

Psychology to identify ‘deep-seated’ homosexuality

ROME – A leading canon law expert said that in applying the Vatican’s directive against admission of homosexuals to the priesthood, seminary authorities should make use of psychological sciences to distinguish between “deep-seated” and transitory homosexual tendencies.

Jesuit Father Gianfranco Ghirlanda, rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University and an adviser to several important Vatican agencies, said the use of psychology was a complex but necessary means of establishing the true nature of homosexual traits.

Psychological evaluations alone can never substitute for the informed decisions of bishops and seminary authorities, but such testing must be taken into serious consideration, Father Ghirlanda said.

He made his comments in the March 4 issue of the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* (Catholic Civilization), whose contents are reviewed by the Vatican prior to publication.

In 2005, the Vatican issued an instruction saying the church cannot allow ordination of men who are active homosexuals or who have “deep-seated homosexual tendencies.” The norms do not rule out ordination for men who have experienced transitory homosexual tendencies or episodes, as long as they have been overcome for at least three years.

The wording of the document prompted much debate about the nature of the homosexual inclination and the ability of church authorities to distinguish between permanent and transitory tendencies.

In his article, Father Ghirlanda said it was clear that bishops and seminary superiors should make use of one or more psychological experts when there is a question about homosexuality in a candidate.

The purpose is not simply to weed out those with homosexual inclinations but, in the

case of transitory tendencies, to help the candidate overcome them, he said.

“In fact, the range of situations between deep-seated homosexual tendencies and transitory homosexual tendencies is as great as the number of individual cases. What may at first seem deep-seated could turn out to be conquerable with therapy,” he said.

The priesthood candidate has a moral duty to comply with psychological testing and eventual therapy in such cases, he said.

But such testing or therapy cannot be imposed on a candidate, and requires his prior, informed and explicit consent, he said.

The results of such psychological consultations should not be communicated to seminary superiors without the candidate’s written permission, he said.

Father Ghirlanda said this presents seminary superiors with a delicate task: They cannot use psychological testing to intimidate priesthood candidates, but they should consider refusal to comply as an element in their decision about seminary acceptance.

When there are doubts about suitability of a candidate, church law makes it clear that he should not be admitted to the seminary, he said.

Father Ghirlanda said similar evaluations may also be needed for heterosexual candidates to the seminary. A heterosexual who is lacking in “psycho-affective and religious maturity” should also be excluded from the priesthood, he said.

The difference, he said, is that it is more difficult for a person with deep-seated homosexual tendencies to reach such maturity.

The Congregation for Catholic Education (of Seminaries and Institutes of Study) has been working for several years on guidelines for the use of psychological sciences in the admission and formation of candidates for the priesthood. Sources said the document was still in the preparation stages.