

WORLD & NATION

Focus in Italy turns to priests, homosexuality

By John Norton
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Once a taboo subject at the Vatican and in Italian ecclesiastical circles, the delicate issue of homosexuality in the priesthood has begun generating public discussion and extended examination by church officials.

A recently published Italian book that presented the nonfiction account of an anonymous priest struggling with his homosexuality drew generally favorable reviews from church leaders and the Italian bishops' daily newspaper.

Marco Politi, the journalist who authored *La Confessione* ("The Confession"), told Catholic News Service Feb. 1 that a religious order had even invited him to its northern Italian house to lead a discussion on homosexuality in the priesthood.

In December, a prominent priest who runs a national drug rehabilitation community told an Italian newsweekly that he knew of priests who "live their homosexuality in a tormented way." Many of the homosexual priests, he said, are young: "It is a phenomenon that is spreading above all in seminaries."

Out of public view, meanwhile, Italian and Vatican church officials separately have examined whether and how to address the admittance and formation of homosexual candidates to the priesthood.

A top Vatican doctrinal official told Catholic News Service the Holy See views the negative effects of homosexuality on the priesthood as "a very serious problem and is determined to take steps to correct it."

Italy's bishops are expected to add a direct reference to homosexuality in revised guidelines for seminary life being prepared, said Msgr. Luca Bonari, director of the Italian bishops' National Vocations Center.

The guidelines are likely to acknowledge the "greater risks" to celibacy that priestly life poses for a homosexual, and therefore require careful discernment — on a case-by-case basis — of whether homosexual candidates are able to live their sexuality "with serenity," Msgr. Bonari told CNS.

Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, told CNS it is "self-evident" that seminaries should refuse admittance to men with a strong homosexual temptation.

In a written statement Archbishop Bertone said, "It cannot be denied that when homosexuality becomes widespread or acceptable in a certain cultural or geo-

graphical region, this can have negative effects even within the priesthood."

Although the homosexual inclination is not sinful in itself, it "evokes moral concern" because it is a strong temptation to actions that "are always in themselves evil," the archbishop said.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls the homosexual inclination "objectively disordered."

Expanding on that, Archbishop Bertone said he would define the homosexual inclination as "a temptation that, for whatever reason, has become so predominant in a person's life as to become a force shaping the entire outlook of the person."

"Persons with a homosexual inclination should not be admitted to the seminary," he said.

The Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education, the office authorized to issue admittance guidelines for seminaries, has completed a yearlong study on whether to formally address the question of homosexual candidates to the priesthood.

"It was a thing begun and a thing ended," Msgr. Angelo Genoni, an official in the congregation's seminary section, told CNS. "At the moment there is absolutely nothing."

He declined to say whether any conclusions had been reached.

Msgr. Genoni did not exclude the possibility, however, that the issue of homosexuality might receive direct treatment in a document now being prepared by the congregation regarding the use of psychological tests for seminarians.

"I don't know if (homosexuality) is a topic which is part of that document," he said. "The experts are working on it."

The education congregation discussed the issue of homosexuality in the context of seminary acceptance at its 1998 plenary meeting and pursued the topic into the following year. Msgr. Genoni said the study had already been concluded when Cardinal-designate Zenon Grocholewski succeeded Cardinal Pio Laghi as the congregation's prefect late in 1999.

Cardinal Laghi, who headed the congregation for nearly a decade, told CNS he did not remember if the study was closed before the end of his tenure.

The inquiry was taken up after bishops, particularly from North America, requested guidelines on seminary admittance and formation of homosexuals, he said.



Reuters/CNS

Nearing election day

Israeli peace activists march past a soldier during a rally in Jerusalem Feb. 3, days before Israelis were to elect a new government leader.

Speakers debate women's roles

By Tracy Early
Catholic News Service

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y. — An Ohio congresswoman urged U.S. Catholic women to use American society's democratic freedom to move the church internationally toward democratic structures more open to women.

But law professor Mary Ann Glendon voiced reservations about "importing secular notions of governance into the church."

Glendon, who teaches at Harvard Law School, and Rep. Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio, both Catholic, appeared together Feb. 4 in a session of a Common Ground Initiative program held in New Rochelle.

Kaptur called for a fuller representation of "those doing the work and professing the belief" at every level of the church.

She said the "restrictive administrative architecture of the Roman Church" was formed when the church was linked to an

autocratic political structure, and it remains autocratic rather than democratic toward women.

As a member of Congress, she can participate in passing laws, but her voice in the church is "muted," she said. "The church must mature politically."

Glendon directed attention to the exercise of influence through the rearing of children, and said this vocation received "too little respect or reward."

Although the church always needs purification, its record of support for those in need of help compares favorably with other institutions, she said.

"Where is my vocation as a mother more respected?" she asked, suggesting that it was not at Harvard.

The two speakers addressed an audience of more than 100 women and a few men in the last of four dialogue sessions that began in 1999 on the theme "What Kind of Church Are American Catholic Women Looking Toward in the 21st Century?"

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