

Influence of the catholic religion on the acceptance of sexual orientation: a case history

Abstract

The influence of the Catholic Church in present-day Guatemala, among other reasons, leads to rejection towards certain groups of people, such as homosexuals. Acceptance of one's sexual orientation is often affected by religion due to the doctrine that the Church has taught and proclaimed. The Catholic religion excludes any loving and sexual contact between people of the same sex, so individuals, especially during adolescence, often experience a series of psychological problems that are mostly a result of fear of rejection. However, there has been a change in this matter nowadays, as Pope Francis, the leader of the Catholic Church, has proclaimed peace and shown support for the LGBT community. This research identifies the influence of the Catholic religion on the acceptance of a homosexual teenager's sexual orientation within their family. The approach was qualitative, with a narrative design, and the technique used was a case study. Three interviews were conducted: one with the teenager, another with their mother, and the last one with their grandmother. After obtaining the information, it was analyzed and organized chronologically, combining the information from the three participants.

Keywords: homosexuality, family, teenager, LGBTQ

Volume 13 Issue 1 - 2025

Franklin José Pereira Quiñonez

Psychology, Rafael Landívar University, Guatemala

Correspondence: Franklin José Pereira Quiñonez Tenth semester undergraduate student in Psychology Universidad Rafael Landívar, Antigua, Guatemala

Received: March 5, 2025 | **Published:** March 18, 2025

“Homosexual people have a right to be in a family. They are children of God and have a right to a family. No one should be cast out or feel miserable because of it.”

Introduction

Guatemala is a country rich in culture and traditions, where the predominant religion is Catholic, however, new generations tend to believe in God, but not in specific, religion this can be related to the norms imposed by religion and discrimination, especially to the LGBTQ community. Often, the distinction becomes blurred and the message many Catholics hear is simply that being gay is a sin. This generates condemnation of many LGBTQ people in faith communities and has caused some to exercise discretion during religious activities. There is no constitutional prohibition regarding civil unions or same-sex, however, it is unlikely that a bill will be passed, which could allow same-sex couples to have the same right as heterosexual couples to access civil unions or marriage, in order to raise awareness among homophobic people as both civil and religious authorities initiate a gender equality project marriage.

Several researches carried out in Latin America describe the crisis of religion due to the constant rejection of homosexual practitioners and how this community is affected, so that its members abandon this practice in order to 'self-realize' and avoid the burden of conscience. In this regard, Moral¹ shows statistical data from an international framework, where there are fewer young Catholics and more people with no religion. The conclusion of this author is that homosexuals without religion tend to be more liberal since they do not have to abide by certain mandates and stereotypes. An important part of the religion that supports the Christian homophobic mentality is found in different books of the so-called Holy Catholic Bible, which are used by homophobes to support this attitude, based on passages such as the one in the book of Corinthians (6:9-10):

Know yet not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor

drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

This paper deals with the influence of the Catholic religion on the acceptance of the sexual orientation of a homosexual adolescent believer within his family. It mainly identifies those general aspects that the church transmits to its parishioners, which influence the psychological and emotional aspects of homosexual youth. It is important to highlight that the Catholic Church has evolved and changed certain doctrines over the years, thanks to this, many LGBTQ people have taken up this doctrine. Pope Francis as leader of the Catholic Church, in 2013 emphasizes the importance of accepting people without judging their orientation. The mission of peace that the Pope promulgates is to unite all peoples, races, colors, religions no matter, they are all human beings which makes them children of God. This news has generated controversy around the world, because many people do not accept the new changes and are accustomed to the old doctrine founded by the apostles of Christ.

Context and perspective of the Catholic Church

In Guatemala, the Catholic religion predominates, due to a historical process that dates back to the Spanish conquest of indigenous lands. However, it coexists with ancestral customs. This has produced a process of religious syncretism in which people "find themselves immersed within indigenous groups that, in many cases, practice pre-Hispanic" cults.³ The same authors mention that this has different aspects, including that many traditions generate tourism.

