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Homosexuality and Theological Method — A Pattern of Argument to Watch

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Commonweal is a left-leaning Roman Catholic magazine that is often at odds with the Vatican. For an evangelical theologian, reading *Commonweal* offers insight into the thinking of the Catholic left — a pattern amazingly similar to liberal Protestantism.

Consider this paragraph from a [recent editorial](#):

It is true, however, that like many Catholics, Commonweal is engaged in the difficult task of discerning whether new understandings of homosexuality are compatible with the gospel and the church's moral tradition. We look first to the church for guidance and instruction. But since God's presence in the world is not confined to the church, we also look to the lives and testimony of our friends and neighbors. No one should pretend that reconciling homosexual love with the church's teaching is easy or perhaps even likely; and no one should assume it is impossible. God, we are convinced, is both faithful and known to confound expectations. Neuhaus, on the other hand, argues that the church's teaching about homosexuality is not open to debate or evidently to any further development. The debate, however, is taking place, and Catholics betray no disloyalty or impiety by participating in it.

The immediate target of the editorial is Richard John Neuhaus, editor of *First Things*. Neuhaus is one of the most influential conservative Catholics in America, and he had defended the Vatican's recent instruction on homosexuals and the seminaries. That was too much for the editors of *Commonweal*.

But, in this editorial, they demonstrate to an almost quintessential degree a line of argument that defines the liberal mindset on this question. They are engaged, the editors reveal, “in the difficult task of discerning whether new understandings of homosexuality are compatible with the gospel and the church's moral tradition.” Just replace “the church's moral tradition” with “the Bible” and you will see the Protestant version.

Next, they explained: “We look first to the church for guidance and instruction. But since God's presence in the world is not confined to the church, we also look to the lives and testimony of our friends and neighbors.” Again, replace “the church” with “the Bible” and you are looking at Protestant revisionism in the face. Modern science, psychotherapeutic theories, and other competing authorities relativize the Bible's authority.

Note this line of argument carefully, for you will encounter it in some unexpected places — and you will know where it leads.

