NOT LOOKING AWAY, NOT PLAYING IT DOWN: WHY HOMOSEXUALITY IS A CONCRETE HINDRANCE FOR ORDINATION

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In view of the social normalization of homosexuality and the painful awakening to the reality that a not-negligible percentage of priests, especially in the Western world, is homosexually oriented, the question of why this orientation is irreconcilable with ordination has become more urgent. The decisive arguments are theological and have to do with the prospective priest’s full manhood. These arguments are in harmony with modern psychological insights into (male) homosexuality as a personality defect that blocks the person’s growing to mature manhood. It is argued that only after having demonstrably overcome homosexual tendencies should a candidate be admitted to the seminary.

A History of Success and its Consequences

The subtitle of the doctoral thesis defended in 2007 by the first author at the University of Freiburg, Germany, on the ordained ministry and homosexuality, refers to the conflict potentially inherent in this subject: “A pastoral-theological and canonical study on homosexuality as an objective hindrance for ordination.”

With this subject, one finds oneself in a field of conflict indeed, because today, merely raising this question and considering the possibility that homosexuality might represent an obstacle for ordination may provoke negative reflexes in large sections of society and even within the Catholic Church. It risks being understood as an expression of “homophobia.” After all, it is widely believed or assumed that homosexuality must be genetically determined or otherwise innate, an unchangeable orientation, a way of life equivalent to heterosexuality, with the same dignity as a vital dimension of the human person, and one entitled to the same rights and privileges. After a long history of moral disapproval of homosexual behavior in Western civilization (and in other cultures), its appreciation has turned into the opposite, a blitz process of moral change within hardly thirty years. From an object of criminal law, it turned into a respectable, legitimate, dignified way of life, perhaps the most stunning example of changing social attitudes in our time.
This radical attitude change did not come about spontaneously. Upgrading and normalizing homosexual behavior and relationships was an indissoluble ingredient of—and at the same time an effective tool in—a profound cultural and sexual revolution that increasingly substituted irreligious, secular-humanist values for traditional Christian ones. Especially since the 1960s, the Judeo-Christian values that—by and large—guided our choices in matters of love and relationships for centuries, were on the wane, a process facilitated by such factors as the (misleading) Kinsey Reports and the one-sided sexual ideology and humanist sexology of which it was a product, and the massive introduction of hormonal contraceptives.

Yet, it is primarily the international homosexual emancipation movement that is responsible for the unprecedented success story of Western society’s revolutionary normalization of homosexual behavior. This goal has been pursued with remarkable consistency and professionalism, making use of all possible social and political instruments and channels. That “in little more than a decade, homosexuals have moved from pariahs to cultural heroes,” Rabbi Samuel H. Dresner ascribes to the “the most successful public relations campaign in the history of the nation. During this period, America has not only come to accept homosexuality as an inevitable phenomenon in our society, but also as a legitimate ‘lifestyle’ deserving of affirmation as well as tolerance.” Gallup polls through the last decades reflect this mentality change, or, at any rate, the change in many people’s publicly expressed opinions.

The volte-face of the official (psychiatric) medical and psychological world, which has enormously contributed to changing public attitudes in this regard, can be illustrated with a pronouncement by the New York Academy of Medicine’s Committee on Public Health from the early sixties, reflecting the then generally accepted opinion among medical professionals: “Homosexuality is an illness indeed. The homosexual is an emotionally disturbed individual…; some homosexuals have gone beyond the plane of defensiveness and now argue that deviancy is a ‘desirable, noble, preferable way of life.’”

The success of the normalization campaign is in great part due to the massive hammering home of two effective arguments: Homosexually oriented persons are the victims of unjust discrimination and persecution; and their condition is a normal, inborn (or biologically founded) variant of sexuality. These mantras are presented as the only views that are scientifically well-grounded. Dissenting opinions are denied publicity, or discredited as inhumane, obsolete, unscientific charlatanism.
The whole question, then, merely amounts to a matter of human rights. In most countries of the European Union, for example, the state now prescribes that primary-school children are taught the “right to sexual preference.” The dominance of the new morality on homosexuality in European politics was highlighted by the resolution of the European Parliament of January 18, 2006. A two-thirds majority endorsed the full equalization of homosexual partnerships to the normal marriage. Particularly noticeable was the resolution’s uncompromising, actually ominous, wording. All objections to the proposed ideal were dismissed as injustice, intolerance, and unacceptable “homophobia.”

Regarding this alarming development, the German theologian Hans Lachenmann rightly remarked, “The rhetoric of tolerance tips over into thought dictatorship. Here appears the ideological and dictatorial bent which connects the ‘new ideology of evil’ (Pope John Paul II) with the other ideologies of evil.”

It is outside our scope to answer the question of why vast sections of the political and social establishment could embrace so rapidly the basic propositions of the homosexual movement. But it seems incontestable that this acceptance exacerbated the dissolution of the traditional canon of Christian values in the broader field of sexuality, marriage, and the family. Thus, the degenerating morality of marriage not only leads to increasing tolerance of homosexual relations, but the cause-effect relationship works both ways. This phenomenon is well documented for many cultures of the past such as the Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman. But it is no less true today, as has been made clear, for instance, by sociologist Stanley Kurtz’s analysis of statistics concerning marriage, cohabitation, and birth out-of-wedlock for the Nordic European countries after the legalization of homosexual partnerships. The significant decrease of marriage percentages, with the concomitant increase of unmarried cohabitation and out-of-wedlock birth rates, cannot be satisfactorily explained other than as the product of a mentality change spurred on by the normalization of homosexual relationships.