In the department of Sacatepéquez, the Catholic religion is full of traditions and customs derived from Catholicism, in turn, is one of the most developed departments and with other thoughts due to tourism and the high demand that this entails, mainly La Antigua Guatemala. The young people Antigua Guatemala have been raised with a very deep towards the Catholic Church, so the families intend to follow such teachings to the new generations. However, the current population has become much more liberated than some years ago, which has caused more conflict from young people towards their parents or grandparents, who are the people who have been responsible

for bringing Christ to the home and comply with the teachings that the church dictates fervor and faith

From its own criteria, the Catholic religion seeks to understand the presence of God in the life of the human being, transmitting its doctrine and fulfilling the commandments that, it considers, God has given to humanity. A central aspect is the so-called 'coming of Jesus' and his life, passion, death, resurrection himself and ascension to heaven. The apostles continue his doctrine and Peter is the first successor of Christ earth, according to the interpretation of different passages, including Matthew (16:19)⁴ "And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven". With this doctrine, Christianity begins its path of evangelizing and taking the word to the whole world.

According to the ecclesial vision itself, Catholic religion is much more than a doctrine: it is understanding the scriptures, putting them into practice and believing in a more powerful being, Przywara⁵ refers that "Religion in the background is not so much creaturely feeling before God, but awareness of God in me and me in God, as the original character of the creature" (p.89).

Regarding the vision of couple relationships, for the church there is no other family that is not conformed by man and woman. This according to the interpretation of some passages such as Genesis (2:24)⁶ "Therefore shall leave a man his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be flesh". This quote is important, because it begins every marriage alliance and serves to justify that no homosexual couple can marry under the blessing of the Catholic Church in any country. Dominguez⁷ points out that "it is an agreement by virtue of which a man and a woman contract marriage, generating correlative rights and duties for the spouses" (p.1). From this perspective, the Christian family has the obligation to promote the values and duties that must be fulfilled before society, its spiritual growth and service to God. This has implied the rejection of the union between two men or two women. It is interpreted as an attitude contrary to the Christian teachings and laws of becoming a family.

Homosexuality

A clear and understandable definition of homosexuality is presented by Ardila⁸, who refers to "homosexuality as people whose primary affective-erotic attractions are with people of the same gender" (p.26). In the third decade of the 21st century, homosexuality is quite common and present, since different groups and activists have fought for the rights of these people who, leaving aside their orientation, are human beings and have the same dignity and rights. However, for homosexual people, the process of accepting their homosexuality is problematic and 'coming out of the closet'. This moment in life of a homosexual is the most difficult and has no time defined for it. It can happen at any stage of development, so the difficulties presented each person vary according to the stage and their environment, among other variables. González, et al.,⁹ define the main factors that influence acceptance:

Rejection from family, friends, schoolmates, co-workers and some religious people are difficulties that homosexuals, sometimes suffer which can make the process of accepting homosexual sexual orientation complex and difficult (para. 13).

It is also understood that many homosexuals try to change their lives and refuse to accept their reality for fear of rejection and what they have observed in other people: "many homosexuals try to pass

for heterosexuals, follow the norms and customs of heterosexual society and live a double life or a false life".¹⁰ A consequence of this is that they will live unhappy for the rest of their lives until they reach acceptance.

In addition, there is another problem. There is a social attitude of rejection towards homosexuality. This attitude is called homophobia, Sierra¹¹ considers that homophobia "represents a problem that reincarnates and exemplifies the predominance of male, power as well as the ingrained heterosexist in our society" (p.9). Social values, including those generated by religions, cause this problem and homosexuality is often seen as a crime, a disease, a sin, among other labels that have been placed on this orientation. And, ultimately, it is the cause of much harm, suicides or homicides. Rejection turns into death, even in violent and brutal ways also because of the mockery and abandonment of the families, who do not accept their children and hate them to point of running them out of the house.¹¹

Material and method

The research had a qualitative approach, because it oriented the subject as a process, involving personal development, upbringing, society, feelings and expressions that are difficult to measure or quantify. The design was narrative to analyze the stories and experiences about events of one or several people, considering a chronological perspective. It was also analyzed from a constructivist paradigm, due to the fact that reality is apprehensible in the form of multiple and intangible mental and social constructs, which are constructed through experience, with a local and specific nature, which depend on people and groups to take their form and content.¹² The scope was descriptive. The technique used was a case study and the instrument was an in-depth interview applied to 3 people: the adolescent, the mother and the grandmother. The mother and grandmother were chosen because they are the people closest to the adolescent and with whom he lives the most. The interviews were conducted individually and in person.

