

The Linacre Quarterly

Volume 73 | Number 3

Article 2

August 2006

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Recommended Citation

Whitehead, Kenneth D. (2006) "Homosexuality: Is the Catholic Church Guilty of Discrimination?," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 73 : No. 3 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol73/iss3/2>

Homosexuality: Is the Catholic Church Guilty of Discrimination?

by

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I.

The new Instruction from the Holy See on homosexuality and the priesthood has been sensationalized in some places in the media as if it represented some kind of radical new departure for the Catholic Church. However, only someone ignorant of the Church's constant teaching against homosexual acts – or persuaded that this teaching could somehow be changed in accordance with modern ideas – could ever have seriously imagined that the new Instruction would turn out to be anything other than a solemn reiteration of the Church's traditional teaching and practice with regard to homosexuality.

In the permissive moral climate of today, however, many people nevertheless go on thinking that the Church is simply going to have to reconcile herself and come to terms with modern society's current acceptance of homosexuality as natural and normal – as well as with contemporary society's at least passive acceptance of practically every other kind of voluntary sexual activity whatever (provided only that it is "consensual"). Spawned by the so-called sexual revolution beginning in the 1960s, this is the general attitude the Church faces today in the modern secular world in which she lives; and, it is widely thought, the Church will eventually have to accept this new morality, at least in some respects.

Hence the new Instruction from the Congregation for Catholic Education generally barring homosexuals from admission to seminaries or to the priesthood, except in extremely limited circumstances, has encountered the same kind of negative and critical reaction that has so

often been given in recent years to other authoritative Church documents upholding traditional teaching and practice in the face of contemporary wishes and expectations. This negative and critical reaction comes from inside as well as outside the Church. Although the document has not been attacked head-on as much as it has been belittled and nit-picked, this too inevitably undermines its authority and credibility, and there are other signs that it is not universally being accepted as settling the question about homosexuality in the priesthood. In the minds of many, this question is considered to be still an open question.

Some accounts contend that what the document says and prescribes is not really clear. Other accounts speak of the need to “interpret” or even “decipher” it. It is noted that Roman documents are not seldom subject to modification in practice, and, in this case, many bishops, major superiors of religious orders, and seminary rectors are said to be at loggerheads about this particular document, and this will inevitably lead to divergences in how it is implemented. Yet other commentators have asked, sometimes querulously, what is meant by such expressions employed in the document as “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” – as if the meaning of this particular expression were not pretty clear; it appears, for example, in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC #2358).

Meanwhile, a number of priests have “come out” openly as homosexuals since the document was issued, apparently determined to register their defiance of the Roman decision; a few of them have even resigned from the priesthood. Finally, there have been a few open letters signed by priests, both here and abroad, declaring that homosexual priests make such a great contribution to the Church’s mission that – the suggestion is – this new Roman document cannot really be considered the final word in the matter, or be expected to stand for long.

One of the main impressions left in the minds of anyone dependent on typical media reporting for whatever knowledge they may have of the nature and contents of this Instruction is surely that the Catholic Church is – once again, the suggestion is! – gratuitously insulting an entire class of men, homosexuals, by stigmatizing them and trying to deny to them their legitimate “rights.”

In reality, the document is quite clear about what it says and prescribes. It says that homosexuality is an “objectively disordered” condition which as a general rule renders men unfit for ordination. Hence homosexuals as a rule should not be ordained; nor should they be admitted to seminaries for priestly training, either. The document specifies in very plain words that “the Church, while profoundly respecting the person in question, cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called ‘gay culture’.”

However, the door to ordination is not entirely closed to them, since it is recognized that homosexual tendencies are sometimes only “transient,” and can sometimes be overcome with what the document calls “affective maturity.” Such tendencies must have been overcome at least three years prior to ordination to the diaconate, however. Thus, the document does not deny in principle that men with homosexual tendencies are capable of leading the life of chastity required by the Catholic priesthood; it is granted that men with such tendencies have been good and holy priests. It also means that bishops, major superiors, and seminary rectors do have some small discretion in the matter of admission of some of them to the seminary and to ordination.

In the climate of today, though, this area of discretion will undoubtedly be stretched to the limit, while the achievement of “affective maturity” in the case of given candidates will very likely be claimed more often than the Roman drafters ever imagined. At the same time, however, the major thrust of the document quite definitely is to deny admittance to the seminary and to ordination of men with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” or a history of homosexual involvement, and that decision will surely have a profound influence on the selection of future candidates for ordination.

