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Should Gays be allowed to become Priests?

Completed by

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Introduction

Gay priests have been around for many years. Yet, the topic of homosexuals in clergy is a considerably recent phenomenon. It became a hotly debated issue after the 2001 scandal when Catholic priests were discovered to engage into sexual intercourses with young boys. The opponents of the gays becoming priests use the above mentioned facts of sexual abuse as their main argument, implying that all homosexual clergymen present a danger to innocent boys attending sermons and Sunday schools. **Thesis statement:** This paper, by referring to a number of scholarly articles and sources, argues that homosexuals should be allowed to become priests as the real problem with gay clergymen lays not in their sexuality, but in the absence of an open discourse and ability to reveal their true nature to the church or society.

BODY: Argument 1

There are many voices on this side of the debate. Richard McBrien is one of the advocates of the gay priests, arguing that they have their place within the church. He states that the priest sex scandal is being caused by the Church's refusal to update its theologies and practice around sexuality in general. Included here would be, of course, the long history of "misogyny in the churches, the stubborn refusal to reconsider the ground-breaking encyclical Humane Vitae banning any artificial forms of birth control, mandatory celibacy for clergy", the patriarchal and thoroughly authoritarian style of governance in the Church, and usually, but not always, the "need to revisit the ban on homosexual activity as seriously sinful and disordered" (Weigel 2003, p. 45). This has been called the "liberal litany", and has a great number of enthusiastic adherents (Weigel 2003, p. 47).

While not everyone in this group agrees with every one of the updates required to move the Church forward into the new century—the issue of gay clergy

seems to be particularly acceptable here—most view the current clergy sex scandal as an opportunity to force the Church to live up to the vision of the Second Vatican Council, which is seen as inviting significant structural and doctrinal change (Berry 2002).

BODY: Argument 2

Furthermore, many researchers argue that it is the patriarchal, secretive, clerical culture that encourages both the sexual misconduct itself and the cover-ups by authorities. The reform of the church appears as the reasonable answer to such problem (Cozzens, 2000; Dinter, 2003). Many individuals have been playing against each other in countless television, radio, magazine, and newspaper outlets around the world. Both sides offer sometimes plausible explanations for one or another facet of the problem. Both sides always have their own experts. But when pushed into a corner, there is only one thing common to both sides: both opponents and advocates of the gay priests agree that there is a larger problem within the church that causes clergymen to become involved in immoral and illegal acts. In other words, gay priests alone do not pose a threat to either society or congregation – it is the absence of proper mechanism regulating their sexual behavior that presents a real problem.

Some assume that the priest-offenders must be exactly like all the other offenders we do know something about. Then we won't have to worry about any significant differences that might actually account for peculiar variations in their behavior. We can assume that we actually do understand a great deal about psychosexual dysfunctions, unusual sexual desires, etc. But we would be greatly exaggerating the fact. The truth is that we do not know much at all about the intricacies of psychosexual development and its variants. And we know even less about how certain priest develop the desire to sleep with young boys.

BODY: Argument 3

Reasonable explanations for why priests engage in inappropriate sexual behaviors that are not explicitly psychosexual have included “gross immaturity, the code of secrecy inherent in priestly culture, the cognitive dissonance” that arises when predominantly gay clergy are forced to preach against their own orientation because of Church teaching on the matter, or the systemic abuse of power throughout Church structures (Berry 2002, p. 24). It is important to note that regardless of the confusion regarding reasons of priests engaging in unlawful behaviors, crimes ought to be dealt with as crimes in all circumstances. But if the goal is to enhance understanding, to promote greater protection to the vulnerable, to try to comprehend in order to be able to prevent abuses, then it is necessary to admit that there is nothing wrong with gays becoming priests: the problem lays in the church structure and rules.

BODY: Debate against gay priests

The opponents of the gay priests issue have skillfully used the national sentiment arising after September 11 attacks to defend their position. In other words, the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, which broke a few months after 9/11, seemed at first to enhance the religious right's argument that homosexuality was a sin and so necessarily a threat to family and state. In March 2002, Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, stated that reforms proposed to combat priests' sexual abuse of children and teens - reforms such as “better psychological screening and revamped training in church seminaries” — would do little to curb the abuse (Qtd in Weigel 2003, p. 78). What was needed instead, he argued, was the prevention of gay men from entering the priesthood. “People with these inclinations just cannot be

ordained. That does not imply a final judgment on people with homosexuality, but you cannot be in this field” (Qtd in Dinter 2003, p. 22).

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Reaffirming the stance on gays being allowed to become priests

The comments of long-time gay marriage rights supporter Michelangelo Signorily clearly show why gay people should be allowed to become priest. In response to Navarro-Valls' call that gay men should not be allowed to enter the priesthood, Signorile observes,

B]anning gays from the priesthood...would go far toward dismantling the homosexual closet in America and I suspect other countries, as the priesthood has been a refuge for a lot of confused and struggling gay men who turn to it, with its vow of celibacy, rather than come to terms with their sexual orientation (Qtd in Callahan 2003, p. 22).

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Finally, there has never been a better opportunity for dialogue, and both the Church and culture could benefit. Both the Church and society at large need to learn much more about the nature of the gay priests. They do not pose an inherent problem or threat to the congregation. Gay priests are not terrorists or perverts. They have the right to speak and be heard. Church is supposed to spread love and

compassion, but not hatred and bias. Gay priests should, thus, be allowed within the church.

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