

# **Assessing the Ministry to Catholic LGBTQ Youth: A Proposal for Catholic Youth Ministers to Provide Pedagogical Support and Pastoral Strategies**

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## **Abstract**

This article assesses and addresses the lack of ministry presence to Catholic LGBTQ adolescents in Catholic youth ministry community in the United States. The paper has two aims in mind. The first aim is to examine LGBTQ youth pastoral issues in the context of Catholic youth ministry and is written from both a descriptive (theological and theoretical) perspective. The second aim is to promote a positive understanding about LGBTQ adolescents and to provide five pragmatic strategies that can be easily implemented by those who work with Catholic teenagers in parish youth ministry and campus ministry, and is written from a prescriptive (pedagogical and pastoral) approach.

*“How can we proclaim Christ to a generation that is changing? We must be careful not to administer a vaccine against faith to them.” “If someone is gay and seeks the Lord with good will, who am I to judge?” “I remember the case of a very sad little girl who finally confided to her teacher the reason for her state of mind: ‘My mother’s girlfriend doesn’t like me.’”*

Pope Francis I

Conversation on route to World Youth Day

July 29, 2013, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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## INTRODUCTION

Pope Francis' remarks above direct attention to some difficult and virtually un-discussed concerns about the way Catholic Church is to minister to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) youth. These concerns range from serious theological disagreements about ecclesial teachings to ignorance among youth ministers about the situations that these adolescents face; to fear, shame and hostility in parents of these teenagers. The purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to elaborate on the ministerial complications in this area and (2) to propose a model for youth ministry that addresses LGBTQ issues and concerns that might be integrated into youth ministry programs or curriculums.

My foundation for this article is that practical theology involves youth ministry. Practical theology that caters to and serves the lives of adolescents is youth ministry. Dean Borgman (2013) notes, "The goal of practical theology is transformation: individual and corporate, subjective and objective, dramatic or subtle."<sup>1</sup> Youth ministry, too, is transformative. Youth ministry also involves reflection and action, which makes it under the auspices of practical theology. In particular, this article will address the ministry to Catholic LGBTQ youth. The question of ministering to Catholic LGBTQ youth is both a practical theological matter as well as a youth ministry dilemma that merits serious attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Borgman, *Foundations for Youth Ministry: Theological Engagement with Teen Life and Culture, Second Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2013, 68-69.

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Currently, mainline Christianity ministers to LGBTQ youth as likened to ministering to teenagers with eyes wide shut. This article addresses the ministerial presence (or lack thereof) to Catholic LGBTQ youth, particularly to adolescents in high school, ages 14-18. The overwhelming majority of Catholic youth ministries in the United States does not cater to, actively attract, or tolerate LGBTQ youth. The premise of this article is that the Catholic Church in general and youth ministry in particular could be and should be doing more to reach out and minister to LGBTQ youth. Catholic LGBTQ youth need a place in the church to be accepted, their gifts empowered, their faith and spirituality nurtured, and their sexuality supported.

Therefore, this essay is an invitation for U.S. Catholic Bishops, Catholic pastors, and Catholic youth ministers: (1) to be more hospitable, gracious, and open-minded with the LGBTQ community in general, and with the LGBTQ youth community in particular and (2) to have LGBTQ Catholics present at the table for dialogue and critique about the lack of advocacy and pastoral care in Catholic youth ministry. This essay attempts to encourage Christian youth ministers—either middle school or high school adolescents--“to minister *to, with, by and for*” LGBTQ young people as so beautifully articulated in the U.S. Department of [Catholic] Education document *A Vision of Youth Ministry*.<sup>2</sup> Although this author writes from a Catholic perspective, this

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<sup>2</sup> Department of [Catholic] Education, *A Vision of Youth Ministry*, (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference), 1976, 6-7.

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study has ecumenical implications and attempts to genuinely foster an atmosphere that fruitfully ministers to the needs of all Christian LGBTQ youth.

Typically, the topic, discussion, and rhetoric surrounding sexual minorities and the Catholic Church centers around three camps of theological thought: (1) **traditional/conservative**, which are those theologians which adhere to the Magisterium's position on homosexual acts with little or no pastoral concern for the LGBTQ person; (2) **mediating/moderate**, which are those theologians who do not challenge magisterial teaching on homosexual acts, but place a greater emphasis on the pastoral ramifications for the LGBTQ person; and (3) **revisionist/progressive**, which are those theologians which openly challenge the magisterial teaching on LGBTQ persons.<sup>3</sup> This paper is written from a revisionist perspective in so far as it tries to provide pedagogical methodology that is not *status quo* ministerial-oriented as well as being open-minded to the LGBTQ youth. This author maintains that all Catholic people, especially LGBTQ youth, share in the same Catholic identity and dignity as heterosexual Catholics, which is shared by virtue of baptism and nourished at the Eucharistic table.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Maher and Linda M. Sever, "What Educators in Catholic Schools Might Expect When Addressing Gay and Lesbian Issues: A Study of Needs and Barriers," *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, 4:3, (2007), 79-111 (82).

<sup>4</sup> Gerald D. Coleman, *Homosexuality: Catholic Teaching and Pastoral Practice*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press), 1996, 110.