**Homosexuality and its Causes in the View of the Human Sciences**

If carefully examined, the fundamental assertion of the “gay movement,” that homosexuality is innate and belongs irreversibly to the nature and identity of the person concerned, proves untenable. This approximately one hundred year-old concept is still lacking any solid physiological and psychological basis. The fact that many today believe this dogma in spite of the absence of a scientific underpinning, and even strong evidence to the contrary, is largely the effect of propaganda.
In reality, none of the studies to this date that have tried to identify biological factors as causes, or at least partial causes, of homosexuality have produced anything in the way of straightforward, compelling evidence. This failure is all the more significant because the majority of these studies have been conducted by (more or less) activist homosexual investigators, several openly declaring that it was their intent to prove the inborn character of the condition. The results, however, have often been presented or interpreted in an obscuring, biased manner, so that the non-professional reader of research reports—and the public at large—might wrongly conclude that at least some promising indication of a biological factor had been detected, while in reality this was no more than pure speculation.

In any case, results that—at first glance—may look supportive of some form of a “born-that-way” theory have not been replicated in subsequent research, an inescapable requirement for any reported finding before it can be taken seriously. Therefore, German professor of social sexology Martin Dannecker, a homosexual advocate himself, in his affidavit for the German Federal Government in the year 2000 unequivocally affirmed: “All attempts made in the past, to anchor homosexuality biologically, must be considered as failed.” After 2000, the research outcome has made the existence of a biological correlate of homosexual tendencies even more improbable, although, ironically, exactly in that period public belief in such a theory has considerably intensified.

Even if it were demonstrated that there is some biological factor involved in the origins of homosexuality, that would not automatically prompt the conclusion that homosexuality is “natural,” in the sense of “in accordance with creation,” let alone that its practice would be ethically justified. To quote the German theologian Ulrich Eibach:

If one identifies ‘existing nature’ with ‘God’s creation,’ everything ‘produced by nature’ turns into something ‘created and approved by God.’ Such an identification of ‘nature’ with God’s work, the creation, ignores that in nature we not only find the creation willed by God but also the effects of evil, which corrupts nature and was not created or wanted by God. Ethically seen, we end up with a ‘naturalistic fallacy,’ because we derive from the ‘existing’ that it ought to be the way it exists and that, theologically, it corresponds to the will of God.
Many who are not familiar with the psychological study of homosexuality may be surprised to learn that the classical celebrities of personality psychology and psychotherapy such as Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Stekel, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, and Victor Frankl never considered homosexuality as a normal or natural variation of human sexuality. The view of these pioneers, which was in essence a psychopathological view, has been substantiated by modern psychological and psychiatric researchers, theorists, and therapists of homosexuality. Many of their observations and insights into psychological causes and dynamics of same-sex attractions are very helpful to our theological study of the problem of whether or not same-sex attracted men are to be admitted to the priesthood. We want to call attention in particular to the following three items that appear to be intimately connected with a homosexual orientation in men: a degree of deficient manhood, the obsessiveness of homosexual desires and excessive promiscuity of the homosexual lifestyle, and the emotional or personality immaturity manifested by many persons with this orientation.

Upon examining the psychological and psychiatric observations and research evidence of recent decades, one of the most remarkable discoveries one makes is that there is a steadily growing consensus that same-sex attractions somehow spring from failed “gender identification” (“gender nonconformity” and the like) during childhood and adolescence, due to imbalanced parent-child interactions and peer-group maladaptation. Modern emphasis on the central role of feelings of inadequacy with respect to one’s gender identity, therefore, is particularly in agreement with the initial observations of Alfred Adler, the first to explicitly describe same-sex attractions as compensatory reactions to inferiority feelings with respect to one’s masculinity or femininity. Furthermore, clinical observation, as well as empirical psychological research, has made it clear that this “gender-inferiority complex” is intimately bound up with a variety of emotional, personality, and relational problems.

For example, for virtually all psychological authors, the homosexual desire is an obsessive quest for masculinity, for belonging to manhood (in the case of the lesbian woman, for femininity, for belonging to womanhood) and for male (or female) affection, to compensate for inferiority feelings regarding one’s own gender. Due to the permanence of such inferiority feelings and of the accompanying feelings of frustration, loneliness, not belonging, depression, and anger, the homosexual wish is an addictive longing that cannot be really satisfied by giving way to it. As a result, the homosexual lifestyle is self-
destructive; lasting and faithful partnerships are statistically most exceptional; and promiscuity is more intense than in the heterosexual world.

The extraordinary promiscuity of the homosexual lifestyle has been abundantly demonstrated; only two typical examples for male homosexuals need be cited here. The first study is well-known: only 7 out of 156 American gay couples, i.e. 4%, declared their relationship “monogamous,” and even among the monogamous cases, none had lasted longer than 5 years. A recent well-designed Dutch study revealed that those with a “steady” partner had on average 8 different sex partners per year, those without a “steady” partner 22; the average “steady” partnership lasted 1.5 years. The period of between 1.5 and 5 years is approximately the limit of faithfulness also for the minority of American men who practice homosexuality and seek a steady partner.

