

THERE'S NOTHING "GAY" ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

Robert R. Reilly

Daniel C. Mattson, *Why I Don't Call Myself Gay: How I Reclaimed My Sexual Reality and Found Peace* (Ignatius Press)

Why would someone with homosexual inclinations not call himself "gay"? After all, our popular culture practically screams for him to do so. The Supreme Court even offers to bless his "union" with another man. It seems he has nothing to lose and everything to gain by "coming out." But with author Daniel Mattson, there is something even stranger here than his refusal to call himself "gay." He once did consider himself "gay" and lived the "lifestyle," but then threw it over for something better – a chaste life as a single Catholic man. One could hardly imagine a more unpardonable offense in the face of today's Zeitgeist than to renounce "sexual freedom" for the sake of freedom in Christ.

Why did he do it – especially in light of the social rejection and splenetic invective he will inevitably receive as a result? The short answer is the profound unhappiness he experienced in trying to live out the homosexual fantasy. Of course, there are all kinds of unhappiness, but the greatest is caused by sin. The guilt from sin often drives a person to repentance and thus to a restored relationship with God, the true source of happiness. In a nutshell, this is what happened to Mattson, who had spent a good part of his life being angry at God. It was not an easy journey.

His book is a searing spiritual autobiography in which he lays his soul bare. He does not flinch in examining the evil into which he fell, the rationalizations that he gave himself for it, and the agony it caused him. This book is particularly

invaluable because it comes from within the homosexual experience and reveals it for what it is. The book's honesty is almost frightening. It's as if we are eavesdropping on the most intimate and thorough confession, the experience of which makes the absolution he eventually receives all the more moving.

In fact, well before reading this book, I saw Mattson in the 2014 documentary *Desire of the Everlasting Hills* (<https://everlastinghills.org/>), in which he and several others with homosexual or lesbian tendencies tell the stories of how they lived active homosexual or lesbian lives, but then eventually returned to the Church. This film is the most powerful advertisement for Confession that I have ever seen. The restorative power of God's overwhelming mercy is seen in the tears streaming down their faces. They are beneficiaries of it, and that is the story they want to tell.

This is why Mattson has written this book. He was willing to expose mercilessly the torment in his soul in order to show us God's mercy to him—with the intention of drawing others into Divine Love, for which he has become an apostle. As he states toward the end of the book, "I want to help people see the face of Jesus." He wants others to know that they too can be forgiven and are called to a higher love. The palpable joy Mattson expresses on his return to Holy Communion will bring tears to the reader's eyes. Who would not wish to share in such joy? This is what makes the book so compelling.

The problem, however, is how to continue living this way, particularly in today's culture. This is hardly a struggle only for those with homosexual inclinations (*everyone* has disordered desires of some sort), but it can be particularly acute for them. Consider the analogy of an alcoholic trying to achieve sobriety during a perpetual Happy Hour. With a great deal of spiritual perspicacity and practical wisdom, the latter half of the book addresses the problem of living chastely in a sexually depraved culture. As Mattson points

out, for those with homosexual inclinations, the indispensable Catholic spiritual support group is Courage, which produced *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*.

While a good deal of the book is personal testimony and Christian witness, Mattson does not neglect what reason can tell us about reality in general and the purpose of our sexual powers specifically. In fact, these philosophical reflections played a role in his recovery. Central to these considerations is the role of nature.

One of the critiques of Mattson's book posted on Amazon comes from someone who appears to be a parent of a homosexual. She counsels: "Hey everyone, did you know there are gay swans— it is just a part of nature, that's all." I wonder if she would be as accepting if her child had cancer: "Hey everyone, you know there are cancerous cells—it is just part of nature, that's all." Somehow, I don't think so. Most likely she would object to the cancerous cells because they are killing her child and seek their removal. Why would she be able to see the danger in the one, but not in the other? Mattson addresses this important question in his chapter titled "What Does the Word 'Disorder-ed' Mean Anyway?" In it, he proves to be a good Aristotelian. It is worth spending some time on what constitutes order, so we can understand how we know what is disordered.