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The paper is divided into two parts: (1) the descriptive, which is theological and theoretical in nature and (2) the prescriptive, which is pastoral and the pedagogical in scope. The paper begins with a brief discussion of the theological and moral conundrum facing ministry to LGBTQ youth and the failures of ecclesial documents to address the quandary. Afterwards the article sketches out some concrete pastoral practices that easily could be incorporated into a parish youth ministry as part of its comprehensive curriculum. Before getting into the core of this essay, it may be worthwhile to review some terminology that pertains to the LGBTQ community.

### **Defining the Terminology**

It may seem a bit simplistic for the readers of this journal; however, it is beneficial for a Catholic audience and for Catholic youth ministers who are reading this journal (some for the first time) to learn the basic terminology for this study. The language will also give a general Catholic audience common ground to speak from as well as and the proper understanding of the terminology, which can be incorporated into future Catholic documents.

LGBT refers to individuals who consider themselves as either lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Adolescents who claim the LGBT sexual status are considered “sexual minority teenagers” by the American Academy of Pediatrics.<sup>5</sup> In recent

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<sup>5</sup> David A. Levine, “Office-Based Care for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Youth,” *Pediatrics*, 132:1, (2013), 198-203 (198-199).

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literature surrounding LGBT youth, the letter “Q” has been added to young people who refers to the word “questioning,” and can be added at times to the acronym LGBT to read LGBTQ. Questioning refers to an adolescent who is still discerning their sexual orientation and/or struggling with their sexual identity.

*Sexual orientation.* According to the American Psychological Association, the sexual orientation of a person is an enduring individual pattern of emotional, romantic, and physical (sexual) arousal and attraction to persons of the opposite gender or sex, the same gender or sex, or to either genders or more than one sex.<sup>6</sup> These sexual attractions towards other human beings are generally categorized under heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality, although the category asexuality does exist, which is the lack of romantic or physical attraction towards others.

*Lesbian youth.* A lesbian youth is an adolescent female who self-identifies herself as a person who has sexual tendencies, overtures, and attraction to other females and woman. Although an adolescent female may self-report being a lesbian, she will still occasionally have sex with males, because with teenagers sexual behavior does not necessarily equal sexual identity.<sup>7</sup>

*Gay youth.* A gay youth is an adolescent male who self-categorizes himself as a person who has sexual tendencies, overtures, and attraction to other males and men.

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<sup>6</sup> American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association) 2008, 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Levine, 2013, 199.

Similar to lesbian youth, a gay adolescent male may self-recognize being gay, but he may sporadically engage in sex with females, for the reason that sexual conduct is not tantamount to sexual distinctiveness.<sup>8</sup>

*Bisexual youth.* These are teenagers who self-identify their romantic and physical attraction, and emotional and/or spiritual intimacy to people of both sexes and genders.<sup>9</sup>

*Transgender youth.* Young people who describe themselves as transgender are those persons who exhibit “gender-nonconforming” characteristics and actions (transsexuals, cross-dressers, and gender “blenders” – purposeful ambiguous gender expression), that is, those individuals who transcend their typical gender paradigms.<sup>10</sup> Many transsexual persons are in transition—either from hormone therapy and/or cosmetic surgery—to live in a gender role of choice, but have not undergone Sexual Reassignment Surgery.<sup>11</sup>

*Queer.* This was once a derogatory term used by heterosexuals; today, the term has become increasingly popular with LGBTQ youth as an empowering term that is consciously used as a way of reclaiming their uniqueness and power as outsiders and as sexual minorities. Sometimes the term *queer* is associated with transgender persons.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Levine, 2013, 199.

<sup>9</sup> Michael J. Bayly, *Creating Environments for LGBT Students: A Catholic Schools Perspectives*, (New York, NY: Harrington Park Press), 2007, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Arnold H. Grossman, and Anthony R. D’Augelli, “Transgender Youth: Invisible and Vulnerable,” *Journal of Homosexuality*, 51:1, (2006), 111-128 (112).

<sup>11</sup> Bayly, 2007, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Bayly, 2007, 20.

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Knowing these terms and the ways they are expressed is helpful to guide the conversation about LGBTQ youth and it is important for Catholic youth ministers to learn and feel comfortable using these terms.

## **PART ONE: THE THEOLOGICAL QUANDARY AND MORAL CONUNDRUM**

This section is descriptive in scope and scrutinizes the theological and theoretical aspects of Catholic teachings on homosexuality and the obfuscation and misunderstanding a pastoral plan with LGBTQ youth. The Catholic Church has not directly written anything concerning LGBTQ youth in its documents on youth ministry; therefore, this part investigates that peculiar phenomenon. The Catholic Church has written two specific documents (addressed below) on the “pastoral care” of persons of homosexual inclination, but they leave much to be desired. Nevertheless, traditional Catholic teaching on homosexuality is warranted.

### **Traditional Christian Teaching on Sexuality and Homosexuality**

The church teaching on the subject is clear. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: (1) all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, known as *imago Dei* (n. 299); (2) love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being (n. 2392); (3) all human beings deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, which

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upholds their innate integrity (no. 2284-2317); (4) sexuality is a gift that is ordered toward conjugal love (n. 2360); (5) sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul; (6) homosexuality refers to relations between men or women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction towards persons of the same sex (n. 2357); and (7) all Christians are called to various forms of chastity and to re-main chaste outside of matrimony (n. 2348).<sup>13</sup> These points represent a rudimentary understanding of the church's teaching on human sexuality and homosexuality.

