



DICASTERIUM PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI

Answers to Several Questions from His Excellency, the Most Reverend José Negri, Bishop of Santo Amaro, Brazil, Regarding Participation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony by Transgender Persons and Homosexual Persons

31 October 2023

On 14 July 2023, this Dicastery received a letter from **His Excellency, the Most Rev. José Negri, Bishop of Santo Amaro in Brazil**, containing some questions regarding the possible participation in the Sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony by transgender persons and homosexual persons.

After a study in this regard, this Dicastery responded as follows.

The Responses of the Dicastery to Bishop Negri

For the most part, the following responses reiterate the basic contents of what the Dicastery has already affirmed on this subject in the past^[1].

1. Can a transgender person be baptized?

A transgender person—even after undergoing hormone treatment and sex-reassignment surgery—can receive Baptism under the same conditions as other believers, if there are no situations in which there is a risk of generating public scandal or disorientation among the faithful. In the case of children or adolescents with problems of a transgender nature, if they are well-prepared and have the right disposition, they also can receive Baptism.

At the same time, the following points should be considered, especially when there are doubts about the objective moral situation a person is in or about the person's subjective disposition toward grace.

In the case of Baptism, the Church teaches that when the Sacrament is received without repentance for grave sins, the individual does not receive sanctifying grace, even though he or she does receive the sacramental character. The *Catechism* affirms, “This configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible, it remains for ever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a promise and guarantee of divine protection, and as a vocation to divine worship and to the service of the Church”^[2].

Indeed, St. Thomas Aquinas taught that when the impediment to grace is removed in someone who had received Baptism without the proper disposition, the character itself is “an immediate cause disposing one to grace”^[3]. St. Augustine recalled this situation by saying that even if a man falls into sin, Christ does not destroy the character the man received in Baptism; rather, he seeks out (*quaerit*) the sinner, in whom this character is imprinted, which identifies him as belonging to Christ^[4].

In this way we can understand why Pope Francis wanted to emphasize that Baptism “is *the door* which allows Christ the Lord to dwell in our person and allows us to be immersed in his Mystery”^[5]. Concretely, this entails that the doors of the sacraments should not “be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself ‘the door’: baptism. [...] [T]he Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems”^[6].

So, even when doubts remain about a person’s objective moral situation or subjective disposition toward grace, one should never forget this aspect of the faithfulness of God’s unconditional love, which is capable of generating an irrevocable covenant even with the sinner: a covenant that is always open to an unpredictable development. This is true even when a purpose of amendment does not appear in a fully manifest way in the penitent, since the possibility of a new fall “should not prejudice the authenticity of the resolution [of amendment]”^[7]. In any case, the Church will always call people to live out all the implications of Baptism they have received, which always must unfold and be understood within the entire journey of Christian Initiation.

2. Can a transgender person serve as a godparent?

Under certain conditions, an adult transgender person—even after undergoing hormone treatment and sex-reassignment surgery—may be admitted to the function of serving as a godparent. However, since this task does not constitute a right, pastoral prudence demands that it should not be permitted if there is a danger of scandal, undue legitimization, or disorientation in the educational sphere of the ecclesial community.

3. Can a transgender person serve as a witness to a matrimony?

There is nothing in the current universal canonical legislation that prohibits a transgender person from serving as a witness to a matrimony.

4. Can two homosexual persons be regarded as the parents of a child who is to be baptized, and who was adopted or was received by other means, such as surrogacy?

In order for the child to be baptized, there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion (cf. can. 868 § 1, 2° *CIC*; can. 681, § 1, 1° *CCEO*).

5. Can a homosexual person who is cohabiting serve as a godparent?

According to Canon 874 § 1, 1° and 3° *CIC*, a person can serve as a godparent who possesses the proper “aptitude” (1°) and who “leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on” (3°; cf. can. 685, § 2 *CCEO*). Different from this is the situation where the common life of two homosexual persons consists not only in a simple sharing of accommodations, but rather, in a stable and declared relationship “*more uxorio*” that is well-known to the community.

In any case, due pastoral prudence demands that each situation be wisely considered to safeguard the Sacrament of Baptism and especially its reception, which is a precious good to be protected, since it is necessary for salvation^[8].

At the same time, one must consider the real value that the ecclesial community places on the duties of godparents, the role they have in the community, and the regard they show toward the teaching of the Church. Ultimately, the possibility that there may be another person from the

family circle who can act as the guarantor of the proper handing on of the Catholic Faith to the individual being baptized should also be borne in mind, knowing that one can still assist during the Rite not only as a godparent, but also as a witness to the baptismal act.

6. Can a homosexual person who is cohabiting serve as a witness to a matrimony?

There is nothing in the current universal canonical legislation that prohibits a homosexual person who is cohabiting from serving as a witness to a matrimony.

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Prefect

Ex Audientia Die 31/10/2023

Franciscus

[1] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Confidential Note Regarding Some Canonical Questions Pertinent to Transexualism* (21 December 2018), Vatican City [Sub secreto pontificio].

[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1121.

[3] Thomas Aquinas, IV *Sent.*, d. 4, q. 3, a. 2, qc. 3: “est immediata causa *disponens ad gratiam*”; Id., *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 69, a. 9, ad 1: “Et sic omnes induunt Christum per configurationem characteris, non autem per conformitatem gratiae” (“*And in this sense, all [who receive the Sacrament of Baptism] are clothed with Christ, through configuration to him by character, but not through conformity to him by grace.*”)

[4] Cf. Augustine, *Sermo ad Caesariensis Ecclesiae Plebem*, 2; PL 43, col. 691-692: “Nunc vero ipse desertor, characterem fixit imperatoris sui. Deus et Dominus noster Jesus Christus quaerit desertorem, delet erroris criminem, sed non exterminat suum characterem.”

[5] Francis, *General Audience of 11 April 2018*.

[6] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), no. 47.

[7] John Paul II, “Letter to Cardinal William W. Baum on the Occasion of the Course on the Internal Forum Organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary [22 March 1996]”, 5: *Insegnamenti* XIX/1 [1996], 589. (English translation in Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* [19 March 2016], footnote 364.)

[8] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1277.