Nowhere, though, does the Instruction even suggest that the ordinations of homosexual men might be invalid. But at the same time it nowhere accords the slightest recognition either to what the modern world has generally come to consider the main point about homosexuality, namely, that it supposedly results from a natural (and presumably permanent and irreversible) “orientation.” The Instruction never speaks of “sexual orientation” at all as such, but only of “homosexual tendencies.” It thus does not even recognize the category of “sexual orientation”; nor does it employ the term on which so many of the modern world’s ideas and conclusions about homosexuality have come to be based.

In the view of the Holy See, so-called sexual orientation does not define one’s identity or tell “who one is,” as so many homosexuals claim. While the American Psychiatric Association ceased considering homosexuality an illness or pathology as far back as 1973, acceding thereby to prevalent modern thinking as well as greatly influencing it, the Church continues instead to consider homosexuality to be, in effect, a pathology; this is implicit in the Church’s characterization of the condition as a “disorder.”

In short, this document, which bears a title that perhaps only the Holy See could have come up with – “Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of their Mission to the Seminary and Holy Orders” – presents an entirely traditional Catholic position on the subject of

homosexuality and on the Catholic moral teaching and practice with regard to it. Once again, in the face of tremendous contrary pressures, the Church's magisterium is found standing serenely firm on the Church's traditional understanding of a contentious and controversial issue.

Dated November 4, 2005, and issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Instruction has been in preparation at least since 1996. Reportedly, the suggestion that led to its preparation came from Pope John Paul II in 1994. The document is thus not a reaction to the Church's clerical sex abuse crisis, although it mentions in passing that its issuance has been made "more urgent by the current situation" – even while it does not specify what the "current situation" is; that is thought to be well understood.

What is perhaps most surprising about the Instruction, in the end, is how long it took to produce it, especially since it contains so little in the way of breaking any new ground on the substance of the question. Rather, it simply reiterates in plain and unmistakable language what the Catholic teaching about homosexuality has been all along – and what official Catholic practice with regard to homosexuality and what admission to the seminary and to ordination are supposed to have been all along (except that, in some now notorious cases, this official Church teaching and practice have not been consistently followed in recent years in the United States as well as elsewhere).

A 1961 document from the Holy See on selecting candidates for the priesthood expressly excluded homosexuals in a single sentence using language reflective of that time: "Those affected by the perverse inclination to homosexuality or pederasty should be excluded from religious vows or ordination." The present document makes reference to two other subsequent official documents in the same vein, one dating from 1985 and the other from 2002. The 1985 document discussed such terms as "practice", "orientation," and "temptation" in relation to the chaste celibacy required by the priesthood, and concluded that the term "temptation" was to be preferred to that of "orientation"; thus, it is not just a matter of not employing the language concerning so-called sexual orientation; the Church has specifically rejected that language. This 1985 document also noted that "people have to face many and diverse temptations in life, and the mark of the Christian is in bearing them and resisting them, with the grace of God."

The 2002 document referred to in the present Instruction came from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments and stated that "ordination to the diaconate and the priesthood of homosexual men or men with homosexual tendencies is absolutely inadvisable and imprudent, and from the pastoral point of view very risky. A homosexual person or one with a homosexual tendency is not, therefore, fit to receive the sacrament of holy orders." This latter 2002 document caused quite a stir at the time it was issued and should have alerted people

to what was coming. The present Instruction is nothing if not consistent with these earlier Church documents on the subject.

In fact, practically the only seemingly new things in the present document are a couple of bare sentences stating that a priest must achieve "affective maturity" in order to be able "to relate correctly to both men and women, developing in him a true sense of spiritual fatherhood towards the Church community." In other words, priests representing Christ must be bridegrooms to Christ's bride, the Church. The Instruction contends that the homosexual condition "gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women." Apart from mention of this particular impediment, the present document speaks only in the most general terms of the "negative consequences" that the Church believes would follow upon the general acceptance of homosexuals for priestly ordination.

With regard to those homosexuals who in the past may have used the priesthood as a refuge from social and family expectations of marriage and family life, this document introduces a salutary note of *honesty* – much needed today with regard to the whole question of homosexuality. The Instruction states: "It would be gravely dishonest for a candidate to hide his own homosexuality in order to proceed, despite everything, toward ordination. Such a deceitful attitude does not correspond to the spirit of truth, loyalty, and openness that must characterize the personality of him who believes he is called to serve Christ and his Church in the ministerial priesthood."