Ethical aspects

An informed consent form was specifically addressed to the participants of the interview, explaining the objective of the research, the confidentiality of the handling of the information provided, the voluntariness and the fact that there is no obligation to answer all the questions of the instrument.

Results

The persons interviewed were JC, an 18-year-old male who identifies as homosexual were also the mother and interviewed grandmother, who are in an age range between 40-65 years old respectively. Both indicated that they knew the history and process of their son/grandson, which contributed to this research diverse views on the same situation. The influence of the Catholic religion is notorious, the family has grown up surrounded by the traditions, faith and customs that their ancestors have instilled in them "I remember that since I was a little boy they always took me to mass and to holy, hours at first it made me sleepy, but little by little I grew fond of " it (interview 1). Following his doctrine is an essential part of the family norms, from baptism at an early age and the subsequent sacraments: "I baptized him, because my mom always told me that it was time to make him a son of God, he was about 4 months old" (interview 2).

First communion and confirmation, which, according to church rules, must be fulfilled in order to be in harmony with God, attracted JC. "s attention I remember that he always told me that he wanted

to go to communion, but I told him that he was going to make his first communion “soon (interview 3). His whole childhood was very focused on keeping the commandments and growing up as a good child of God. Within this perspective, the family is an important point within religion, so being united and constantly participating in religious activities is important to grow together faith “even though my husband is not Catholic, we have always taught them the importance of being right with God” (interview 3). Growing up in a religious environment and studying in a Catholic school had influence a great in attracting the attention participant’s and in continuing to persevere in the practice and knowledge of their faith: “I remember that I always got 100 in religion “class (interview 1). It is important to emphasize that religious people who consider themselves to carry the word of God, always refer that there is a place for sinners, which has been called hell. “I always them not to do anything bad because otherwise they will go to hell” (interview 3). This is a very vital issue religion, since any person who does not comply with the sacred laws will have an eternal. Punishment. The concept of hell, as a place where everyone fears to go, after this life has had a great influence on JC, ‘s life since in his catechesis and in countless talks by priests and ministers, they have talked about a topic that is central to his identity: homosexuality. He I think I started to realize that I was attracted to men when I was about 13 years old,” said (interview 1). From this age, conflicts between their tastes and their religion begin.

The development of the human being and the inquiry into what attracts him, begins mainly in adolescence and this is exactly what happens in JC’s life, since he fearfully begins to seek information regarding the issues of homosexuality, beginning to fear that what he was going through was only the work of the devil “I remember that when I had thoughts like that, I only asked God to help me not to have them, because I knew it was something bad” (interview 1). However, the family begins to notice certain gestures and expressions of JC, which makes them realize that he was different from other young people. “I always thought he was different from the others, and he said it that way because he was afraid to say the word gay” (interview 2).

During his development, process JC comes to the conclusion that he is definitely attracted men and not women. He experiences this as a labyrinth, he in which does not know what to do. Everything he has been taught at home and in church is called into question, as he does not follow it to the letter. Confronting his thoughts caused JC psychological effects that damaged much of his self-esteem and self- image. “I didn’t even want to comb my hair, anymore because I thought it made me more feminine than the rest of the men, just like having girlfriends and playing things like the league” (interview 1).

In general, JC entered into a contradictory process, since he denied his reality and did not have the support of his family to be oriented in this matter. The guilt became greater, to such a degree that it led him to try to have a girlfriend, in order to experiment and thus forget those homosexual thoughts “when I had a girlfriend I felt pretty good, because I knew that I was pleasing my family and God and they were not going to judge me for being different” (interview 1). This experience lasted for two months, because JC could not sleep for many nights, as he thought about a man he was very attracted to and could not stop thinking about him. That is why he broke up with his girlfriend: “I had to leave her, because I knew I was not doing her any good and she was hurting me more” (interview 1).

