

Father Harvey on Strengths of New Vatican Instruction
"Very Good Because It Does Not Try to Answer Every Question"

NEW YORK, NOV. 30, 2005 (Zenit.org).- The new Vatican instruction on the priesthood and those with homosexual tendencies was exactly the clarification the Church needed, says one expert in the treatment of same-sex attractions.

Father John Harvey, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, is director of Courage International, a support group for men and women with same-sex attractions who wish to live chastely according to Church teachings.

He shared his views of the new document with ZENIT.

Q: What is your impression of the new Vatican document on seminaries and those with homosexual tendencies?

Father Harvey: I think it is very good because it does not try to answer every question -- it tells you from the beginning that it will not. I think it is refreshing. It simply sets down norms for bishops, rectors and people in seminary work.

I think it is wise to put the responsibility on bishops and rectors to understand this issue and to make decisions about individual seminarians. I think this is a good thing instead of answering every question.

It is clear of two types they do not want: those are actively engaged in a homosexual lifestyle and those who push the gay agenda, that "gay is good." People with that view should not be in seminary.

The document rightly mentions that some distinctions should be made between people with deep-seated homosexual tendencies and people with transitory same-sex attractions. It is correct in that some homosexual tendencies may be a symptom of a problem of delayed adolescence.

Q: Did anything surprise you about the document? Or was it as you expected?

Father Harvey: I was not sure what we would get. I cannot really say what I was expecting; I was just hoping it would not be a big universal statement like "Anyone with same-sex attractions is automatically eliminated." It does not say that and allows that there are a lot of distinctions to be made.

I was surprised by the moderation of the document. It did not touch on every situation and left a lot to discretion of theologians and psychologists. I was delighted with it.

Q: What is the significance of the Vatican's document and the Church clarifying policies regarding men with same-sex attractions and seminaries?

Father Harvey: The significance is that this is a statement for the universal Church, not just the Church in the United States.

For years within the Church we have had people pushing the gay agenda -- groups such as Dignity, New Ways Ministry, and gay and lesbian ministries. It is about time the Church said clearly that if seminarians have gay tendencies, we need to be aware of it. They should not hide their same-sex attractions or lie about it.

It is also important [that] the document stresses that a person with same-sex attractions is not automatically excluded from the seminary.

Many teen-agers claim to have same-sex attractions at a given time, but they might be able to apply to seminary if they get things under control. There is a distinction between transitory same-sex attractions and permanent and destructive homosexual tendencies.

We are happy to have a statement that can be used pastorally, as I intend to use it.

Q: Are there ways to identify same-sex attractions, deeply rooted homosexual tendencies and conflicts in affective maturity in the evaluation process for priesthood or religious life?

Father Harvey: It is not always easy to identify same-sex attractions; a person may conceal them and only they know they have those tendencies. But psychologists and theologians can talk with someone over a period of time and identify if he has same-sex attractions.

Seminaries need good Catholic psychiatrists working with them on these issues to distinguish between men with transitory and permanent same-sex attractions.

We need more info on how to handle teens who claim they are homosexual; we need to take them seriously and teach them to be chaste -- that is what Courage International does.

A person can be chaste and have same-sex attractions; quite a number have been able to do that. If a man is constantly chaste, is in his mid-20s and has control of himself, there is reason to believe he could continue living a chaste life.

Only psychiatrists will be able to determine if seminarians have deeply rooted homosexual tendencies; we will have to listen to them on this issue.

Any seminarian dealing with same-sex attractions should seek out a Catholic psychologist and give him or her permission to report to the seminary. That makes good sense.

Affective maturity means that as you have become an adult you have learned to handle your emotions; you do not let yourself go. It is a bad sign if a young adult, whether homosexual or heterosexual, cannot master himself.

It is well known from psychological studies that one of the basic difficulties with same-sex attractions is that they are rooted in trauma from a person's past and his relations with parents and peers. The trauma causes emotional problems within the individual.

Homosexual tendencies come early in life with attitudes formed from children dissociating themselves from their same-sex parent and an inability to relate to peers. This affects the way they deal with women and men throughout their life.

Q: The document leaves the matter of the discretion to seminary superiors to determine if a candidate has left behind problematic tendencies. Are you confident this discernment will be in safe hands?

Father Harvey: I am. What good rectors do, when they deal with someone who is problematic in any way, is have someone from outside who is levelheaded give their professional opinion.

In the case of a seminarian with same-sex attractions, he should give consent to a psychiatrist to evaluate him and report to the rector. Private matters can remain secret, but the psychiatrist needs to report whether the seminarian is fit or unfit to be a priest -- it is not a complete disclosure, just an evaluation.

I am confident they will be in safe hands with good Catholic psychologists.

Q: What do you think will be the most misunderstood part of this document, especially in the United States?

Father Harvey: I think there will not be so much misunderstanding as not being clear about the distinction between deeply rooted homosexual tendencies and transitory same-sex attractions. We need help from psychologists to develop this a little more.

The document is not clear about what it calls \"sexual troubles,\" which I think includes masturbation and pornography. Both are reason enough to ask a heterosexual man to not come into seminary; everyone is bound to chastity. Addictive problems do not belong in the seminary.

Q: How do you hope this document will bear fruit?

Father Harvey: I think it will cause a lot of study by those in seminary work; a lot of good is going to come from this document.

It is not meant to be perfect; it is a clarification statement to the Church.

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