There is nothing unclear about these ecclesial doctrines. The theological quandary and the messy part for practical theology and pastoral ministry are statements such as this: "Basing itself on sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of *grave depravity*, tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are *intrinsically disordered*. They are contrary to the natural law."<sup>14</sup> Wording such as "intrinsically disordered" tends to be divisive instead of binding, and it is offensive and alarming for homosexual persons. Besides being extremely un-pastoral, the phrase "intrinsically disordered," which applies to the homosexual genital acts, can easily be misconstrued by thinking that the message is that all homosexual people are

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<sup>13</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition*, (Hereafter CCC; Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana), 1997, article numbers 299, 2392, 2284-2317, 2360, 2357, 2348.

<sup>14</sup> CCC, n. 2357.

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intrinsically disordered people, which is slippery slope.<sup>15</sup> As Catholic moral theologian Stephen J. Pope notes, “The Magisterium’s message about gay sexual orientation is powerfully stigmatizing and dehumanizing.”<sup>16</sup> The wording utilized by the Magisterium presents a theological quandary for pastoral ministry. Moreover, describing a person’s sexuality as “gravely disordered” would seem to only stimulate suspicion, provoke mistrust, and cause alienation by LGBTQ people. Pope further adds, “The Magisterium’s teaching about homosexuality stands in tension with its affirmation that each [LGBTQ] person is created in the *imago Dei*.”<sup>17</sup> This tension represents a moral conundrum for practitioners of pastoral care and youth ministry.

The Christian normative regarding sex before marriage or outside committed marriage is seen as fornication and it is considered morally wrong and sinful (Galatians 5:19-21). The parameters of this paper do not permit for a full discussion on sexual morality. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the traditional or conservative view regarding sexual relations is abstinence and chastity. Abstinence is the avoidance of a particular pleasure (food, drink, sexual intercourse) for a determined length of time, usually on certain days. Chastity is a virtue and Christian life style. Chastity is the successful integration of human sexuality within a person and thus the person’s interior

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<sup>15</sup> Stephen J. Pope, “The Magisterium’s Arguments Against ‘Same Sex Marriage:’ An Ethical Analysis and Critique,” *Theological Studies*, 65:3, (2004), 530-565, (549).

<sup>16</sup> Pope, 2004, 550.

<sup>17</sup> Pope, 2004, 550.

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life (spirituality) is in unity with the outer life (sexuality).<sup>18</sup> Hence all Christians are called to chastity; even married couples and spouses are chaste non-virgins.<sup>19</sup> A Catholic moderate view of sex before marriage or outside of marriage would indicate that sex between two committed and consenting adults is ideally based on genuine mutual respect, companionship, and love.<sup>20</sup> A Catholic revisionist/progressive view of sex before or outside of marriage would maintain that sexual encounters cause no unjust harm, involve free consent, mutuality of sexual desire, and equality of personhood, power, and status.<sup>21</sup> Monogamy is still the gold-standard. Even a Catholic revisionist perspective would disapprove of so-called “causal sex” or “one night stands” between uncommitted couples. The rationale for bringing up these three views of sex before or outside of marriage is to demonstrate the theological conundrum that pastoral practitioners such as youth ministers must face, especially with LGBTQ adolescents.

Despite charged emotions, personal opinions, troublesome psychological theories, and conservative theologies regarding homosexuality, the larger issue remains: LGBTQ youth deserve, and should expect, proper and competent pastoral care from their parish youth ministry. Moreover, the Catholic Church may want to be

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<sup>18</sup> CCC, n. 2337.

<sup>19</sup> Vincent J. Genovesi, *In Pursuit of Love: Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality, Second Edition*, (Collegeville, MN: The liturgical Press), 1996, 136.

<sup>20</sup> Genovesi, 1996, 171-175.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*, (New York, NY: Continuum), 2006, 216-223.

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careful of not suffering from LGBTQ *ephibephobia* towards sexual minority adolescents or the fear of teenagers who are LGBTQ.

### **Obfuscating a Practical Pastoral Plan with LGBTQ Youth**

The two major Catholic ecclesial documents concerning ministering to LGBTQ people are: (1) the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's document entitled *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*<sup>22</sup> and (2) the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' document entitled *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*.<sup>23</sup> Both of these documents call for the church— institutions, organizations, and ministries—to have an empathetic heart and to provide pastoral care to the homosexual community. However, the two documents provide little by way of real pastoral care and seem out-of-touch with LGBTQ reality.

In fact, the two documents leave most LGBTQ people disappointed by their lack of pastoral concentration; the documents smack of institutional control as well as exacerbating cultural barriers.<sup>24</sup> It appears as though neither the Magisterium nor the

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<sup>22</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," (Vatican City, Italy: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*), 1986.

<sup>23</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing), 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Maher & Sever, 2007, 83.

