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For the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

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Homosexuality has been an aspect of human sexuality which has been a focus for research and reflection within the Catholic Church and other Christian traditions, the Social Sciences, the Law and Legislation for the past thirty years.

In writing *The Remarkable Gift* it was never my intention to harm the Church or to scandalise the faithful. Where that has happened I express my profound regret and offer a sincere apology. My life as a priest is given to the service of the Church. Within that service I hold the office and person of the Holy Father in high esteem as I desire to be always loyal to his teaching and that of the Church Magisterium.

Whatever we write is, in part, influenced by the broader circumstances of our lives at that particular time. My book was written within the context of the dying and death of one of my brothers for an AIDS related illness. Before that, it has long been a pastoral concern of mine that so many homosexual men and women felt estranged from the Church they love because of their sexuality. I add to that my concern about the tragedy of youth suicide – contemplated, attempted and carried out – in Australia, which research is now strongly indicating is partly related (around one third of situations) to issues of sexuality, homosexuality in particular. If I were to write a book on homosexuality today, more removed from that sad yet blessed experience of my brother's death, it would be quite a different one with different insights and understanding on the issue.

In offering a reflection on Catholic Church teaching I would give a greater emphasis to the dignity of the human person, especially as developed by Pope John Paul II in his Encyclicals and other writings. His emphasis that each person is called to live their dignity with responsibility as a foundation for the moral life would be highlighted.

In writing about conscience, I realise that I should have also presented a clear picture of the development of an informed conscience which would honour the dignity of the person and strengthen an understanding of the social consequences of each person's moral decisions. The role of the teachings of

the Church in the development of conscience would receive far more detailed attention.

The Church, in presenting her teaching on homosexuality, does so out of the wisdom of her experience of human nature, her reflection on the word of God, and her insights into the Natural Law. The Church has developed her teaching on homosexuality in the context of her respect for human sexuality, the gift of marriage and the call for all Christ's faithful to live a life of chastity. The book should have given greater emphasis to these matters which would have enabled me to present the teaching on homosexuality clearly, in more moderate language, avoiding the danger of language which is found to be ambiguous.

There is in the Magisterium of the Church a rich reflection on the teaching on homosexuality and of pastoral concern for homosexual people. This teaching from the Vatican, Episcopal Conferences, groups of bishops, as well as individual bishops, offers an invaluable guide to people and a great support in the development of an informed conscience. I would want to present that body of writings more clearly and as a sure guide to personal self-awareness and decision making in the moral life. Drawing on the heritage of writings found through the centuries, especially in the writings of some Saints, I would want to write more clearly on the value of chaste friendships as an important support for Christian life – and in this situation – for Christian homosexual persons.

I accept with full submission of heart and mind the authoritative teaching of the Church on homosexuality:

Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared 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.

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfil God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church nn 2357-2359.*)

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