Homosexuality is thus psychologically explainable. Already in 1932, Berlin professor and preeminent psychiatrist Harald Schultz-Hencke, asserted that “homosexuality can totally be explained psychologically,” which opinion is endorsed today by authors such as Lawrence Hatterer, Gerard van den Aardweg, Joseph Nicolosi, and Richard Fitzgibbons. At this point, it is useful to remember that many more practicing psychotherapists and other professionals share the view of homosexuality as a form of psychopathology than one may suppose based on the American Psychiatric Association’s decision to remove this orientation from the list of mental disorders in 1973.

Regarding this issue, a clear distinction must be made between the official policy of this organization and its sister organization, the American Psychological Association on the one side, and the opinion of a great part of their respective memberships on the other. For this social-political decision was not inspired by new scientific evidence, but was “instead an action demanded by the ideological temper of the times.” A survey published in Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality, a few years afterwards, showed 69% of the responding American psychiatrists being in disagreement with the APA’s definition change in its Diagnostic Manual because they still viewed homosexuality as a disorder. In any event, the prevailing public perception about consensus in the scientific community on the inherence and normality of same-sex attractions does not reflect reality.

Linked to the foregoing is the important question, which is also directly relevant for our considerations on the position of the homosexually inclined applicant for the priesthood, of whether or how far this homosexual inclination is reversible. According to many psychotherapists, therapy with motivated persons is more effective than
commonly believed. It often results in a substantial decrease of homosexual fantasies and interests and greater personality maturity. In a minority of cases even a complete change to heterosexuality has been achieved. The older theorists and therapists, notably Adler, Jung, and Stekel, had already made similar claims, but the first more systematic study inquiring into the effect of psychotherapy was done in the early sixties by the New York group of Irving Bieber. The reported results were encouraging, but they must be interpreted with prudence. Of 72 exclusively homosexual (male) patients, 14 (19%) became exclusively heterosexual; of 30 male bisexuals, 15 (50%). That might convey a slightly overly optimistic impression. For one thing, the therapeutic effects were evaluated by the therapists themselves, and secondly, the effects were assessed at the end of therapy, not years later, while experience teaches that after some time, several ex-patients may slide back, more or less, into their former patterns.

Making a discount for these sobering factors, the main findings of the Bieber group about deep changes away from homosexuality in at least a minority of therapy-minded persons have indeed been confirmed by subsequent researchers. The most published report of the last decade is that of Robert Spitzer, the New York professor of psychiatry who at the time was a key member of the psychiatric task force that abolished the pathology-definition of homosexuality in 1973. Of 200 self-selected ex-therapy and ex-counseling clients whom he examined with respect to changes in their sexual attractions, he rated 11% of the 143 males and 37% of the females as “deeply changed” from homosexuality to heterosexuality. Further, an additional 29% of the males and 63% of the females were “substantially improved.” This psychiatrist, who himself had for a long time not believed in the possibility of change, now shifted to a moderately positive position. Although Spitzer was very careful in his wording, it is typical of the political and academic culture of our time on this subject that he was vehemently attacked from all sides, and even accused of “treason.”

For the priest and theologian, the practical conclusion must be that although excessive optimism as to the possibilities of deep, real, and lasting change from homosexuality to heterosexuality is to be avoided, the prevailing fatalism is not justified either. However, relatively few therapists specialize in change-directed forms of treatment or counseling for homosexuality. Sadly, many counselors and other professionals keep aloof from change-directed therapies, in part because the ideological and political climate at universities and training institutes is averse to them, in part because many share (to some degree) the homosexual emancipation ethics: Identify with your sexual feelings and live
accordingly. That does not mean there is no demand for change-directed treatment and counseling on the part of many same-sex attracted people themselves. This demand is bigger than most would think, both on the part of those homosexually oriented who have experienced or are aware of the illusions of the “gay lifestyle” and on the part of those who reject it out of moral, religious, or commonsense reasons.

Homosexuality and the Roman Catholic Church

Insofar as the Church is part of the world, it is not surprising that the problem of homosexuality reverberates fully within it. Yet the high percentage, as compared with the total population, of homosexually inclined—and often practicing—seminarians, priests, and other consecrated religious makes the problem of homosexuality within the Church even more urgent. In this respect, the Catholic Church in the United States functions as a role model for the Church in other parts of the world, because of the high status America enjoys in the world as the most developed and scientifically progressive nation. If the reported numbers and data are only approximately correct, then the Catholic Church is (still?) raising a clergy of which a non-negligible part has a homosexual orientation. Some even feel that, “It is increasingly a subject of discussion at the beginning of the twenty-first century … that the priestly ministry is, or is about to become, a profession for gays.”

Against the background of the numerous homosexual—and to a much lesser extent, pedophilia—scandals in the Church in virtually all Western countries on the one hand, and on the other hand the claim of homosexually oriented priests and reformist theologians that it is desirable that men with this orientation exercise the priestly profession, one may wonder what percentage of priests, monks, and seminarians are thus inclined. Statistics can seldom be taken at face value, especially in this area. Nevertheless, one fact stands out: significantly more seminarians, priests, and monks tend towards homosexual interests, or have conscious homosexual feelings, than the numbers in the overall male population would predict. For the U.S., it has been estimated on the basis of several sources that between 1960 and 1977 about 20% of the priests behaved homosexually or had inner homosexual conflicts, while this percentage considerably increased in the years through 1985. Later publications by the same author mention 50% of American priests as living a celibate life, 30% having had relations with women, and 15% with (young) men.