Thus, in a very brief compass, this Instruction re-establishes what was never really changed or disestablished by the Church in the first place. However, it is hardly any secret that both Catholic teaching and practice with regard to homosexuality, especially as they relate to the priesthood, have hardly been consistently followed in certain quarters in recent years; and, indeed, have often been seriously called into question, especially as a result of the rise of the contemporary homosexual rights movement, and of the increasing acceptance in contemporary society at large of homosexuals as supposedly constituting a legitimate class of people in society – not deviant, but merely pursuing "alternative lifestyles" – and of homosexual practices as suddenly natural and normal – and not, let us say, perverse and immoral, as once was almost automatically considered to be the case. From being the love that dare not speak its name, homosexuality became transmuted, as some wag remarked, into the desire that won't shut up.

In recent years, what is considered by some to be "enlightened opinion" within the ranks of Catholics has similarly moved quite markedly towards tolerance and even acceptance of active homosexuality. In modern society, in which discrimination of any kind is one of the few things now considered plainly wrong or immoral – and indeed at a time when almost nothing else is any longer characterized as such – not a few Catholics, too,

have not wanted to be seen as guilty of “discriminating” against homosexuals.

In the past several years, during which rumors of a forthcoming Roman document on homosexuality and the priesthood have been rife, not a few voices of theologians, members of religious orders, and even a few bishops have been raised making a definite point of affirming a seemingly unqualified acceptance of homosexuals. At the same time, some bishops have shown no hesitancy or reluctance in ordaining openly homosexual candidates to the diaconate or priesthood. Similarly, many dioceses and parishes have continued with active gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or trans-sexual (GLBT) “ministries,” thus inevitably affixing a moral stamp of approval on these more than highly questionable categories and on the activities associated with them. Similarly, some dioceses or parishes have sponsored (or, at any rate, have allowed) the celebration of so-called “gay pride” Masses. This same kind of moral blindness has been exhibited on ostensibly Catholic college campuses, where “gay” student organizations are too often given official recognition, and where pro-“gay” speakers and programs are not only allowed, but are sometimes even favored.

All of this remained more or less true, even following the revelations of the clerical sex abuse scandals beginning in 2002, after which it soon became widely known and publicized that most of the sex abuse cases being exposed were not the result merely of “pedophilia,” as the media and elite opinion continually tried to claim. Rather, fully 81 percent of these clerical sex abuse cases, according to the report of the U.S. bishops’ own National Review Board, involved homosexual priests in relationships with post-pubescent boys. Those who, even in the face of such statistics, continue to argue that homosexuals are not the only, or even the majority of, sex abusers, not only fail to explain how a statistic such as this 81 percent can simply be blithely ignored; they are also failing to come to grips with such studies as one that appeared in a professional journal showing that the less than 3 percent of the population consisting of male homosexuals was responsible for more than 36 percent of the recognized cases of abuse of children.

Then there were the revelations of the homosexual networks in the priesthood and in seminaries and religious orders, again involving a number of bishops, some of whom had to step down in disgrace as a result of these revelations. One might have thought that all of these evil and offensive manifestations, so contrary to the Church’s firm moral teaching, would have given some pause to those within the Church attempting to promote the normality of homosexuality. To some extent, perhaps, they have given pause at least to some of them.

Still, the critical reception given to the Holy See’s Instruction on homosexuality and the priesthood from so many within the Church’s

official structures cannot be anything but disappointing and disquieting. Many, apparently, simply do not see what is at stake. Thus, it does not appear at the moment that this authoritative Church Instruction will really settle the homosexual priest question – anymore than other similar authoritative Church documents intended to settle such controversial questions as theological dissent within the Church or the ordination of women have, in fact, succeeded in settling the important questions they addressed.

At the very least, though, this new Instruction should perhaps cramp the style of some of those within the Church who continue to think that the affirmation and practice of homosexuality can somehow be made compatible with Catholic teaching and practice, or that the Church's long-standing moral condemnation of any homosexual acts whatever could now, somehow, be modified or abandoned simply because the modern world no longer considers these acts to be wrong. This is not going to happen.

II.

Among the reasons why the new Vatican Instruction on homosexuality and the priesthood has not definitively settled the ongoing controversy on the subject are the various and sometimes conflicting reactions not only of some Catholic theologians and other ostensibly expert commentators on the subject, but even of some of the Catholic bishops themselves. It is not just that the document has been subjected to criticism (and the criticism has largely been allowed to stand); many of those responsible for its implementation have also not displayed very much enthusiasm for it, either.

One of the most widely reported of the episcopal reactions to the document was that of the current president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) himself, Bishop William S. Skylstad of Spokane, Washington. Bishop Skylstad had written in his diocesan newspaper in October, prior to the actual issuance of the Instruction, that "there are many wonderful and excellent priests in the Church who have a gay orientation, are chaste and celibate, and are very effective ministers of the Gospel... Witch-hunts and gay-bashing have no place in the Church." The suggestion here could only be that homosexuality, whatever else it might be, was surely not any bar to the priesthood, in the opinion of the USCCB president.

