developing sentimental feelings for them, and therefore, young priests needs to proceed with caution. In addition, young pastors should not provide pastoral care without some kind of oversight. They should remember that they have limited resources, and do not have the expertise to undertake this process alone, said Father Chan. Therefore, they should ask a team of well-trained people or a professional counselor for help, to know how to approach people with same-sex orientation.
6. In short, this ongoing formation workshop clarified that “same-sex attraction” (SSA) is not sinful in itself; it becomes evil when persons with same sex orientation “act out” and give into temptation that is sinful. Psalm 36 reminds us that “sin speaks to the sinner in the depths of his heart”, meaning that we all face different temptations

based upon our fallen nature, as well as our own character and evil inclinations. Homosexual people who wish to lead a Christian life have their own particular struggle. However, every man and woman struggles with the effects of original sin. We all, as Christians and humans, face temptations to some degree in our lives. We are all united in our efforts to uproot sinful habits and practices, so that God's love can reach its fullness in us.

7. The Catholic Church does not discriminate against homosexuals, because we recognize that homosexual people have the same dignity as heterosexual people. All are created in the image and likeness of God. The Church speaks out on this issue, because her mission is to preach the Gospel and the Divine Truth. We are not slaves to sin, because Jesus is with us, and Jesus has conquered sin and death. The Church's message is based on truth and love. The Church encourages people with same-sex orientation to persevere and live in fidelity to the Gospel and to embrace the cross by transcending their carnal orientation, in order to draw closer to Jesus Christ and reach Christian perfection.