Considering the statistical limitations of these estimates, such a sketch is not fully convincing, although it is perhaps the best
approximation available. It is not difficult to find journalistic estimates of up to 50% of American priests being “gay,” but skepticism is warranted.\textsuperscript{33} According to a questionnaire study in Germany in 1977, among 235 priests in pastoral practice, 15-25\% declared themselves predominantly or exclusively homosexual; but since only half of the contacted priests answered the questions, this percentage need not be representative for the whole group.\textsuperscript{34}

Another author with experience in this field estimated that minimally (“only”) 6-8\% of the German candidates for the priesthood in 1990 had homosexual tendencies.\textsuperscript{35} It is significant that the existence of homosexual “gangs” within German seminaries was openly criticized by the Master of Novices of the Jesuits in Nürnberg, Stefan Kiechle.\textsuperscript{36} Even if only a minority of the seminarians would initially participate in such gangs, they would be likely to heavily influence the atmosphere in the rather closed world of the seminary, or, as a matter of fact, in the broader circles of the ecclesiastical world. They may infect others, or incite them to other kinds of perversions. Illustrative is the fact that after the homosexual scandals in the seemingly orthodox seminary of Sankt Pölten, Austria, had been carefully examined by papal delegate Bishop Klaus Küng, only 10 out of the 40 seminarians were allowed to continue their studies for the priesthood.\textsuperscript{37}

In the largest Catholic nation of the world, Brazil, numerous homosexual—and by comparison only few really pedophilic—incidents have been brought to public notice, and these have repeatedly shocked as well as angered the faithful.\textsuperscript{38} For Brazil, however, dependable statistics on the number of homosexually oriented or homosexually acting priests and monks do not exist; there are only indications. For example, between 1987 and 1993, 27 (2\%) of the 1500 priests of the city of São Paulo died of AIDS.\textsuperscript{39} This at least points to an above-average percentage of homosexually active priests in comparison with the general male population: It is the visible top of an invisible iceberg. Also, information of the type supplied to Gino Nasini—by 62 priests in various responsible ecclesiastical functions—regarding the homosexual priests under their supervision or among their acquaintances, leaves no room for doubt about the seriousness of the problem in Brazil. Of the sex scandals in their dioceses, 35\% were homosexual and 13\% pedophile (but his criteria for “pedophilia” are not very precise, so some of these cases probably concern adolescents). The frequent observation that homosexual priests tend to attain influential positions in the Church, to become vicars of the more prestigious parishes, and to be popular, “charismatic” personalities, gives pause to reflect.\textsuperscript{40}
From this evidence, a few generalizations can be made. First, the percentage of homosexually oriented seminarians and priests in large parts of the Western world is much higher than in the population as a whole. Admitting that many estimates are inflated, in part by those who want to normalize the institution of the “gay priest,” in part because so many incidents regarding homosexual priests attract publicity that one may get an exaggerated impression of their number, yet 10% seems a moderate estimate. That would be three, four, or five times as high as in the population at large, which is for men approximately 2%.41

Two qualifications are in order. First, average percentages of homosexual priests do not convey an adequate picture of the situation. There is much reason to suppose that homosexual priests or candidates for the priesthood are overrepresented in some organizations within the Church—in some dioceses, orders, congregations, monasteries, seminaries, etc.—while they are probably rare in other organizations, dioceses, or institutes. Second, the percentage of homosexual candidates for the priesthood may well be diminishing in recent years, certainly in some quarters of the Church. These caveats notwithstanding, it is difficult not to see that the Church is still confronted with a serious internal problem. Why do so many young men with same-sex attractions want to be priests today? What characteristics of the Church today elicit this interest? Obviously, the problem is deeper than inadequate technical screening of candidates.

It is difficult to find a monocausal explanation for this near-worldwide increase of homosexual behavior of priests during the last half-century or so, and of the rather well-established increase of homosexual applicants for the priesthood during the same period. Indubitably, the secular mentality change with respect to homosexuality did not stop at the threshold of the Church. But the disproportionately high numbers of same-sex attracted clergy must in some significant part be a reaction to factors or situations within the Church itself. Factors which no doubt contributed to this increasing “homosexualization” of the clergy and the accompanying scandals are the often lax attitude of the hierarchy and a negligent way of screening seminarians and candidates for the priesthood. Many in responsible positions in the Church acted on incorrectly understood notions of tolerance and understanding; sentimentalism and a lack of fortitude substituted for realistic Christian love; sometimes an attitude of denial and naive carelessness made the responsible functionaries minimize the gravity of the problem and cover it up, in the hope that it would disappear of itself. Others in leadership positions, to the contrary, purposely adopted the positions of the gay movement, or continue to do so, to some extent. A
kind of “gay” spirituality and theology, in opposition to the moral teachings of the Church, was developed, and has by no means disappeared. In effect, the “dogmas” of the biologically (genetically) determined and unchangeable homosexual “nature,” of the specific identity of the homosexually-oriented person, were translated into Christian terminology. Hence homosexuality was spoken of as a “variant of creation,” a “creational experience,” or an “equivalent variation of nature,” and it was inferred that it must be “willed by God,” be something “good,” so that acting in accordance should be permitted.42