Aristotle said that "what is" operates according to the laws of nature. What are these laws? Aristotle taught that the essence or nature of a thing is what makes it what it is, and why it is not, and cannot be, something else. In *The Politics*, he said that "the 'nature' of things consists in their end or consummation; for what each thing is when its growth is completed we call the nature of that thing, whether it be a man or a horse or a family." For example, as an acorn develops into an oak tree, there is no point along its trajectory of growth that it will turn into something other than an oak. That is because it has the "nature" of an oak tree and not of

anything else. Hence, by nature or natural law, Aristotle meant the principle of development which makes any living thing what it is and, given the proper conditions, what it will become when it reaches its fulfillment. This end state is its telos, the reason for which it is. The telos of the acorn is a fully mature oak tree. The natural law for each thing is what allows us to speak of what it “ought” to be.

This means that what is “good” for a thing are those things or actions that assist it in reaching its perfection. Likewise, those things that inhibit or prevent something from reaching its end are “bad” for it, as drought or poisoned soil would be “bad” for an acorn. In each case, Aristotle would refer to the good things for the growth of the oak tree as *natural* to it, and the bad things for its growth as *unnatural* to it. What is good or natural for something is, therefore, intrinsic to that thing, internal to and inseparable from it. This is how we know that cancer is bad for human beings. Cancer may indeed happen but it is not natural to the body.

How does this relate to homosexual acts and the “gay swan” theory? Man is the only creature that has conscious knowledge of the end for which he is made. He alone has the ability to choose between those acts or things which are conducive to his end and those things which are not. Only man can act in defiance of his nature.

While man can come to know what is good or evil, he does not have the prerogative to determine what is good or evil. “Oughtness” is already in the given nature of things. Therefore, man is morally obliged to choose the good that will bring about what “ought” to be. Otherwise, he will become less than fully human and what he “ought” *not* to be—even something worse than a beast, as Aristotle warned.

Because we know what a human being is in the fullest, we can understand what a privation is. For example, we can know with certainty that 20/20 vision is the best for the eye and

blindness the worst. In respect to a man's sexual powers, which are unitive and generative *by nature*, the one whose state is best would be a man as husband and father, just as for a woman it would be as wife and mother. This is how we know that homosexual inclinations are privations and that homosexual acts are *disorders*. It is not a matter of "who says." Homosexual acts cannot actualize sexual potential because they can be neither unitive nor procreative. As Mattson came to realize, homosexual inclinations are not part of what a human being is in his essence. A privation of the good cannot itself be good. In fact, as St. Augustine said, evil is a privation of the good. This is where the "gay swan" argument falls apart.

When Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, announced in 2014 that, "I'm proud to be gay, and I consider being gay among the greatest gifts God has given me," he substituted a privation of the good for the good itself. This is a metaphysical travesty. Unless blindness is the same as sight, one cannot say that the disposition to use sexual organs in ways unfit for either generation or union is the same as, or even superior to, their use for generation and/or union.

Mattson sets this sort of argument forth ably and does not flinch from its application. He writes: "I realize I live with a sexual *disorientation*, which is the lack of something within me that should be present." He embraces the description in the *Catholic Catechism* of homosexual acts as "objectively disordered." In a recent interview with the *National Catholic Register*, Mattson said, "For me, that language is vitally important for my moral safety. I need those hard words for a safety measure for me and my soul. Thanks be to God that the Catholic Church says to me that to behave in a sexual manner with another man is intrinsically disordered. They respect me enough and have enough compassion for me to tell me the truth..."

Mattson knows that the full truth of man is contained only in

Christ, including in his Suffering. For our own salvation, we are called to participate in that Suffering—partly through our own times of loneliness. Mattson advises, “When they come, though they may chafe against us, the answer is to embrace them as Christ embraced the Cross, and offer them for the salvation of those whom we love.”

Our society is suffused with rationalizations for sexual disorders of all kinds. Mattson’s self-examination explodes them with spiritual realism of high-intensity. He has emerged from the darkness through which he has traveled bearing gifts. I cannot imagine a greater one than this book he offers us.

Robert R. Reilly served in the White House under President Reagan and was director of the Voice of America; he also taught at the National Defense University. He is the author of several books, including Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior is Changing Everything and The Closing of the Muslim Mind. He has also published many articles on classical music.