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U.S. Catholic Bishops' consulted or dialogued critically or pastorally with anyone from the LGBTQ community.<sup>25</sup>

The U.S. Catholic Bishops' do not offer anything directly pertaining to LGBTQ youth except for this passing comment:

Young people, in particular, need special encouragement and guidance, since the best way of helping young people is to aid them in *not* getting involved in homosexual relations or in the *subculture* in the first place, since these experiences create further obstacles.<sup>26</sup> (*Italics added.*)

Such a statement hardly constitutes pastoral care and offers no pastoral plan at all. The language of the document only creates further alienation and ostracization, which the majority of LGBTQ youth already experience. Questions loom large: Are we providing the best pastoral care to LGBTQ youth in our parishes/congregations? Are we—the church—doing enough to support, advocate, and minister “to, with, by, and for” LGBTQ adolescents? What are the best ways to minister with LGBTQ teenagers? The Catholic Church is merely obfuscating a pastoral plan with authentic ministry to the LGBTQ community. Moreover, Catholic youth ministry seems to be avoiding LGBTQ youth instead of advocating on their behalf.

Neither the original *Vision of Youth Ministry* nor the updated version *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*<sup>27</sup> (hereafter *RTV*) mentions ministering to

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<sup>25</sup> Bayly, 2007, 85.

<sup>26</sup> USCCB, *Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, 2006, 21-22.

<sup>27</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, (hereafter *RTV*; Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing) 1997.

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LGBTQ youth. Such exclusion is a glaring oversight. *RTV* is the current benchmark and definitive standard for Catholic youth ministry in the United States. All Catholic youth ministries are strongly encouraged to adhere to its content and follow its framework within *RTV*. *RTV* establishes the criteria and goals for youth ministry, which are expected to be integrated and implemented in Catholic parish youth ministries and Catholic school campus ministries in the United States. *RTV* is the principle pastoral tool that Catholic youth ministers are utilize in their pastoral work with young people, unfortunately, there is absolutely nothing written in the document that addresses LGBTQ youth sexuality, issues, dilemmas, or situations.

*RTV* provides Catholic youth ministers with eight components which are to help shape the youth curriculum and are to be integrated within the youth ministry. The components consist of the following: advocacy, catechesis, community life, evangelization, justice & service, leadership development, pastoral care, and prayer & worship. There are two possible sections in the *RTV* document where ministering to LGBTQ adolescents could have been integrated: the Component of Advocacy or the Component of Pastoral Care.<sup>28</sup> *RTV* has beautifully written pages on advocacy in youth ministry and pastoral care with teenagers, but nothing in those sections that specifically address the needs, issues, and dilemmas that LGBTQ youth encounter. *RTV*

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<sup>28</sup> For more detailed information of the Ministry Components of Advocacy and of Pastoral Care, see *RTV*, pages 26-28 & 42-44.

really misses a marvelous opportunity to address the concerns that LGBTQ youth experience on a daily basis.

The section on advocacy offers four lengthy points:

(1) affirming and protecting the sanctity of human life as a gift from God and building societal respect for those who most need protection and support—the unborn, the poor, the disadvantaged, the sick, and the elderly; (2) standing with and speaking on behalf of young people and their families on public issues that affect their lives, such as support for education quality housing, employment opportunities, access to health care, safe neighborhoods, and availability of meaningful community activities and services; (3) empowering young people by giving them a voice and calling them to responsibility and accountability around the issues that affect them and their future; and (4) developing partnerships and initiatives with leaders and concerned citizens from all sectors of the community to develop a shared vision and practical strategies for building a healthy community.<sup>29</sup>

This would have been an excellent place for the U.S. Catholic Bishops' to provide three additional points. A fifth point about focusing on sexual development to all adolescents. A sixth point on practices and policies that will help to avoid sexual discrimination. A seventh point that reminds youth ministers that all people—gay or straight—are created in God's image and likeness. It would have been pastorally prophetic if *RTV* would have added a few bullet points along these lines in this section of the document:

- *Advocacy includes educating all adolescents on psychological development and sexual development, especially those teenagers who are thinking about engaging in sexual relation and those who are already engaged in sexual intimacy.*

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<sup>29</sup> *RTV*, 1997, 27-28.

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- *Advocacy includes standing up for LGBTQ youth and engaging in policies and practices that eradicate discrimination of sexual minority young people and examine and analyze the practices that alienate LGBTQ youth.*
- *LGBTQ youth are created in **imago Dei** and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and have a right to find a safe place to learn and thrive in their parish's youth ministry.*

Unfortunately, *RTV* fails to advocate for LGBTQ youth in the Component of Advocacy.

The section on pastoral care is more developed than the section on advocacy, but it still lacks direct mention of ministering to LGBTQ youth. According to *RTV*,

The ministry of pastoral care to adolescents involves promoting positive adolescent and family development through a variety of positive (preventative) strategies; caring for adolescents and families in crisis through support, counseling, and referral to appropriate community agencies; providing guidance as young people face life decisions and make moral choices; and challenging systems that are obstacles to positive development (advocacy). Pastoral care is most fundamentally a relationship – a ministry of compassionate presence.<sup>30</sup>

Again, these are caring words, but there is nothing that is ministry-specific to the needs of LGBTQ youth. In this section *RTV* lists nine points regarding pastoral care with youth, but one point in particular could have dealt specifically with LGBTQ youth, yet does not. “Pastoral Care, fosters the spiritual development of young people, and the healthy integration of their sexuality and spirituality.”<sup>31</sup> This would have been a perfect

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<sup>30</sup> *RTV*, 1997, 42.

