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## 'God's blunder'

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NCR Today

Pope Benedict's World Day of Peace remarks, including his critique of 'unregulated financial capitalism' were most welcomed. His words, coming out of Catholic social teachings, are not likely to go down well with ideologues of the free market.

It was unfortunate, however, he linked his otherwise timely remarks with another slap at gays and lesbians. Why must a treatise on the economy contain reflections on the 'natural structure of marriage'?

The pope spoke of the 'need to acknowledge and promote the natural structure of marriage as the union of a man and a woman.' This, he said, comes 'in the face of attempts to make it juridically equivalent to radically different types of unions.'

Such unions, he said, 'destabilize marriage, obscuring its specific nature and its indispensable role in society.'

But is this fact? If so, where is the evidence?

No, this is an interpretation based on an extension of outdated Catholic theology.

It pains me that any effort to challenge or update this theology is met with ecclesial resistance and heavy sanctions. Many of our theologians have been silenced.

Sadly our church's official teachings on human sexuality are based on an understanding of nature based on biological notions that do not match human experience. They disregard insights, which come from those who experience human intimacy 'and are a direct attack against a large portion of the human

family, the gays and lesbians among us.

Our church teaches that gays and lesbians can never enter a sacramental marriage and can never express physical intimacy. Official church teaching holds that homosexual inclinations are "disordered."

If so, then God is to be held responsible. God's plan for creation, according to church teachings, is flawed, disordered. If only God could understand human sexuality as Catholic bishops do!

I don't expect a needed correction in Catholic theology and sexual morality for some time to come. This is unfortunate because it is both hurtful and erosive to the church's teaching authority. Pope Benedict is in a difficult spot. It was he who as prefect for the Congregation of Faith wrote in October 1986 the church is being threatened by those who accept "the homosexual condition as though it were not disordered." He then accused those who were seeking change in Catholic sexual morality as being part of "a materialistic ideology, which denies the transcendent nature of the human person."

Those who engage in homosexual activity, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote, "confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination."

Our church has taught that celibacy is a gift given to a relative few. Many of these so gifted people are then called to become priests and nuns.

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But what about the millions of gays and lesbians who are not so gifted? Are they condemned to lives of complete physical isolation?

Is this the design of a loving God? Or a colossal blunder that fails to match human experience and, thus, makes Catholic teaching less relevant to a world in need of enlightened direction?

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