In numerous press reports, this statement of the president of the U.S. bishops' conference was contrasted with that of Bishop John M. D'Arcy of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, who was quoted in the press as saying that Bishop Skylstad's position was "simply wrong." The media, of course, enjoy the spectacle of bishops contradicting each other in this way – but

only rarely is there such a good clear-cut example of it as in this case. In Bishop D'Arcy's opinion, the new Instruction "does bar anyone whose sexual orientation is towards one's own sex, and it is permanent" (emphasis added). Bishop D'Arcy's view that the ban is total was not entirely borne out in the text of the actual Roman document itself, of course, but it seemed closer than the viewpoint of the USCCB president. Moreover, Bishop D'Arcy's viewpoint certainly represented a healthy realism about the possible consequences of indiscriminately ordaining homosexuals, as many apparently wanted.

Both Bishop Skylstad and Bishop D'Arcy were then among the American bishops who issued formal statements on the Instruction when it came out. The statements of both bishops reflected their positions as quoted in the press. The statement of Bishop D'Arcy, no doubt representing at least one current of opinion among the American bishops, strongly supported and even echoed the language of the Instruction itself: "The document reaffirms and makes more specific things the Church has taught for decades," he wrote. "Not everyone is called to be a priest." Bishop D'Arcy described the exclusion of men practicing homosexuality or possessing deep-seated homosexual tendencies or supporting the so-called "gay culture" as a position which he himself had "supported in writing for over 30 years, going back to a time when [he] was a spiritual director in a seminary." He pointedly cited the figure of the 81 percent of the clerical sex abuse cases being those of homosexual priests abusing young males.

Bishop Skylstad's statement was more nuanced, and his views probably represented those of more American bishops. Accurately restating the positions announced in the Instruction, and making clear that these were the Church's official positions, he nevertheless then went on to urge his fellow bishops and major superiors "to make this Instruction the occasion for a comprehensive *discussion* with seminary rectors and vocations directors about the affective maturity which every priesthood candidate should manifest" (emphasis added). A number of other bishops similarly stressed the need for further discussion. The document was thus widely seen not as a finished or cut-and-dried thing but as a matter for discussion among those who will principally be applying it. There *are* "interpretations" of it that can be made, in other words. Claiming the achievement of "affective maturity," for example, will probably be seen by some as a possible means to continue to admit men with homosexual tendencies.

This kind of reaction was not untypical of how the USCCB quite regularly "receives" authoritative Roman documents. It has been the long-standing custom of the American bishops to accept publicly and even praise such Roman documents when they are issued, and this is exactly what Bishop Skylstad did in the name of the conference in the present case. However, how the USCCB or individual bishops implement a given

Instruction can be another question, just as a call for further discussion can be a not very subtle signal that there *will* be variations in how the document is understood and put into practice.

In his statement in the name of the USCCB, Bishop Skylstad also made a point of mentioning the need to “respect... all people irrespective of sexual orientation” – as if lack of respect for homosexuals were the basic problem here. In harmony with his earlier article in his diocesan newspaper, he also addressed the question of whether “a homosexually inclined man can be a good priest.” “The answer,” he asserted, “lies in the lives of those men who, with God’s grace, have been truly dedicated priests.” While this is true enough, the continuing anxious concern evidenced here with trying to appease pro-homosexual opinion (while the grave evil of homosexual acts as well as the excesses of the contemporary “gay culture” are generally passed over in silence), along with considering this clear and unmistakable Instruction from the Holy See to be merely a matter for further discussion, is troubling, especially coming from a president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. It points to a strange reluctance, unfortunately encountered not seldom today among some American bishops – just as the same reluctance is practically all-pervasive in American society at large today – to recognize the harmful consequences of accepting homosexuality as natural and normal. Bishops who emphasize the “respect” owed to homosexuals are failing, in other words, at least in some degree, to treat homosexuality as the disorder which the Church very plainly teaches that it is.

This reluctance to come to grips with the seriousness of the moral problem posed by the acceptance of homosexuality today was reflected in the reactions of some other American bishops to the Roman document. It is almost as if these bishops, and not infrequently other Church spokesmen as well, were *ashamed* of the Church’s teaching on homosexuality. Certainly some of them apparently find it necessary to be quite *apologetic* about it. Even while affirming the Instruction in words, as Bishop Skylstad does, the tone and emphasis of his comments, like those of the comments of some other bishops, reflect an apologetic attitude that seems to concede that homosexuals have a genuine grievance against the Church on account of her teaching about them.