<sup>31</sup> *RTV*, 1997, 43.



location to address the sexual orientation of teenagers as well as connecting LGBTQ sexuality to their spirituality. It is certainly not unreasonable to connect sexuality to spirituality. This would have been an excellent place to add something along these lines in this section of the document:

- *Pastoral Care is concerned about the total person; about the full expression of young people's spirituality and sexuality.*
- *Integrating our sexuality – whether heterosexual or homosexual – into genuine loving relationships is a matter of greatest importance for identity formation.*
- *LGBTQ youth deserve and should expect competent and genuine pastoral care.*

Unfortunately, *RTV* fails to offer quality pastoral care to LGBTQ youth in the Component of Pastoral Care.

Perhaps it is time for a revised and updated version of *RTV*, one with a new and fresh perspective that meets the needs of all adolescents today.<sup>32</sup> A new and improved version that clearly advocates for LGBTQ youth and one that clearly states that the pastoral care needs of sexual minority adolescents are important. Both the magisterium's document and the U.S. Catholic Bishops' documents<sup>33</sup> fail in providing an authentic fundament or preferential option to LGBTQ youth along the lines of other

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<sup>32</sup> Arthur D. Canales, "The Ten-Year Anniversary of *Renewing the Vision*: Reflection on Its Impact for Catholic Youth Ministry," *New Theology Review*, 20:2, (2007), 58-69.

<sup>33</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," (Vatican City, Italy: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*), 1986; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing), 2006; and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry*, (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing) 1997.

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vulnerable and marginalized groups receive. Therefore, in a real way, the Catholic Church obfuscates a pastoral plan for LGBTQ young Catholics and offers generic platitudes, which are not pastorally fruitful or practically fulfilling. It is important that teenagers who are sexual minorities receive proper and competent pastoral care and feel that they valued have a voice, and a place within the church. It is the role and responsibility of Catholic youth ministry reach out and accepts LGBTQ youth who can contribute to the vitality of the ministry, church, and society.

### **The Role of Catholic Youth Ministry toward LGBTQ Youth**

It would seem appropriate and wise if Catholic youth ministry would become more tolerant and encompassing toward LGBTQ youth. If Catholic youth ministry is going to be comprehensive the way that RTV maintains Catholic youth ministry should, then, Catholic youth ministries across the country are going to have to be a lot more systematic and intentional about ministering directly and openly with LGBTQ youth.

Gifted youth ministers often feel helpless to truly advocate for LGBTQ youth in fear of losing their job or due to repercussions of “not following the *Catechism*.” Other youth ministers are fearful of being fired by a conservative pastor or bishop because they are misperceived as “pushing” the ministry “envelope” too far by advocating for LGBTQ equality in Catholic youth ministry. Equality toward LGBTQ youth does not simply translate as “being hospitable” toward LGBTQ teenagers. Equality should be a given with every human being. Equality means that two adolescent females (Linda and

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Lisa) can feel comfortable walking into a Catholic youth ministry setting holding hands just like two heterosexual teenagers dating (Gina and George) – without feeling judged, besieged, or badmouthed. Authentic equality is reciprocal between both sexes. There is no doubt that this scenario will thoroughly disturb the traditional youth minister (as well as some conventional parents), but this is genuine equality. Besides youth ministry has always been on the cutting-edge of the church’s ministry practice and praxis.

Still worse are the horrifying stories about Catholic parents who “disown” their own daughter or son when she or he comes out to their parents. It is not uncommon for youth ministers to hear that Catholic parents say hurtful and emotionally damaging phrases to their homosexual teenage sons and daughters, such as, “No son or daughter of mine will be a queer,” or, “you cannot live under my roof if you are gay,” or something much worse. It is shameful, that approximately 43% of LGBTQ adolescents are forced out of the house altogether by their parents, who are thus disowning their own children because they have a unique sexual orientation.<sup>34</sup> Another “black eye” Christian parents, is that it is not uncommon for LGBTQ youth to find solace on the streets; approximately 46% of LGBTQ teenagers ran away from home because of family rejection of sexual orientation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Laura E. Durso and Gary J. Gates, “Serving our Youth: Findings from a National Survey of Service Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth who are Homeless or At Risk of Becoming Homeless,” (Los Angeles, CA: True Colors Fund and the Palette Fund, *A Paper from The Williams Institute*), 2012, 1-15 (4).

<sup>35</sup> Durso & Gates, 2012, 5.

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The veracity of the situation is that LGBTQ youth need authentic advocacy by Catholic parishes, from parish youth ministries, and parents. Authentic advocacy and genuine pastoral care cannot be in the form of: (1) trying to change a young person's sexual orientation, (2) pressuring adolescents to conform to societal standards of "normal" sexuality, or (3) thinking that God does not love them or does not listen to them because of their sexual orientation. Fernando Arzola astutely points out, "If the church does not provide a safe, nonjudgmental environment to help them [LGBTQ youth] process issues and questions, they will undoubtedly go somewhere else for help. Unfortunately, these persons or places – gangs, nightclubs, and the streets – may not necessarily share the values of the church."<sup>36</sup> It is in the best interest for pastors, youth ministers, and parents to collaborate on the best practices for integrating LGBTQ youth awareness into the youth ministry.