Depression and anxiety accompanied JC for several months. He constantly believed that he should die before becoming homosexual. The fear of being judged by his family, society and God did not help in his acceptance process. When he reached the age of 15, one afternoon

in August, JC accepted that he was in fact homosexual, he took the courage to talk to his mother and tell her the truth. His mother did not react as he him expected, because she threw him out of the house: “I didn’t know what to say or think, I closed myself off and told him to go to my mother’s, house so that could she correct him and straighten out” (interview 2). Upon arriving at his grandmother’, s house JC decided to come clean with her and explain everything he had been through. He knew he was taking a risk talking about it with someone who had instilled religion, but in this case, the reaction was different. She accepted him and urged him to continue being who he in him really was and not to let himself be carried away what people say or what his mother had told, because him God is a God of love and does not judge anyone. “I remember that day I cried a lot and I asked God to give me the words right, because my baby was very bad and I didn’t care what he is, really since he will be always my grandson and I love him” (interview 3).

During his process, JC tried to talk to his mother and father, who were totally intolerant of talking to him. This continued until the day the grandmother talked to the mother and made her analyze everything that was happening and the century they in, which was no longer the same as 30 years, “everything has changed and must be changed with time too, I do not know the truth because I had closed myself off so much when he talked to me, but my mom me a go to see things well and ask my son for forgiveness” (interview 2).

The acceptance process for JC was quite difficult. He tried to hide it out fear of God and his family. In fact, to this day it has been a topic that causes discomfort and anger for some members of his family such as his father and maternal grandfather. He reports that he is accepted by them, but they try not to touch the subject, since they are not very flexible about it, “my dad usually looks at me funny when my friends come to the house, he always thinks that I am a boyfriend of one of them and tries not to socialize” (interview 1). He currently attends church and continues to practice his faith and traditions like any other Catholic, keeping in mind that religion is just a way of seeking God and knowing Him. But this does not imply a certain denial on certain issues that in the long run cause conflicts, separations and guilt in people. JC responds to the question “What is the main cause of the influence of the Catholic religion in the acceptance sexual? I think it is the lack of orientation updating the church, the closing of having to be one in way order to be right with God, I think it is more focused on being like being human wants us to be to fit into society and not with God” (interview 1).

Discussion

The religion Catholic is a factor that hinders the process of acceptance sexual. It produces orientation stress and conflict, given the attitude and amount of negative information that imply certain norms and doctrines. In some cases, it can lead to suicidal thoughts or to having a partner of the opposite sex in order to hide it from the family and society as in the case of JC, according to Moreno, et al.,¹³ there are attitudes in situations of offense, such as passivity, aggressiveness and pro social responses. In JC’s case, there is a passive attitude, since she conforms to and accepts the offense received by her family. As she came to understand the situation JC was going through, she responded to the pro social situation; this was aimed at confronting the conflict and solving it assertively, giving priority to positive feelings and the importance of expressing the situation correctly in order to express and repair the offense committed.¹⁴ The doctrine of the Catholic Church over the years has evolved along with different aspects social and cultural ;these include abortion, gender and diversity the value of women

However, in JC's family the ancient, cultures and teachings still prevail, they have used the holy scriptures (The Holy Bible) as support to point out the "sin" that JC was committing, based on 1 Corinthians (6:9-10)² "neither the unrighteous, nor the effeminate, nor fornicators shall inherit the kingdom of God". This verse is not at all described to point out or judge homosexual people, since judging the neighbor is taken as a sin even more serious according to Romans (2:1)¹⁵ "man you who judge, whoever you are, why judge the other, you condemn and yourself you who judge do the same". To defend a position using the Holy Scriptures as a convenience is nothing more than a person in need of self-concept and self-esteem according to Pope Francis in his recent documentary (Amen, the Pope responds).

JC's coming out of the closet was affected by the negative thoughts that his family had placed on him regarding what it is to be "a man and a woman"; the moment JC discovers that he does not comply with these beliefs and expectations, he begins to doubt his existence. According to Vitaliti, et al.,¹⁶ he has thus begun his heterosexist mourning process, which each homosexual goes through differently depending on the cultural, social and religious context in which he finds himself. In this case, exclusion by family members, discrimination and self-abuse were present and he did not receive the necessary professional support.