Because the homosexual inclination would be an integral part of the person’s authentic nature, he would even be under a moral obligation to acknowledge his identity and accept his feelings, which means that he should integrate them in his actual, practical love life. In the last edition of the official German Catholic Lexicon for Theology and Church (LThK), theologian Wunibald Müller states bluntly:

The objective of pastoral care today is to help people accept their homosexual orientation and to live in love. In this sense, the engagement for the human and civil rights of homosexual people can be seen as part of the pastoral ministry. Since today homosexual behavior in the context of a personal relationship is not judged as being different from the sexual behavior of the heterosexual within a personal relationship, therefore pastoral ministry will likewise see it as its duty to help homosexual people shaping a homosexual partnership.43

Thus the unambiguous biblical testimony, confirmed time and again in Church tradition and several statements of the Church’s Magisterium, to the effect that homosexuality is a disorder in the relationship of the sexes, and homosexual practice a serious offense, is radically reinterpreted. The Bible then becomes a culturally determined document without pretensions of absolute validity.

Whoever demands that homosexuality be recognized as a variant of creation equivalent to heterosexuality, advocates a view of man that deviates from biblical testimony. Such demands strike at the heart of creation and are therefore directed against the Creator himself. “The human being rebels … against his own nature,” Archbishop Comastri said in his meditations on the Way of the Cross in the Coliseum on Good Friday 2006, “He invents himself again. He fights against his Creator. Not His image he wants to be, but his own creator and lord.”44

One’s moral view of homosexuality is intimately connected to one’s moral view of human sexuality in general. If the whole of the
Church’s moral teachings on sexuality is not accepted, this has inescapable consequences for the evaluation of homosexual behavior. And it is impossible to avoid the impression that even persons with responsible, high functions in the Church are critical of—from sometimes reject—a part of the moral doctrine on sexuality. For some observers, this is one of the main reasons for the high—in some countries perhaps still growing—percentages of homosexually oriented seminarians, priests, and monks. In some places, candidates for the priesthood whose convictions were in line with the Church’s official doctrine on celibacy and homosexuality could not pass psychological testing because they were “too dogmatic” or “sexually underdeveloped.” Where such attitudes prevail, it is inevitable that homosexual networks and subcultures come into existence in seminaries, and then among the clergy at large. This has a destabilizing and repelling effect on heterosexual young men. Add to this that, in general, a tendency to feminization is apparent in the whole Western Church, a consequence of the prevailing secular feminism. A more feminized atmosphere, in turn, facilitates the acceptance of the less masculine in ministry functions, as priests or deacons. So feminization and homosexualization in the Church go hand in hand. (We have noted above that the clerical sex scandals show that the problem in the Church is predominantly a question of “ordinary” homosexuality, not different from homosexuality in the secular world.)

These various secular influences have weakened moral convictions with respect to sexuality and man-woman relationships. For ultimately, the unheard of epidemic of sexual abuse by seminarians, priests and monks that has come into the spotlight of publicity can hardly be understood unless in relation to an underlying crisis of belief in the Church’s moral doctrine on marriage and sexuality in vast sections of the clergy.

**Homosexuality and the Sacrament of Orders**

According to canon 1024 of the Code of Canon Law (CIC), only a baptized man can validly receive the sacrament of orders. Even if a man with homosexual feelings is unable to adequately identify himself with his manhood, he nevertheless is a man psycho-physically according to his real nature. Being baptized, then, he seems to meet the two requirements for a valid ordination.

However, a merely formal interpretation of the notion of manhood is not sufficient. To be a man is more than to possess male sexual organs. It is the synthesis of three fundamental elements, which are identified and explained by Spanish theologian San José Prisco:
Sexual identity, sexual role, and sexual orientation. The first refers to the self-perception and the personal consciousness of being a man or a woman; the sexual role is the behavior manifested by the individual and that marks him or her in front of others as a man or a woman; sexual orientation refers to the erotic attraction of the individual for the same or the opposite sex.

In view of these aspects, “a candidate will be more or less suitable inasmuch as he considers himself, lives, and enables others to recognize him as a heterosexual.”

If there are primarily theological reasons that designate homosexuality as an objective impediment to ordination, it is puzzling that these very theological arguments are almost completely absent from the present discussion. They seem not to penetrate, not to be taken seriously even by theologians themselves. Yet the theological dimension is indispensable, because the question of whether or not homosexuality is an objective obstacle to ordination cannot be answered exclusively on the basis of insights from psychology and the human sciences, and even less on the basis of pragmatic considerations. Evidence from the human sciences is useful, for it can confirm that a sound theological approach to this problem is in harmony with the laws of human nature. But the Church must present her proper, theological wisdom in the first place, as the fundamental source of arguments for her position. This should be done more articulately and more powerfully than, generally speaking, has been done so far, for many people still have uncertain and unclear notions about the theological reasons for the Church’s stance on the ordination of sexually disordered or handicapped persons.