Catholic youth ministry would be wise to focus its advocacy and pastoral care efforts on: (1) teaching adolescents the ways to cope as a teenage sexual minority in the family, school, and church, (2) helping young people find positive heterosexual and homosexual role models in the community, (3) providing LGBTQ youth with a safe place to meet and grow in their faith as part of the parish community and the sub-community of youth ministry, (4) catechizing juvenile sexual minorities about human sexuality and theology of the body without stigmatizing and shaming, (5) loving

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<sup>36</sup> Fernando Arzola, Jr., *Toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry: Theory and Praxis in Urban Context*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 2008, 47.

LGBTQ adolescents for who they are, and not for who they are not, and (6) developing ways to embrace an LGBTQ young person's sexuality and their Christianity. Catholic catechesis plays an enormous role in helping for justification in schools and parishes to develop programs that help to bolster Catholic identity in LGBTQ youth.<sup>37</sup>

Pastoral care toward LGBTQ youth must not merely pay lip-service, but to honestly try to address a fundamental human need. All Christian youth ministry is a response to, and in light of, God's active presence for the life of the world—a presence that reflects and acts on behalf of all adolescents.<sup>38</sup> LGBTQ youth, like heterosexual adolescents, deserve a lived theological emphasis on a lived experience of soteriology as the natural extension of God's passionate engagement with the world.<sup>39</sup> In other words, those ministering to the young church may want to be more meta-reflective with the existential (human) and ontological (spiritual) needs of LGBTQ youth. Pastoral care in Catholic youth ministry is the hope of praxis—theology in action done well in the name of God—to, for, and with adolescents.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, adolescent pastoral care aims at catering and ministering to the needs of LGBTQ youth, which is a population that is currently being under-served to in mainstream Catholic youth ministry. To provide competent and proficient advocacy and pastoral care to LGBTQ adolescents,

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<sup>37</sup> Maher & Sever, 2007, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Craig Dykstra and Dorthy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," In Miroslav Volf and Dorthy C. Bass edits, *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 2002, 13-32, (18).

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Root and Kendra C. Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, (Downs Grove, IL: IVP Book), 2001, 223.

<sup>40</sup> Department of [Catholic] Education, *A Vision of Youth Ministry*, (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference), 1976, 6-7.

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development of appropriate pastoral strategies is paramount for Catholic youth ministers.

## **PART TWO: PEDADOGICAL APPROACHES & PASTORAL STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

This section is prescriptive in nature and examines five pedagogical and pastoral strategies that may be implemented by a parish youth minister to bolster conscious awareness on the issues facing LGBTQ youth. These five strategies are merely suggestions and provide youth ministers with a methodology that may be utilized for purposeful catechesis with teenagers in youth ministry settings. These five strategies are designed to assist the youth minister in areas of empathy, encouragement, and empowerment with young people to whom they serve. This section is offers pragmatic and pastoral approaches which can be readily infused and implemented into a youth ministry curriculum.

### **Strategy #1: LGBTQ Youth Speaker Series**

One pedagogical strategy is to bring in LGBTQ speakers within the community (congregation or neighborhood) to address and discuss their personal struggles, issues, and concerns of growing up in the Church. It might prove to be prudent if a different speaker came in and presented a different sexual minority group. Therefore, the

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LGBTQ Youth Speaker Series is primarily intended to be addressed to the youth of the parish and could be a four-week series. For example, the first evening could be with a lesbian speaker who shares from her experience as a lesbian woman living in the world, the second session could be a gay presenter who can testify from his familiarity as a gay man participating in the Church, the third week a bisexual person could express their unique situation as a bisexual person and as a Christian believer in the faith, and the fourth lecturer could discuss transgender issues and the struggles that a transgender person suffers. This could be a powerful conscious-raising series for all teenagers involved in the youth ministry. It may be wise for the youth minister to meet and discuss the format of the evening with the presenter and also ask the speakers for an outline of the presentation a week before she/he presents. In this way, the speaker's outline will be able to be shared and discussed with the adult catechists of the youth ministry ahead of time. It may be a good idea if there were small-faith sharing groups following the speaker to help teenager's process the topic and to engage in theological reflection.

### **Strategy # 2: Film Series on LGBTQ Issues**

A second pastoral approach could be for the youth minister to develop a four-week film series on LGBTQ Issues and discuss the pertinent themes that a given movie addresses. Young people enjoy watching movies as a group and discussing them; it

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becomes a social experience for teenagers.<sup>41</sup> This is perhaps the simplest strategy to organize and implement, but it is also one that could be most graphic for adolescents. LGBTQ cinemas cover an array of LGBTQ topics and issues: first same sex kiss, sexual discrimination, taboo cultural customs, violence because of gender, and multicultural LGBTQ teenagers.

Granted that some of these movies will need permission slips from parents because they are Rated-R (Restricted) and will probably also need permission from the pastor to show some of these movies. Here are some movies that cover LGBTQ themes: *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985); *My Own Private Idaho* (1991); *Philadelphia* (1993); *Boys Don't Cry* (1999); *Weekend* (2001); *Go Fish* (1994); *The Birdcage* (1996); *Brokeback Mountain* (2005); *Milk* (2008); *Circumstance* (2011); *Pariah* (2011); *Blue is the Warmest Color* (2012); *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013); *The Normal Heart* (2014). It is highly recommended that the youth minister preview the film with the adult volunteer leaders of the youth ministry so they can discuss and discern the direction of the evening and prepare small group discussion questions. It may be prudent for the youth minister to hand out journals for each student to write her/his thoughts out and to reflect on certain aspects of the movies and the way the movie made them feel (affectively, emotionally) as they watched the movie. Then after a period of time of journaling bring the group up into a few semi-

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<sup>41</sup> Amy E. Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Practical Youth Ministry*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books), 2011, 90.



large groups to discuss their thoughts and feelings. Youth ministers should be aware that each evening may be emotionally charged due to the content of the movies.

