



November 2022

Dear Friends,

I still like to think that I am relatively young, and fairly up-to-date with technology and various forms of social media. While I'm not a "digital native" — of the generation that grew up when the Internet was already in full swing — I am comfortable posting, and tweeting, and sharing. But even I can be surprised by the ever-changing digital landscape, and recently I had to learn very quickly about a concept I had not encountered before: *shadow banning*.

Shadow banning refers to the practice of some social media platforms blocking or hiding the content that a user shares online, so that it remains mostly invisible to others who follow the user, or to the general public. It might mean that a new post is placed lower in a user's feed, so that people who scan the most recent posts don't see it, but also don't know they missed it. Or certain tags or keywords might be excluded, by algorithms or human moderators, from appearing when users search for content from a specific source or on a specific topic. These practices can lead to a decrease in engagement between content creators and followers, and make it more difficult to find or share content. Worst of all is that, different from outright suspension or removal of users for violating a platform's terms of service, shadow bans leave the user at first unaware that it is happening, who is doing it, and why.

You may have guessed that Courage International has recently found our social media accounts shadow-banned by some platforms, and one of our accounts was even erased from one platform for about a week earlier this year. (When I questioned it, we were reinstated without any explanation for having been removed in the first place.) It is disappointing, but not surprising. While the message that we have to share with the world — about the true nature of identity, chastity and love — is beautiful and life-giving, it is certainly counter-cultural, and rejected by too many people. Our social media posts never contain messages of hate or rejection of anyone, least of all of our brothers and sisters who experience same-sex attractions or gender identity discordance. But in the "cancel culture" so prevalent in the modern world, we are easy targets for those who reject and hate our message.

Writing in 1986, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explained that "An essential dimension of authentic pastoral care is the identification of causes of confusion regarding the Church's teaching," and this is more essential today than ever before (*Letter on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*, no. 4). The CDF went on: "[D]eparture from the Church's teaching, or silence about it, in an effort to provide pastoral care is neither caring nor pastoral.

Only what is true can ultimately be pastoral. The neglect of the Church's position prevents homosexual men and women from receiving the care they need and deserve" (no. 15).

Thus, Courage International cannot stop speaking the truth in love (cf. Eph 4:15) about such important topics, whether social media platforms and users like it or not. We owe it to people who experience same-sex attractions or gender discordance to share the Church's authentic teaching with them, because we believe that following that teaching brings freedom, peace and fulfillment. We owe it to clergy and everyone in ministry to share our pastoral experience and plan with them, so that they can be prepared to receive our brothers and sisters with love, to care for them well, and to accompany them along the right path. We owe it to all people of good will to invite them to hear, embrace and live the truth of the Gospel message. It is the obligation imposed on us by the Lord: "If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

I am asking for your support in this mission of ours to proclaim the Good News about identity, chastity and love. If you don't already receive our e-newsletter or follow Courage International on social media, you can do both from our website (couragerc.org). I know that some of our members and friends are very private about their experiences, but now is no time for fear: please like, retweet and share with your friends, family and followers the content we provide in English and in Spanish. Shadow bans only work in the long run if we neglect the many ways that we can work around them.

Please also consider renewing and even increasing your financial support for Courage International, which helps our mission in many ways. It allows us to employ talented, creative people who compose our e-newsletters and social media content. It helps us to provide clergy study days, periodic retreats, and the annual conference. It pays for legal advice and advocacy when companies or individuals go beyond shadow banning and discriminate against our message and our apostolate. And being able to count on your steady support frees up my team and me to seek out even more opportunities to speak the truth in love to whoever will listen.

Be sure of my prayers for you and your loved ones, and of my sincere gratitude for your support. May God reward your generosity and bless you and your loved ones abundantly.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Father Philip G. Bochanski
Executive Director