Another example of the same phenomenon came from the newly appointed archbishop of San Francisco, George H. Niederauer (formerly bishop of Salt Lake City). In a press interview, Bishop Niederauer championed the same view that Bishop Skylstad did to the effect that homosexuals were perfectly capable of being good priests. So they are in some cases, but that for good and sufficient reasons, and only after long and careful study, the Holy See has seen fit to take a different, and indeed much broader, view of the total problem anyway, is surely a responsible

decision that archbishops should not be contesting in public. As Pope John Paul II reminded the American bishops – in the city of San Francisco, no less, back in 1987 – when they fail to uphold the legitimate decisions of the Holy See, *they undermine their own authority* – and this at a time when respect for episcopal authority in the Church in America could hardly be lower because of the way the clerical sex abuse scandals have mostly been handled. That a bishop with the views on homosexuality in the priesthood of Bishop Niederauer is being sent to San Francisco, of all places, does not bode well for the effectiveness of the Church's mission there in the face of the obstreperous and vulgar – and dismayingly successful – “gay rights” movement.

Then there were the lukewarm reactions of other members of the hierarchy. While again affirming the legitimacy of the Roman document, at least in words, statements such as those issued by Archbishop Theodore McCarrick of Washington, D.C., or Bishop Howard Hubbard of Albany, New York, blandly made the claim that seminary and ordination practices in their respective dioceses have all along reflected the norms now set forth in the Holy See's document. This may well be so, but again to come out with a public statement to this effect at this particular time can strongly imply there was never any real need for the issuance of the Holy See's Instruction.

Similarly, the U.S. Conference of the Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) issued a statement averring that the policies of men's religious orders “agree with the statement as it delineates the need for personal discernment with the aid of one's spiritual director” – but at the same time not explicitly stating its agreement with the Instruction's judgment that homosexual men should not generally be ordained at all. The CMSM statement, again, includes the apparently now obligatory phrase, “regardless of sexual orientation,” as if the problem of the homosexual seminarian or priest were not the primary concern for the issuance of the Instruction in the first place.

But if the homosexual proclivities of some seminarians and priests, and the undeniable fact that some of them have acted on these proclivities, were not precisely the problem being addressed, what has the fuss been all about? It almost seems that the Congregation for Catholic Education is being taxed, however mildly the manner of it, for being concerned with something that is supposedly not really a problem at all. In truth, of course, practically the whole world knows and understands by now the ravages inflicted on the Church by the clerical sex abuse crisis, caused, for the most part, by homosexual priests engaged with adolescent boys. Practically the whole world knows and understands this, except, apparently, some of the Church's own leaders who are charged by their office with remedying the problem.

Acceptance of the idea that homosexuals are gravely harmed and are somehow owed apologies because of the Church's truthful characterization of their same-sex attractions as disordered amounts to something perilously close to an abandonment of the Church's teaching in the face of today's admittedly terrific contrary pressures to accept homosexuality as natural and normal. Often the Church's full teaching gets tacitly laid aside for any practical purposes when the question comes up; when that happens, many Church leaders like to quote the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on the respect owed to homosexuals. This would be fine if only they would quote the Catechism's entire teaching on the subject; instead they like to quote selectively only the article which specifies that homosexuals:

...do not choose their homosexual condition; for most of them it is a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided (CCC#2358).

As if "unjust discrimination" against homosexuals was the major problem in American society today! To the contrary, the organized homosexual movement in America today is currently on the verge of gaining through the courts full legal recognition and approval for homosexual liaisons and practices. And when that occurs what could then be in the offing are legal penalties imposed against those who are opposed to homosexual practices (such as anyone taking seriously and following Catholic teaching in the matter). The logic of this is perfectly clear: placing obstacles in the way of homosexual "rights" would then indeed be "discrimination," as that term is currently understood. Nor is the danger to those who believe that homosexuality is a disorder and that homosexual acts are evil and immoral at all hypothetical. Instances of the penalization of such people have already occurred in Canada and in some Scandinavian countries.

Yet even in the face of such looming danger, many in the leadership ranks of the Catholic Church in America nevertheless apparently go on imagining that the real danger is "unjust discrimination" against homosexuals! One wonders what kind of a world these people think they are living in. Do they even know that we are engaged in a culture war about all these things? They are so sensitive and tuned in to what contemporary culture thinks and expects that they fail to take with due seriousness what the article in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* coming just before the one quoted above teaches, namely, that:

...homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They

do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved (CCC #2357).