However, JC had a support network that is necessary for this type of grief, according to Arias¹⁷ support networks are the sets of relationships that integrate a person in his family and social environment, with which he establishes solidarity and communication links in order to solve specific needs such as coming out of the closet. These support networks are necessary in the life of every human, being, if they are not available or are not clear, they could have repercussions on the actions of the affected person. In JC's case, he located his grandmother as one of these, as well as his close friends, who knew the situation he was going through, and who also influenced the confrontation with his parents. JC received mercy and forgiveness from his parents and close relatives who were against his situation, according to research that reconciliation goes in hand with forgiveness, especially in gender diversity and religiosity.¹⁸

Conclusion

With this work it is evident that the Catholic religion has a great influence on the acceptance of the orientation sexual of a homosexual adolescent believer, due to the norms and rules that the church has imposed calling it 'sin', thus creating a barrier between beliefs and identity. Society follows these doctrines and judges people who do not them fully. Comply with This influences the acceptance of homosexuality, due to the fear of being judged and rejected by family, friends and community church. In addition, it became evident that the main cause of the influence of the Catholic religion on the acceptance of the sexual orientation of a believing homosexual adolescent is the fear of being rejected by the religious community and by God. The idea of a punishment upon leaving this world (hell) is very strong, as the church constantly promulgates that there is a special place in hell for all these people. The psychological effects religion on the acceptance of the sexual of orientation a homosexual adolescent believer include depression (due to the sadness of not being able to be who he/she really is), anxiety (due to constant worries and fear of being rejected by people close to him/her) and social isolation (lack of contacts for fear of being discovered and judged by other people). Conflicts between beliefs and identity are evident in the process of

acceptance of homosexuality, mainly within a Catholic Christian family, since it has a traditional doctrine, which does not fit in with the freedom of expression that currently exists in society Guatemalan

Acknowledgments

This research was carried out thanks to the support and guidance in the process of Mgtr. Lizeth Sanchez, to the University Rafael Landivar for the Ignatian values instilled, University of San Carlos de Guatemala that contributed to the publication of this article and especially to JC and family for the availability and trust placed in the researcher.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

References

1. Moral J. Religion, meanings and attitudes towards sexuality: a psychosocial approach. *Revista colombiana de psicología*. 2010;19(1):45–59.
2. DSPACE Corinthians. *The Holy Bible*. Vulgate Version and the Spanish translation of the Reina version Valera. 1995;6:9–10.
3. Rosas L, Propin E. Religious tourism in the Basilica of the Black Christ of Esquipulas, Guatemala. *The periplo sustainable*. 2017;33:394–427.
4. Matthew. *The Holy Bible*. Vulgate version and the Spanish translation of the Reina Valera version. 1995;16:19.
5. Przywara E. *Philosophy of religion of catholic theology*. Editorial Universidad Alberto Hurtado. 2012.
6. Genesis. *The Holy Bible*. Vulgate version and the Spanish translation of the Reina Valera version. 1995;2:24.
7. Domínguez G. On Christian family. *Red de Revistas Científicas de América Latina*. 1998:125–129.
8. Ardila R. *Homosexuality and psychology*. Dykinson. 2014.
9. González J, Toro J. The Meaning of the Experience of Acceptance of Sexual Orientation Homosexual from the Memory of a Group of Puerto Rican Adult Men. *Eureka*. 2012;9(2):158–170.
10. Ardila R. *Homosexuality and psychology*. Manual Moderno. 1998.
11. Sierra S. *Homophobia and masculinity*. El cotidiano. 2002.
12. Ramos C. The paradigms of scientific research. *Advances in Psychology*. 2015;23(1):9–17.
13. Moreno J E, Pereyra M. *Questionnaire of Attitudes towards Situations of Aggravation*. Entre Ríos. 2000.
14. Vargas J. Perception of the socio-familial climate and attitudes towards situations of Aggravation Late Adolescence. *Interdisciplinary*. 2009;26(2):289–316.
15. Romans. *The Holy Bible*. Vulgate version and the Spanish translation of the Reina Valera version. 1995;2:1.
16. Vitaliti J, Onofrio R. *Coming out of the closet: The acceptance of the encounter with one*. Argentine Association of Mental Health. 2011.
17. Arias C. *Social support network and psychological well-being in older persons*. 2015.
18. Sheldon P, Honeycutt J. Impact of gender and religiosity on forgiving communication. *Journal of Communication and Religion*. 2011;34(1):59–74.