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This text was received by the Italian news agency, *Adista*

CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

INSTRUCTION

CONCERNING THE CRITERIA OF VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT REGARDING PERSONS WITH HOMOSEXUAL TENDENCIES IN VIEW OF THEIR ADMISSION TO SEMINARIES AND HOLY ORDERS

INTRODUCTION

In continuity with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and, in particular, with the decree *Optatam totius* on priestly formation, the Congregation for Catholic Education has published various documents to promote an adequate integral formation of future priests, offering guidelines and precise norms concerning its different aspects. The Synod of Bishops in 1990 also reflected on priestly formation in the current circumstances, with the intention of complementing the conciliar teaching on this issue and make it more explicit and incisive in the contemporary world. Following this Synod, Pope John Paul II published the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*.

In light of this rich teaching, the present Instruction does not intend to dwell on all the issues in the affective or sexual realm that require attentive discernment throughout the entire period of formation. It contains norms regarding a particular issue, made more urgent by the current situation, and that is the admission or not to Seminaries and Holy Orders of candidates that have deep-seated homosexual tendencies.

1. Affective maturity and spiritual fatherhood (paternity)

According to the constant Tradition of the Church, only baptised males validly receive sacred Ordination.

Through the sacrament of Orders the Holy Spirit configures the candidate, with a new and specific designation, to Jesus Christ: the priest, in fact, sacramentally represents Christ, Head, Shepherd, and Spouse of the Church. Because of this configuration to Christ, the entire life of the sacred minister must be animated by the gift of his entire person to the Church and by authentic pastoral charity.

The candidate for ordained ministry, therefore, must attain affective maturity. Such maturity will allow him to relate properly with men and women, developing in him a true sense of spiritual fatherhood for the ecclesial community that will be entrusted to him.

2. Homosexuality and Ordained Ministry

Since the Second Vatican Council up until today, various documents from the Magisterium – especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* – have confirmed the Church's teaching on homosexuality. The *Catechism* distinguishes between homosexual acts and homosexual tendencies.

Regarding *acts*, it teaches that, in Sacred Scripture, these are presented grave sins. Tradition has always considered them as intrinsically immoral and contrary to the natural law. As a consequence, they can never be approved under any circumstance.

As regards to deep-seated homosexual *tendencies*, which are present in a certain number of men and women, these also are objectively disordered and are often a trial for such people. They must be accepted with respect and sensitivity; every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfil God's will in their lives and to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter. In the light of such teaching, this Dicastery, together with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, deems it necessary to clearly affirm that the Church, even while deeply respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to Seminary or Holy Orders those who are actively homosexual, have deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called *gay culture*.

Such people, in fact, find themselves in a situation that seriously obstructs them from properly relating to men and women. The negative consequences that can result from the Ordination of persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies should not be obscured.

When dealing, instead, with homosexual tendencies that might only be a manifestation of a transitory problem, as, for example, delayed adolescence, these must be clearly overcome at least three years before diaconal Ordination.

3. The Church's discernment of the suitability of candidates

There are two inseparable aspects of every vocation: the free gift of God and the responsible freedom of man. The vocation is a gift of divine grace, received through the Church, in the Church, and for service of the Church.

By responding to the call of God, man offers himself freely to Him in love. The mere desire to become a priest is not sufficient and there is no right to receive sacred Ordination. It rests with the Church – in her responsibility to define the necessary requirements for reception of the Sacraments instituted by Christ – to discern the suitability of the one who wishes to enter the Seminary, to accompany him during the years of formation, and to call him to Holy Orders, if he is judged to possess the required qualities.

The formation of the future priest must articulate, in an essential complementarity, the four dimensions of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. In this context, it is important to recall the particular importance of human formation as the necessary foundation of all formation. To admit a candidate to diaconal Ordination, the Church must verify, among other things, that the candidate for priesthood has attained affective maturity.

The call to Orders is the personal responsibility of the Bishop or the General Superior. Keeping in mind the view of those to whom they entrusted the responsibility of formation, the Bishop or General Superior, before admitting the candidate to Ordination, must arrive at a morally certain judgment regarding his qualities. In the case of a serious doubt, he must not admit him to Ordination.

The discernment of the vocation and the maturity of the candidate is also the grave duty of the rector and other formators in the Seminary. Before every Ordination, the rector must give his judgment on the qualities of the candidate required by the Church.

In discernment of the suitability for Ordination, the spiritual director has an important task. Even though he is bound by secrecy, he represents the Church in the internal forum. In meetings with the candidate, the spiritual director must clearly recall the Church's demands regarding priestly chastity and the specific affective maturity of the priest, as well as help him discern if he has the necessary qualities. He has the obligation to evaluate all the qualities of the personality and assure that the candidate does not have sexual disorders that are incompatible with priesthood. If a candidate is actively homosexual or shows deep-seated homosexual tendencies, his spiritual director, as well as his confessor, has the duty to dissuade him, in conscience, from proceeding towards Ordination.

It remains understood that the candidate himself is primarily responsible for his own formation. He must offer himself in trust to the discernment of the Church, of the Bishop that calls him to Orders, of the rector of the Seminary, of the spiritual director, and of any other educator in the Seminary to which the Bishop or General Superior has given the task of forming future priests. It would be gravely dishonest for a candidate to hide his own homosexuality, regardless of everything, to arrive at ordination. Such an inauthentic attitude does not correspond to the spirit of truth, loyalty, and availability that must characterise the personality of one who considers himself called to serve Christ and his Church in the ministerial priesthood.

CONCLUSION

This Congregation reaffirms that it is necessary that Bishops, Superior Generals, and all those responsible carry out an attentive discernment regarding the suitability of candidates to Holy Orders, from the admission to Seminary to Ordination. This discernment must be done in light of a concept of ministerial priesthood that is in conformity with the teaching of the Church. Bishops, Episcopal Conferences, and Superior Generals should assure that the norms of this instruction are faithfully observed for the good of the candidates themselves and to always assure for the Church suitable priests, true shepherds according to the heart of Christ.

The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, on 31 August 2005, approved this Instruction and ordered its publication.

Rome, 4 November 2005, Memorial of St Charles Borromeo, Patron of Seminaries.

Zenon Card. Grocholewski

Prefect

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Titular Arch. of Vertara

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