### **Strategy # 3: Parent Series on LGBTQ Youth**

A third practical tactic would be to host a Parent Series on LGBTQ Youth, which could be launched once a year to discuss LGBTQ issues and raising LGBTQ students in the Catholic Church. The series could be publicized as “Embracing Unity through Diversity” or “Embracing All our Sisters and Brothers” and could involve a variety of themes or topics. Guest speakers such as theologians, pastors, school administrators, and parents could be invited to share their expertise in certain areas. A six-week series might look similar to this:

- *Week One: Human Sexuality: God’s Gift*
- *Week Two: The Challenges of being LGBTQ at Home, School, and Church*
- *Week Three: The Societal Stigmatization and Dangers that LGBTQ Youth Confront Daily: Harassment, Bullying, and Violence*
- *Week Four: Creating a Parish that Welcomes and Loves All People*
- *Week Five: Growing in Faith and Love: Loving God, Church and My Partner*
- *Week Six: Created for Love: What’s a Committed, Loving Homosexual Couple to do?*

Immediately following the presentation, a brief question and answer session could be provided, and perhaps after that, some light refreshments and *hors d’oeuvres* could be served to stimulate further causal conversation. A series such as this would potentially illuminate the hearts and minds of all its participants; however, one of the drawbacks

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would be getting parents to commit to attending a six weeks due to hectic schedules and perhaps lack of openness to the series.

#### **Strategy # 4: Support LGBTQ Month**

This fourth pragmatic method involves four separate activities which could be implemented throughout the course of an academic year or a particular month such as October, which is, and has been coined as, “LGBTQ History Month” by the LGBTQ community in the United States.<sup>42</sup> Each of these activities could be used interchangeably with any activities mentioned here in this strategy or with the other four pedagogical practices listed above.

One activity that a youth minister could do to cultivate a spirit of openness and acceptance among LGBTQ youth is to create LGBTQ youth-led student ministry, which could be a sub-ministry of the youth ministry. A separate LGBTQ youth-led sub-

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<sup>42</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month (LGBT Pride Month) is currently celebrated each year in the month of June to honor the 1969 Stonewall riots in Manhattan. The Stonewall riots were a tipping point for the Gay Liberation Movement in the United States. In the United States the last Sunday in June was initially celebrated as “Gay Pride Day,” but the actual day was flexible. In major cities across the nation the “day” soon grew to encompass a month-long series of events. Today, celebrations include pride parades, picnics, parties, workshops, symposia and concerts, and LGBT Pride Month events attract millions of participants around the world. Memorials are held during this month for those members of the community who have been lost to hate crimes or HIV/AIDS. The purpose of the commemorative month is to recognize the impact that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals have had on history locally, nationally, and internationally. In 1994, a coalition of education-based organizations in the United States designated October as LGBT History Month. In 1995, a resolution passed by the General Assembly of the National Education Association included LGBT History Month within a list of commemorative months. LGBT History Month is also celebrated with annual month-long observances of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history, along with the history of the gay rights and related civil rights movements. National Coming Out Day (October 11), as well as the first “March on Washington” in 1979, are commemorated in the LGBT community during LGBT History Month. This source is from Library of Congress website: <http://www.loc.gov/lgbt/about.html>.

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ministry that caters to the issues, needs, and concerns of LGBTQ youth would be highly desirable for adolescent sexual minorities. The LGBTQ ministry could be called Alliance Ministry, or Equally Blessed, or Dignity Ministry.

A second activity within LGBTQ month could be to host a walk/run called “Stand Up!,” which could either be a full marathon (26.2 miles) or half marathon (13.1 miles). The walk/run could be advertised at local schools, churches, and youth ministries to raise awareness of about LGBTQ youth. Such an event would begin to create moral and transformational leaders for those young people who helped to plan, organize, and implement the walk/run.<sup>43</sup>

A third activity within LGBTQ month is to sponsor a “Stop the Hate Campaign.” The purpose of the Stop Hate Campaign is to help to highlight LGBTQ social justice implications. It is a method designed to integrate Catholic social teachings<sup>44</sup> and to discuss the discrimination and persecution, which surrounds LGBTQ youth. The Stop the Hate Campaign could be a series of four evening lectures, which is open to the entire parish-community which highlight various themes. Some lectures may be the following:

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<sup>43</sup> Arthur D. Canales, “Models of Christian Leadership in Youth Ministry,” *Religious Education*, 109:1, (2014), 24-44, (41).

<sup>44</sup> The Catholic Social Teachings are as follows: (1) the dignity of the human person, (2) community and the common good, (3) human rights and responsibilities, (4) compassion for the poor, (5) participation in civil society, (6) work and the rights of workers, (7) stewardship of creation and environmental responsibility, (8) solidarity with citizens of the world, (9) the role of government, and (10) the promotion of peace. For more information on Catholic Social Teachings see Ronard Krietemeyer, *Leaven for the Modern world: Catholic Social Teaching and Catholic Education*, (Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association) 2000.