Yes, homosexuals – along with everybody else – must assuredly be treated with “respect, compassion, and sensitivity,” as the Catechism specifies. But they must be treated this way because of their inherent human dignity, not, for heaven’s sake, *because of* their homosexual deviance! Nor does respect for their human dignity require giving in to their outrageous demands that society, and presumably the Church as well, has to accept and approve of their deviant practices and lifestyles. To go on and on, as a Bishop Skylstad does, about all the “wonderful” and “excellent” homosexual priests there are out there – again, they are surely “wonderful” and “excellent” in spite of their homosexuality, not because of it – is to misconceive the nature of the problem encountered today by the Church and by Christians in our society. That the current president of the American bishops’ conference seems more concerned with the feelings of possibly insulted and injured homosexuals than with the threat to Catholic moral teaching and the salvation of souls and the moral fabric of American society posed by the gains regularly being made today by the organized homosexual movement evidences a really badly misplaced list of episcopal priorities.

In any case, the question of the celibacy and chastity of homosexual priests can hardly be so readily assumed, or passed over as a question of no great importance, when the elevated numbers of them who have died of AIDS is considered – not to speak of the numbers of them verifiably involved in the clerical sex abuse cases that have been exposed. These are painful facts, but they must be taken into consideration when deciding what position the Church must maintain with regard to homosexuality and the priesthood.

On another question, Bishop Skylstad’s very use of the term “gay bashing” without quotation marks points to a tacit acceptance of the current definition of the homosexual question that is offered by today’s organized homosexual movement. To accept and use the coined terms, “gay” and “straight,” in the same way that the homosexuals regularly do, is already to concede a considerable degree of normality to homosexuality – and this before any substantive discussion or argument about its real nature ever gets joined. These categories should not simply be accepted in the same way that the homosexuals have seen fit to define and popularize them.

Unfortunately, though, the vice president of the USCCB, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, also made use of the same terms, even while strongly defending the Holy See’s Instruction. He concluded the excellent

statement that he issued on the document by declaring that “to portray the Instruction as ‘gay bashing’ or ‘gay banning’ is to misrepresent it.” Yes, but why not speak of “homosexuals” instead of, in effect, tacitly recognizing the existence of a special class of – perfectly normal, just different – people that is implied by the use of the word “gay” to designate them?

Unlike Bishop Skylstad, Cardinal George at least placed these terms within quotation marks (as the Roman Instruction itself did). Better still, though, no member of the American hierarchy – anymore than Christians generally – should concede to today’s organized homosexual rights movement the right to change and distort the language and the meaning of words. Unhappily, this has become the reality, with the successful introduction of the terms “gay” and “straight” into contemporary discourse.

III.

If the response to the issuance of the new Roman Instruction on homosexuality and the priesthood has been less than adequate on the part of some of the American bishops, one gets the impression, at least from published accounts, that the “cognitive elites” in the Church today have been almost unanimous in deploring and rejecting the document. In this case, many of them have not so much attacked the Instruction head-on, as has so often been the fate of so many documents from the Holy See for so long – following the prototypical public revolt against the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* back in 1968 (from which the Church has not recovered yet). By now, though, even many in the ranks of the dissenting cognitive elites have learned that the Holy See is not going to change the Church’s teachings in response to their criticisms. This has been amply confirmed by the actions of the Holy See during the three pontificates that have followed that of Pope Paul VI.

Thus, the effectiveness of the documents issued by the Holy See must be undercut in other ways, by damning them with faint praise, for example, or by administering a thousand small, critical cuts. Suggestions can be offered to the effect that Rome does not really understand how things are in America, or perhaps that the “theology” underlying the latest Roman Instruction fails to take into account the latest developments in the field. And so on. Documents issued by the Holy See in the expectation that they will be received and applied here have instead regularly been allowed to become fair game for sustained public criticism in exactly this way. Once it has been established in the minds of the critics that the Roman document does not quite measure up, then it can then be widely criticized with impunity. This criticism is then generally followed by eventual relegation to the shelf of the disputed document itself, while things then continue to go on pretty much as before. Think *Personae Humanae*. Think

Donum Veritatis. Think *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Think *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. For that matter, think the American bishops' own 2004 statement that public figures are no longer going to be allowed to undermine Catholic teaching within Catholic institutions or on Catholic campuses.

This process of "studied inattention" to or even "benign neglect" of elephant-in-the-living-room type problems in the Church in America was already going on in the case of homosexuality and the priesthood even before the Instruction itself was issued. Various, mostly self-appointed experts, as often as not members of the clergy, have long been accustomed to advance such arguments as that the priest shortage will surely be worsened by discouraging good candidates who also happen to have homosexual tendencies or that the clerical sex abuse crisis can in no way be laid at the door of homosexuals in the priesthood.