Now the priest, acting in persona Christi capitis, must represent Christ not only as a person, but in the performance of actions that are specifically male: in his acting as “bridegroom” towards his “Bride,” the Church. If it is true that the sacramental sign must be similar to the reality it indicates, the question naturally arises whether a homosexually oriented man is able to represent Christ in these specifically manly activities at all, since the relation “bridegroom-bride” is alien to him. If the meaning and symbolism of the sacrament of holy orders, with their male-female connotations and basic anthropological realities, are to be safeguarded against being obscured, rendered imprecise, or even denied (the latter occurs when a same-sex attracted priest values his orientation as a positive source of meaning), then heterosexual manhood is in fact a meaningful and even indispensable condition for ordination.
Because the victims of sexual abuse by members of the clergy were in large majority male adolescents, homosexuality has undeniably proven to be a risk factor that cannot be underestimated, all the more because there is also a staggering incidence of relapse among the perpetrators.49 Therefore, in the case of same-sex attracted candidates for the priesthood, the “usefulness” of these prospective priests for the ministry of the Church, as required in canon 1025, section 2 (this and all subsequent canonical references are to the Code of Canon Law, 1983), and understood as “appropriate operational capacity” and “harmlessness for the Church and the people entrusted to it,” has to be judged as very restricted at least. For their employment in fields vital for the Church, such as ministry with children and youth, must be regarded as risky. Respect for the people entrusted to the Church as well as protection of their physical and moral integrity must in this respect have priority over the sensitivity of some homosexually oriented men who feel hurt and unjustly treated for being excluded from ordination. A fruitful pastoral ministry to married couples and families, moreover, presupposes the fundamental suitability of the priest himself for marriage and normal family life.

According to canon 1037, the promise of celibacy before the reception of the sacrament of orders implies not only the commitment to sexual abstinence, but also the authentic renunciation of marriage and family, and thus in principle presupposes heterosexual manhood. Homosexually oriented men cannot be supposed to meet this requirement, unless one would, at least indirectly, be open to homosexual partnerships of one type or another.

Homosexuality must be understood as a psychic illness in the sense of canons 1041, n. 1, and 1044, section 2, n. 2. As we have seen, the homosexually inclined person suffers a more or less serious blockage of the ability to fully relate normally to persons both of the same and of the opposite sex, in all aspects, and to emotionally understand the vital dimension of the man-woman relationship. (Nor can this defect be compensated for by empathic, sympathetic, or affable manners and conduct). Secondly, there is the related lack of sufficient emotional maturity, as required according to canon 1031, section 1. This may express itself in narcissistic, egocentric, and sexually promiscuous behavior, the latter often accompanied by “a general lack of awareness of sin,”50 and in depression, psychosomatic ailments, and other manifestations of emotional and personality instability. Although such expressions of emotional immaturity of course vary from individual to individual in intensity and form, the risk of their occurrence, as correlates to same-sex attractions is in general too high to be acceptable.
The *Instruction of the Congregation for Catholic Education*, 2005, has—in an unambiguous manner—rendered explicit the prohibition against ordination of men with a homosexual orientation, which had always been implicit in canon law. The text, approved by Pope Benedict XVI, affirms that the Church “cannot admit ... to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called ‘gay culture’.”

Further confirmation of this position took place in May 2008 in a letter from Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone to all Bishops and Superiors of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and in November 2008, when the prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, Cardinal Grocholewski, presenting the *Directives for the application of psychology with respect to the admission and education of priesthood candidates*, reaffirmed to the press that same-sex attracted men could not be ordained to the priesthood, precisely on account of the nature of the priesthood. This orientation, he said, is like a wound that hinders one in his pastoral ministry; at issue is “the way one engages in relationships, and not just the question of abstinence.”

In addition, the 2005 *Instruction* makes it clear that a prerequisite for the ordination of a man with a homosexual penchant as a deacon, as a first step to the priesthood, is the complete overcoming of this tendency—not merely a period of three years of sexual abstinence prior to it without regard to whether the candidate continues feeling homosexual attractions. It considers homosexuality not only as a sexual issue, but also as a more comprehensive syndrome. It states that homosexuality “gravely” thwarts a person’s adequate relating to men and women alike, whereas such normal relating is imperative for the development of a true sense of spiritual fatherhood.

Thus, a one-sided focusing on “the capacity for sexual abstinence” as the decisive criterion of evaluation for the admission to ordination is wisely avoided. Naturally, it is important whether a candidate can live chastely. In the case of most same-sex oriented men, there is a marked preoccupation with sexual fantasies and desires, so that in spite of their good will and intentions, experience teaches us that few of them succeed in permanently resisting the temptation to one or another kind of sexual sin. Such desires are part and parcel of a generalized personality problem (sometimes called a “character neurosis”) that comprises much more than the strictly sexual. As we have written elsewhere, “Homosexual longings are not isolated drives but symptoms of an overall deficit in a person’s emotional growth to full masculinity (femininity). This is not an accidental aspect of the human
psyche. Being a man, being a woman, is part of the substance of our psychic nature, our personal identity."54

From the wording of the Instruction one must conclude that it leaves no room for the ordination of men who have not overcome unequivocally their homosexual feelings, whether acted out in the past or not, and who have not experienced a profound change towards heterosexuality. In this respect, the prohibition is absolute.

The admission of homosexually feeling men to the seminary and the priesthood is not left to the discretion of the responsible Ordinaries. The directive evidently is meant to be accepted and implemented in the practice of the formation of priests in the strict sense it has been formulated. In fact, this document has established legal certainty concerning this controversial issue.