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- *Presentation # 1: The Dignity and Equality of the Human Person*
- *Presentation # 2: Putting an End to Homophobic Bullying*
- *Presentation # 3: Debunking Myths and Stereotypes about LGBTQ Persons*
- *Presentation # 4: Why Can't We All Just Get Along?*

These lectures will thoroughly ground young people with Christian social teachings and allow them to connect their faith with the larger global realities that other people face daily.<sup>45</sup>

A fourth activity in LGBTQ month is a book club that reads four books over the course of a month and discusses a different book weekly in an informal matter at a local coffee shop, at a student's home, or even the pastor's study. Below is a list of LGBTQ books that the California Department of Education has included in their high school reading list of books. As previously mentioned a youth minister could have the teenagers select four out of this list: (1) *Giovanni's Room* (1956) by James Baldwin, (2) *Rose of No Man's Land* (2005) by Michelle Tea, (3) *Hero* (2007) by Perry Moore, (4) *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker, (5) *Fun House: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) by Alison Bechdel, (6) *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) by David Levithan, (7) *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) by Jeanette Winterson, (8) *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) by Virginia Woolf, (9) *Middlesex* (2002) by Jeffrey Eugenides, and (10) *The Difference Between You and Me* by Madeleine George (2012). The purpose is to allow LGBTQ Youth Month to help LGBTQ youth to understand themselves while also allowing the larger youth community to

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<sup>45</sup> Arthur D. Canales, "Transforming Teenagers: Integrating Social Justice into Catholic Youth Ministry or Catholic Education," *Verbum Incarnatum*, 4:1, (2010), 69-91, (79-80).

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befriend them and come to know their struggles and stigmatization as a sexual minority. These four activities can really aid LGBTQ Youth Month within the congregation to become more open-minded about same sex issues and in the process can learn a tremendous amount.

### **Strategy # 5: Weekend Retreat**

A fifth pedagogical scheme is to offer a weekend retreat, which highlights certain LGBTQ youth themes. Retreats are excellent ways to enhance faith formation and the spiritual “backbone” of a comprehensive youth ministry.<sup>46</sup> Retreats have a way of moving teenagers away from an individualistic (self-centered) mentality to a communal mindset (other-centered), which would be most appropriate for reaching out to LGBTQ youth.<sup>47</sup> The retreat theme could be “Dispelling Myths” retreat or the “Acceptance” retreat. The retreat could offer a variety of presentations on various topics of LGBTQ youth such as “Knowing Yourself, Loving Yourself,” “Understanding LGBTQ Spirituality,” “Loving God and Loving Neighbor,” and/or “Living LGBTQ Christian Discipleship.” The list of topics for retreat talks is limitless and the retreat could be as broad or narrow as the youth minister discerns. An essential element of a youth retreat that highlights LGBTQ issues is to concentrate the retreat on aspects that will raise the

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<sup>46</sup> Arthur D. Canales, *A Noble Quest: Cultivating Spirituality in Catholic Adolescents*, (Waco, TX: PCG Legacy), 2011, 93.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur D. Canales, “Christian Discipleship: The Primordial Model for Comprehensive Catholic Youth Ministry,” *Journal of Religious Education*, 60:3, (2012), 35-45, (42).

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conscious awareness about LGBTQ issues as well as engage all teenagers on the topics. Retreats are great avenues for bolstering adolescent spirituality in young people, and since the retreat typically takes place on a weekend format they (retreats) have greater potential to transform teenagers lives and call them more deeply into a relationship with God.<sup>48</sup>

Taken together these five approaches offer pedagogical support and pastoral implementation strategies for Catholic youth ministers. These ideas can benefit the entire youth ministry and will demonstrate that a Catholic youth ministry can stand in solidarity with LGBTQ youth. The five pastoral methodologies addressed engage adolescents on several LGBTQ youth issues, themes, and principles, but they are suggestions, and parish youth ministers will have to discern which pedagogical practice works best for their circumstances.

## CONCLUSION

Comprehensive youth ministry is not a theoretical exercise. Catholic youth ministry is a commitment and participation in young people's joys, hopes, and struggles for a full adolescent life, and discernment of God's salvific action in teenager's personal history.<sup>49</sup> Youth ministry is God's work-in-action, embodied, and integrated

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<sup>48</sup> Arthur D. Canales, "The Biblical-Hermeneutical Model for Youth Ministry: Four Scriptural and Pedagogical Approaches for Youth Workers," *The Bible Today*, 51:4, (2013), 237-247, (246).

<sup>49</sup> Pamela Copper-White, *Shared Wisdom: Use of Self in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 2004, 186.

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pedagogically and holistically with critical thinking and theological reflection, and therefore, cannot overlook ministering to, with, and for LGBTQ youth.

It is time for the Catholic Church to offer pastoral wisdom and insights on ministering to LGBTQ youth instead of offering insensitive platitudes such as “we love the sinner, but hate the sin.” Simplistic answers and once-for-all explanations will not satisfy or pacify the LGBTQ community, and one-dimensional answers should not gratify youth ministers either. Catholic youth ministry would do well to perform emancipatory pastoral practices that promote peace through justice, service, and love.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cooper-White, 2004, 191.