Typically, such statements never seem to elicit any reaction or answers from the hierarchy (sometimes it is members of the hierarchy who are advancing them!); nor do those who advance them ever seem to be disadvantaged as far as their official positions in the Church are concerned. As far as anybody might be able to tell, the dissidents who typically issue such statements could be speaking *for* the Church in America. At the very least, the idea gets across with a great many people that just because Rome has spoken does not mean that that is necessarily how things are going to be. The contemporary reversal of the old maxim, "*Roma locuta est, causa finita*" could hardly be more complete.

What is constant in all this today is that there are plenty of people out there in the Church's "middle management" or among her cognitive elites who evidently do not have to conceal their disagreement with various Roman decisions and policies. Not a few working pastors were quoted in the press speaking out against the new Instruction virtually as soon as it was issued. The Rev. Richard J. Prendergast, pastor of St. Josaphat Catholic Church in Chicago, for example, was quoted in the *Washington Post* as saying: "We reject the assertion or implication that persons with a homosexual orientation cannot offer valuable service in leadership roles in our Church." The Rev. Fred Daley, pastor of St. Francis de Sales Church in Utica, New York, was quoted in the same newspaper as declaring: "I'm a deeply-rooted homosexual and I'm proud of that; it's who I am and how God created me; it's not something transitory... I've been ordained for 31 years," he added, "and I'm committed to the Church's discipline of celibacy" (but not, evidently, to compliance with the Church's official and authoritative decisions and directives).

Among the fairly well-known, self-identified Catholic intellectuals attacking the document was the journalist, Andrew Sullivan, who strongly articulated the idea that one's sexuality does define "who one is." Author of a book advocating same-sex "marriage," Sullivan has long been prominent

among those holding that the Church can and must change her teaching regarding homosexuality. The new Instruction was thus no doubt deeply disillusioning for him. He blamed it all on Pope Benedict XVI personally, during whose pontificate, of course, the document was finally issued.

"What the new pope has done is conflate a sin with an identity," Sullivan explained. "He has created a new class of human beings who, regardless of what they do, are too psychologically and therefore morally disordered to become priests." This, according to Andrew Sullivan, is exactly contrary to the teaching and practice of Jesus, whose position he characterizes as "always to ignore the stereotype, the label, the identity. . . . The new pope has now turned that teaching on its head. He has identified a group of people and said, regardless of how they behave or what they do, they are beneath serving God..."

It would probably be impossible to mis-characterize the Roman Instruction and its message more thoroughly than this. To state that the Church's judgment about homosexuals is made "regardless of what they do" is, precisely, to get the whole thing wrong and backwards. The problem *is* "what they do," what they insist they should be able to do because of their alleged "orientation," namely, engage in homosexual acts considered by the Church to be intrinsically evil. In any case, what Jesus did, of course, was to tell sinners to go and sin no more (see John 8). Jesus, precisely, did *not* say: "Persist in your sin because that is who you are."

Among the experts hastening to prove the Holy See wrong for the Nth time was a psychologist, Mary Gail Frawley-O'Dea, Ph.D. She turned out to be one of the very same experts called in to address and instruct the American bishops about the clerical sex abuse crisis at their famous meeting in Dallas in the summer of 2002. How or why the bishops and their staffs manage to find such people to advise them is surely one of the great mysteries of the contemporary Church. In this case, Dr. Frawley-O'Dea, in an article in the *National Catholic Reporter*, cited a number of experts published in professional journals dealing with sex offenders showing that "research indicates that homosexuals are not more likely than heterosexuals to violate minors generally." These "criminal behaviors," she tries to explain, "stem not from their sexual orientation but rather reflect their psychological immaturity, arrested development, or anti-social criminal proclivities." These characterizations, of course, are largely semantic in relation to the equally vague and unspecific kind of term that "sexual orientation" itself is. To cite them is *not* to establish that they themselves could not stem from or be affected by homosexual impulses or tendencies.

Frawley-O'Dea's citations are thus unconvincing, especially in the face of the 81 percent of clerical sex abusers engaged with post-pubescent males; if this is not homosexuality being acted out, it is not clear what it could possibly be. Any objective observer is tempted to conclude that the

field of “research” she cites is perhaps as confused and even as intellectually and morally corrupt as the kind of “scientific” or “medical” research today that justifies abortion, embryonic stem cell research, and cloning as if these were morally neutral questions. Such “research” is too commonly produced by professionals who are evidently unwilling to state honestly what it is they are talking about.

