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# Maybe Irish Voters Actually Were Swayed by their Church

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**SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**

# Maybe Irish voters actually were swayed by their Church

By **Una M. Cadegan**

*Special to Crux* | June 3, 2015

It's almost always more incorrect than correct to say "Church" when you mean "hierarchy." It's especially misleading in the case of same-sex marriage, and Catholic support thereof.

The vocal public insistence of much of the hierarchy (Vatican, Irish, US) on the impossibility and the danger of same-sex marriage represents a dead end in Catholic moral theology. This is not to undercut the entirety of the moral theology — far from it. The notion that humans are created for relationships, that the power of procreation is deeply and sacredly connected to the love between men and women, that stable, loving families are a crucial element of a healthy society and one of the best possible situations in which to bring up children — these and other aspects of Catholic teaching on human sexuality are a potentially great — even essential — gift to the world.

For it is also hard to argue that contemporary society has given rise to a view of human sexuality that's unambiguously conducive to human flourishing. The commodification of young bodies, whether in advertising or pornography or trafficking; the deep-rooted, vicious misogyny unleashed at the drop of a hat on every web site with a comments section; the widespread acceptance of the notion that sex need not involve real mutuality, commitment, even consent — these and other current realities disregard human dignity in favor of the unconstrained pursuit of some other ostensible good: profit, autonomy, pleasure, freedom.

On these and other issues, I happily listen to the hierarchy teach the wisdom of Catholic tradition. But I have come to believe that in including the issue of same-sex marriage in this list, they are making a significant category error. It is not an error that invalidates the moral tradition from which it emerged. All traditions that have deep roots give rise to multiple branches and off-shoots, and some of those shoots eventually become dead ends. They are connected to the original roots, but they do not themselves bear good fruit nor help preserve the life of the tree.

The teaching against gay marriage is an example of good scholastic reasoning gone wrong. That human sexuality is created by God as a good; that sex between a man and a woman should be open to the creation of a new human life; that mutual, loving fidelity is the best protection for the lives created via that love and that relationship — all are both logical and consistent with human experience, ancient and contemporary.

Do these ideals go badly wrong on a regular basis? Of course, but that is evidence of human sinfulness, not of a misunderstanding of the role of sexuality and procreation.

So what to make of same-sex attraction? The logic says: Since sexuality is inextricably linked to procreation, sex that is non-procreative is disordered. Good logic, but an invalid conclusion. Why? Because of our current understanding of the origins of homosexuality.

If it is not chosen, if it is something that seems to be (as current science continues to demonstrate) as much a part of human personality as opposite-sex attraction, then it is part of how God created a person. To suggest that an involuntary orientation deeply linked to the need for human connection and relationship was put there by God but meant to be suppressed and unused is to depict God as a wicked prankster placing insupportable, arbitrary obstacles in the path of people for whom he supposedly has infinite, creative love.

And here's where we start to see the dead end of this chain of reasoning — this branch of the tree has just gone as far as it can grow, and is no longer contributing to the life of the whole. Regardless of whether anecdote and data are singular and plural, wherever I look and listen, there is someone who is troubled by the fact that a young person whom they love is more and more alienated from the Church because of the current teaching on homosexuality and same-sex marriage. If, as the current polling data seem to show, young people are dropping away at increasing, even unprecedented, rates on account of this issue, then this branch of the tree is literally a dead end.

But another branch is producing real fruit, and it is that branch to which those supporters of same-sex marriage who still identify deeply with Christian tradition — with the “Church” in its full, proper meaning — are looking when they politely or impolitely defy public condemnation of same-sex marriage by clerics of their Church and march or vote in favor of it.

But make no mistake — they are being “swayed by their Church.” They know perfectly well that “their Church” preaches “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). They know that their Church preaches “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in them” (1 Jn. 4:16).

They look at the same-sex couples they know who seek to be married, and they see mutuality, and commitment, and fidelity, sometimes in the face of overwhelming vitriol and resistance.

They see relationships that welcome and nurture children.

They see love. And they know what their Church preaches about that.

*Una M. Cadegan is an associate professor of history at the University of Dayton.*

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