

# Debate on sexual behavior needs thoughtful approach

Friday morning I grabbed the paper and saw the headline: "Court Lifts Ban on Sodomy." In other articles, I read: that the Canadian government is likely to approve same-sex unions; that the U.S. Senate majority leader is backing a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages; that a Southern Baptist official denounced the Supreme Court's decision, followed by a Unitarian-Universalist minister who praised it and the movement in Canada; and that opinion is divided within the Episcopal Church regarding the ordination of an "openly gay" bishop.

We often hear people using the phrase "moral spectrum" in discussing such developments. For some time I have been more aware of polarization rather than a spectrum surrounding the question of gay and lesbian people and morality. My experience indicates that for some, the need is to condemn sex between couples of the same sex, even if the relationship is one of commitment and fidelity. For others, the need is for everyone, churches included, to overcome homophobia, the fear and hatred of gays and lesbians. That doesn't sound like a spectrum; it sounds like two opposing poles.

Most churches take the same position on the treatment of homosexual persons — that gay and lesbian people, like all people, are entitled to respect, love, and inclusion in our families and communities. There is a spectrum, however, governing the teachings of various Christian churches on the matter of gay sex:

One category of churches and groups asserts that sex-



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

## The Moral Life

ual intercourse belongs exclusively in the context of heterosexual marriage. This teaching regards all sex outside of marriage, including that between gay or lesbian couples, as intrinsically evil. This position characterizes the official teaching of the Catholic Church and many of the evangelical and other churches in our country.

A second category upholds this same norm, but acknowledges that some people are genuinely oriented toward members of the same sex. Since heterosexual marriage is impossible for them, these churches approve same-gender sex — as an exception to the norm — when it takes place within a committed relationship between genuine homosexuals.

A third category places the entire moral weight on the character of the relationship rather than on the nature of the sex act itself. If a couple, whether heterosexual or homosexual, experiences genuine selflessness and growth, reaches out toward others and toward the community, finds spiritual solace, encouragement, peace, and greater love for God in the context of their shared commitment, that relationship and its expression of sexuality is justified for such churches.

And a fourth category is

indifferent to the nature or context of sexual expression. For them, sex — except when it is forced or coerced — is simply a human activity without moral consequence.

I know of no group contending that promiscuous sex is a moral good. I know of no reputable group arguing that forced sex, sex for favors, sex with minors, or sex for gratification alone is a moral option.

These four categories offer a simplistic explanation of a very complicated reality. Some theologians recently have suggested that for churches and groups falling into the first two categories, there may be a need to recognize not one norm governing sexual behavior, but two. Given the fact that real people are in fact irrevocably homosexual, it may be that a set of standards for gay sex needs to be developed.

Because members of our churches, families, friends, neighbors and fellow citizens are gay and lesbian, we have to struggle with these questions. To those who want to pretend that there is no such thing as genuine homosexual orientation, who need to ignore the complexity of human sexual development and human relationships, who seek to reduce everything to a simple measure of external behavior separated from human personality, I say think again.

Last week's headlines aren't going away. We can become a polarized, absolutist society, or, in my terms, we can "get real." The choice is ours.

Sister Schoelles is president of St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry.



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

## MORE LETTERS

negligent in the future.

It might be better if Mr. Stowell worked toward educating the public about circumcision. Informed parents are the best defense for ending this practice.

Sharon Griffiths  
Genesee Park Boulevard  
Rochester

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** According to ABC News, Stowell's mother signed the consent form, but his lawyers argued that she did so under the influence of post-Caesarian painkillers.

## Targets letter on 'victory'

To the editor:

The letter in the June 25 edition of the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* from Michael Balch claims that legal abortion is the greatest legal victory. He takes one

of the usual pro-abortion shots at "the pro-life activists and supporters who complain about abortion being murder in the eyes of God," and cites the First Amendment of the Constitution, and the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court ruling as two of the "well made decisions in our great nations history."

Whether he chooses to ignore God now is one of God's gifts to him — his free will. It's later that he needs to be concerned about God, whether he believes in Him or not. In his final statement he raises a silly argument made by many to justify in their minds the right of any woman to abort her baby, "...let's say that your sister, wife or daughter was raped. What then?"

Well Michael, what if you were conceived as the result of that rape?

David Coriale  
Conifer Cove Lane  
Webster

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