Thus, Dr. Frawley-O’Dea speaks of “psychosexually mature adult homosexual men” – but they are precisely *not* “psychosexually mature” if they have homosexual impulses which they are willing to act on. Her position amounts to yet one more claim that homosexual impulses are somehow normal (not disordered). She speaks of homosexual predations as “crimes of power,” not of any misuse of the sexual faculties, much as some radical feminists attempt to describe rape in the same way. The idea seems to be to locate the moral wrong of sex abuse (or rape) in coercion, exploitation, and lack of consent. To locate it in the misuse of the sexual faculties themselves, of course, would mean, logically, also condemning homosexual acts – but that will obviously not do. These acts must remain doable by “mature adult homosexual men,” just as fornication and adultery too must apparently remain doable so long as they are done consensually; otherwise, the freedom secured for people today by the sexual revolution would no longer be operative!

Thus, along with her flawed approach to the actual facts about sex abuse in the Catholic Church, Dr. Frawley-O’Dea employs language indicating that she is anything but an objective observer: she actually claims that “the Vatican’s policy under the new Instruction will *persecute* gay men who have accepted their homosexuality enough to speak about it”(emphasis added). The goal, evidently, is to “accept” one’s homosexuality, not transcend it.

It is bad enough that the *National Catholic Reporter* should bring in the ramblings of a Frawley-O’Dea as a supposed *answer* to the Congregation for Catholic Education’s thoroughly thought-out and carefully drafted Instruction. With the paper’s editorial in the same issue (12/9/05), it gets worse. Entitled “For What It’s Worth, Our Condolences,” the journal, in a few breathless paragraphs, reprises most of today’s clichés about homosexuality and the priesthood which the organized homosexual rights movement has been promoting all along – and which too many Catholics have quite uncritically bought into. Here are a few samples:

To all those in positions of leadership in the Roman Catholic Church who also happen to be homosexual, we offer our commiseration and sorrow that once again you have been forced to hear your sexuality, an element intrinsic to your humanity, described as an objective disorder...

The description is repugnant, of course, to all those in the church, gay and straight, who understand that homosexuality is, in the overwhelming number of cases, not a chosen orientation but an essential part of one's nature as heterosexuality is for others...

Already the document is being parsed to shreds, but to little avail. Without being too dismissive of the efforts of canon lawyers and other church authorities, the document will remain a puzzling and unclear instruction because it is, itself, fundamentally disordered...

There is more, but these excerpts more or less sum up the NCR's whole anti-Instruction case. One wonders from what height of moral ground the *National Catholic Reporter* presumes to correct (and despise) the solemn teaching of the Church of Christ or to offer "condolences" to those supposedly adversely affected by it. On the evidence of their own words, the NCR editors can hardly be imagined any longer to believe that the Catholic Church is "the teacher of truth," as Vatican Council II taught (*Dignitatis Humanae*, #14). They can hardly be thought to believe this when they are so quick to set aside and denigrate carefully considered and clearly articulated teachings of that same Church in favor of the ideology of the modern homosexual rights movement. What if the teaching that homosexuality is a disorder is *true*? It is no one else but "the teacher of truth" herself, after all, that declares this to be the case.

For the editors of the *National Catholic Reporter*, though, homosexuality is not the only issue on which they have openly declared themselves against the teachings of the Church. On the contrary, *disloyal* opposition is regularly and almost invariably the stance they adopt towards numerous teachings, which nevertheless remain the teachings of the Church. For them it is apparently still the 1960s and "Question Authority" is still the reigning slogan. In the present case, like many other contemporaries, they have simply accepted the claim of the modern organized homosexual rights movement that homosexuality is natural and normal and not a disorder. From this, it follows for most people that homosexual acts are not morally wrong, either.

The main point of asserting the naturalness and consequent acceptability of homosexuality, after all, is to legitimize a condition whose principal defining characteristic is the claim that sexual attractions and hence sexual relations between persons of the same sex are indeed natural and normal and hence not disordered or immoral. Yet a basic contradiction lies at the heart of asserting this position. On the one hand, homosexuality is held to be natural and homosexual acts normal and hence not immoral for those with same-sex attractions. On the other hand, to assert this is to claim that there is no natural and moral use of the human sexual faculties

(e.g., in marriage between a man and a woman for mutual self-giving and possible procreation of children). How can homosexual acts be natural and normal for homosexuals if there are no natural and normal sex acts?

Once again, it is the Catholic Church that has correctly judged this issue in the recent Instruction on homosexuality and the priesthood. And it can be affirmed without fear of contradiction that, in severely restricting men with deep-seated homosexual tendencies from entry into the seminary or the priesthood, the Church is in no way guilty of unjust discrimination.