The Church alone is entitled to judge who is called to the priestly ministry. When she decrees that men who have not overcome unequivocally their homosexual tendencies, nor have experienced a clear change towards heterosexuality, are not called, then this cannot be denounced as a lamentable example of a “prohibition of a profession” (as in the Nazi ordinance that prohibited certain categories of persons to exercise certain professions, the Berufsverbot); nor is it “unjust discrimination” or “homophobia.” For it is not sufficient to feel attracted to the priesthood, to want to be a priest; from subjective feelings and interests alone cannot be inferred an objective claim or right to the ordained ministry. The crucial point is the Church’s decision as to the suitability of the candidate for the priestly ministry and its meaningful and fertile exercise. In the case of homosexually oriented men, the Church, motivated by theological insights, supported by information from the human sciences and the extremely painful experiences of the recent past, considers this suitability not guaranteed. The equal dignity of all human beings does not imply that all have the same legal status, the same competence, and the same qualities to be admitted for ordination.

Suggestions and Outlook

If we are not to become entangled in contradictory arguments in canonical law and theology, then we must recognize that same-sex attractions are not compatible with the priesthood. Clarity in theological statement and juridical norms is the best guarantee for the truth that alone sets free. For this reason, it is very desirable, and indeed of some urgency, that homosexual syndromes, including pedophilia, be expressly and formally designated as a hindrance for ordination in the
corresponding regulations of the Code of Canon Law, by dint of Papal law. This would more distinctly underline the meaning and necessity of this regulation for the Church of our time, for the priesthood in particular, than an Instruction, even if this has been approved by a Pope who himself has ordered its publication.

Apart from this, the question remains whether this well-founded prohibition of ordination of the homosexually inclined can or will be adequately enforced. The reactions in various ecclesiastical circles to the Instruction do not justify much optimism. Many in responsible positions keep silent or seem hesitant; some try to play down the uncompromising character of the directive. For the Instruction to be effective within the near future, it is of course necessary that bishops and leaders of institutes of formation are willing to recognize the problem in the first place, discuss it, and try to solve it resolutely and courageously, and not prefer, as has happened too often in the past, to conceal it, play it down, or postpone long overdue practical measures to counter it. Furthermore, the problem should not be relegated to the forum internum, because under such procedures the temptation to bypass implementation of the Vatican proscription may be too great.

With regard to selection procedures, the logically consistent method in the case of an applicant for the seminary who appears to have had more than transitory, pubertal homosexual inclinations in the past, would be to postpone admission to the seminary or educational institute until convincing psychological proof is submitted of his profound inner change from homosexual to heterosexual interests, and this for at least several years (five years is the safest duration, according to several psychotherapists). Should the candidate manifest bisexual tendencies, admission would not be considered either, until years of sustained complete reversal of sexual interests have elapsed, with the accompanying growth in masculine identification. That would make admission to the seminary and priesthood of a so-called “ex-gay” man a rather rare exception, but that is what is clearly taught by psychological experience. Although substantial improvement is often attained during several years of (self-) therapy, radical and lasting changes (in motivated patients/clients) still constitute a minority of about 10-20%. An additional advantage of this realistic procedure would be the reduced attractiveness of the seminary, the priestly profession, and the religious life for men with this kind of sexual and personality immaturity. In consequence, gay networks and subcultures within the Church would lose their breeding grounds.

In the last analysis, however, the solution of the grave problem of homosexuality in the clergy depends on whether bishops and other
responsible dignitaries will comply with the obligation demanded of them by Pope John Paul II to commit themselves to “the fullness of the Christian truth with respect to sexual morality,” taking pains to purify and renew the priesthood along with the purification and renewal of marriage and family life.

Notes


2. Among the many studies analyzing the social-psychological backgrounds of this change, particularly illuminating are: Homosexuality and the politics of truth by psychiatrist Jeffrey Satinover (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1996), The gay nineties, by social psychologist Paul Cameron (Franklin TN: Adroit Press, 1993), and Homosexualität aus katholischer Sicht (Homosexuality from the Catholic viewpoint), by moral theologian Andreas Laun, Auxiliary Bishop of Salzburg, Austria (Eichstätt, Germany: Franz-Sales Verlag, 2001, 208-265).

3. For an outstanding survey of the interrelationships between the sexual, “gender”, and general cultural revolution and their global methods of operation, see Marguerite A. Peeters: La mondialisation de la révolution culturelle occidentale: Concepts-clefs, mécanismes opérationnels (The globalization of the cultural revolution in the West: Key concepts, operational mechanisms), (Brussels: Institute for Intercultural Dialogue Dynamics, 2007). Mrs. Peeters is an expert in the strategies and objectives of international organizations involved in cultural change, including the UN.


6. Newport, F. “American attitudes toward homosexuality continue to become more tolerant.” *Gallup News Service*, 2001, June 4. It is questionable, though, if these polls probe what many people really think in their heart of hearts, put otherwise, to what degree they tend to give “desirable” answers.


8. Baier, S. "Ein Sieg für die Schwulenlobby“: www.die-tagespost.de/Archiv/titel_anzeige.asp?ID=20513. Admittedly, the resolution did not go so far as to demand the prohibition of the Bible and the Quran as homophobic literature, but it is obvious that the idea is already implicit in the text.


15. McWhirter, D.P. & Mattison, A.M. *The male couple: How relationships develop*. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984. We must keep in mind that the greater part of active homosexuals have no fixed partners, though.


23. The key study here is Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry*, p.102 and passim.


25. Still another limitation of these percentages of change is that they concern the clients who had finished treatment. A portion of those who begin seems to stop halfway.


Dutch psychologist van den Aardweg reported 11% of 100 male homosexual clients “radically changed” from homosexuality to heterosexuality (and 37% of a small group of lesbians); of these 100 who started therapy, however, about 40% broke off the treatment after some time. Of those male clients who continued treatment, 19% were rated “radically changed” (and 60% of the females): van den Aardweg, G.J.M. *On the origins and treatment of homosexuality*. New York: Praeger/Westport, 1986. These statistics are very similar to the ones given by Spitzer (below).

A recent, well-designed study by two American psychologists yields about the same picture: Jones, S.L. & Yarhouse, M.A. *Ex-gays?* Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007.
28. Spitzer however reiterated that his findings “call into question” the “conventional wisdom in the mental health profession” that “few, if any,” ex-gays “will report changes in sexual attraction, fantasy, and desire consistent with true changes in sexual orientation.” Spitzer, R.L. “Reply: Study results should not be dismissed,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 32 (5, 2003): 469-472.
30. The homosexual (or heterosexual) pedophiliac is interested in boys (or girls) who do not yet display the characteristics of puberty. But the vast majority of homosexual scandals caused by priests concern adolescents, thus must be scientifically categorized as expressions of *ephebophilia*. There is nothing special here, because homosexual tendencies are in general directed to youngsters much more than to mature or middle-aged men, or to prepubescents. As Richard Fitzgibbons noticed, “the crisis in the Church is not one of pedophilia, but about [‘normal’] homosexuality” (Task Force on Homosexuality of the Catholic Medical Association. “A contribution to the debate about the ordination of homosexuals.” *Linacre Quarterly* 69 (2002): 190–197. On the other side, the difference between molestation of a 10 or 12-year old and a 14, 15, or 16-year old is often not so great, neither for the victims themselves nor for their parents.
33. For example, a psychologist screening candidate for seminaries believed between 20 and 40% of the priesthood to be homosexually oriented (*Time*, 2005, Oct. 17, p. 53). However, he represented that situation as not undesirable, and people of that mindset generally tend to exaggerate the numbers so as to make it seem a normal thing.
34. Müller, W. *Priester als Seelsorger für Homosexuelle (Priests as pastors for homosexuals)*. Düsseldorf, Germany: Patmos, 1979. It is likely that among the non-respondents were a number of homosexually inclined men, who perhaps did not want to react. On the other hand, volunteer studies like this one as a rule attract the more liberal types, and those who want to discuss their problems.
38. To illustrate the present situation: Only in the last 5 months of 2009, 5 Brazilian priests were murdered, at least 3 of them with a homosexual background, and one bishop had to resign.
41. 2.8% of men and 1.4% of women in a representative sample of US subjects between 18 and 60 years regarded themselves as homosexual or bisexual (Laumann, E.O. et al. The social organization of sexuality. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). In a national British sample, 1.5% of men and .7% of women age 16-59 reported homosexual contact(s) in the last 5 years (Wellings, K. et al. Sexual behaviour in Britain. London: Penguin, 1994). Of a very large Canadian sample 18-59 years, 1.7% could be regarded as homosexual or bisexual (Canadian Community Health Survey. Statistics Canada, June 15, 2004). Of all 21 year olds of the New Zealand town of Christchurch, 2%-2.8% were rated homosexual or bisexual. Fergusson, D.M. et al. “Is sexual orientation related to mental health problems and suicidality in young people?” Archives of General Psychiatry 56 (1999): 876–880. All these studies however have restrictions and flaws that we cannot consider here.
42. E.g. Theobald, M. Der Römerbrief (The letter to the Romans). Darmstadt (Germany): Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000, p. 145. These ideas have a considerable impact on many German moral theologians. They are discussed in Laun, A. (Ed.) Homosexualität aus katholischer Sicht (Homosexuality from a Catholic viewpoint). Eichstätt, Germany: Franz-Sales-Verlag, 2001.
44. “Certainly,” he continued, “the attack on the family is a painful suffering for God. It seems there is today a kind of anti-Genesis, a counter-project, a diabolic pride that wants to abolish the family. Man would like to invent the family again, to change the grammar of life itself, devised and wanted by God. However, to put himself in the place of God without being God is the most stupid arrogance, the most dangerous adventure.” www.kath.net/detail.php?id=13380.
46. Commenting on the John Jay Reports of 2002, Richard Fitzgibbons remarked: “Hopefully, this clarification, that homosexuality must be considered as the basis of the problem that caused the crisis, leads to a number of new steps to protect the Church, the priesthood, the teenagers and the children”. “Seminary reform needed in wake of sex abuse study,” Zenit, 1 May, 2004: www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=52897.

The facts: 80-90% of the priests involved in the scandals of the foregoing 50 years had abused adolescents from 14 years on, and 10% pre-pubertal boys. About the same proportion of homosexuals to homosexual pedophiles is found in the homosexual population at large.


48. One of the few theologians to expound this argument was German professor Hubert Windisch: “Priesteramt und Homosexualität” (Priestly ministry and homosexuality). Die Tagespost, 2004, Sept. 30, p. 5.


51. Congregation for the Catholic Education: Instruction concerning the criteria for the discernment of vocations with regard to persons with homosexual tendencies, in view of their admission to the seminary and to Holy Orders. November 29, 2005.


55. 10 % if all who started counseling/treatment are factored in, 20% if only those who continued counseling/treatment are counted. Cf. Notes 25 and 26.