

Should the Catholic Church Ordain Gay Priests?

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The recent comments of Pope Francis have created a media feeding frenzy.

What exactly did he mean when he said he would not judge gay priests? Is he now condoning homosexuality?

And is he softening the stance of his predecessor, Pope Benedict, who wrote that men with deep-seated homosexual tendencies should not serve in the priesthood? (Wait a second. Does anyone really think it's wise for a man with deep-seated homosexual tendencies to make a lifetime vow of celibacy and serve side by side with other men of like inclination? We'll come back to that question in a moment.)

During a media interview while returning from Rio to Rome, the pope was asked about the gay lobby in the Vatican. He responded, "There's a lot of talk about the gay lobby, but I've never seen it on the Vatican ID card!"

He continued, "When I meet a gay person, I have to distinguish between their being gay and being part of a lobby. If they accept the Lord and have good will, who am I to judge them? They shouldn't be marginalized. The tendency [to homosexuality] is not the problem. ... They're our brothers."

What exactly did Pope Francis mean? According to John-Henry Westin, writing on , we must interpret the Pope's comments in the context of the historic, foundational teaching of the Catholic Church.

Westin notes, "The Catholic faith teaches that all homosexual acts are presented in Sacred Scriptures as 'acts of grave depravity'; that they are 'intrinsically disordered' and that 'under no circumstances can they be approved.' (Catechism 2357)"

The Catechism also teaches that "even the homosexual inclination is 'objectively disordered' and is a 'trial' for most who experience it. (Catechism 2358)"

At the same time, "They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. (Catechism 2358)"

So, is it possible that Francis was simply restating standard Catholic doctrine—namely, that one shouldn't be judged for having same-sex attractions, as long as those attractions are not acted upon, in obedience to God? Was that his point, but stated with an emphasis on compassion, in keeping with his character?

That is certainly possible, especially in light of the clear statement on marriage made jointly by Francis and Benedict less than one month ago. As reported in the gay press, "Popes Francis, Benedict Jointly Condemn Same-Sex Marriage."

In fact, according to a Spanish language publication, when the Pope was asked by another journalist why he didn't speak out against abortion and same-sex marriage on his trip to Brazil, he responded, "The Church has clearly spoken about that; it is not necessary to go over it again, as it's not necessary to talk about fraud, lying or other things about which the Church has a clear doctrine. It is not necessary to talk about that, but about positive things that open the road for the young ones. Besides, young people know perfectly well what is the Church's position about this."

How interesting that the media has failed to pick up on this

quote!

What about the issue of gay priests?

According to Westin, "Especially after the horrors of the sex abuse crisis, which many have seen to be related to past tolerance of an active gay sub-culture within the Church, the Catholic Church has forbidden even those men with fixed homosexual inclinations from entering the seminary. In November 2005, the Congregation for Catholic Education released the 'Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocation with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders.'

"The Instruction forbade admission to seminary to 'those who practise homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called "gay culture".'

Obviously, men like this are not suitable candidates for the priesthood, and it's hard to believe Pope Francis would now be reversing this policy.

This is not a matter of bigotry toward gays. It's a matter of common sense.

Responding to the pope's comments, Cardinal Timothy Dolan stated that a priest's homosexuality "wouldn't matter to me as long as one is leading a virtuous and chaste life." But he also noted there was a potential problem in speaking of gay priests or the like, explaining, "My worry is that we're buying into the vocabulary that one's person is one's sexual identity, and I don't buy that, and neither does the church."

To be sure, there are plenty of Christian men who have not experienced change in their same-sex attractions but who have chosen to be celibate, and they are living satisfied, full lives, identifying as Christians who are same-sex attracted rather than as "gay Christians." (I think of Christopher Yuan,

co-author with his mother, Angela, of the moving book *Out of a Far Country*.)

But that is very different than ordaining into the priesthood men who are struggling with same-sex attraction, thereby putting them all together in the same environment. This would be like heterosexual priests sharing living quarters with heterosexual nuns. How long do you think their vows of celibacy would last?

In the same way, do we really think that a bunch of young gay men living together in a seminary setting will all be saintly enough to keep themselves pure? And is it realistic to think that, later in their ministries, they will not struggle as they work alone with their teenage altar boys? (These are the very environments that celibate, same-sex attracted Christians would avoid.)

And if it was right to condemn the sex scandals that have taken place in the Catholic Church, how can the Church be criticized for refusing to ordain priests with deep-seated homosexual tendencies? (On a side note, in one of the most blatant examples of sticking one's head in the sand, many gay activists have denied that these sexual abuse scandals had anything to do with homosexuality.)

The simple fact is that those who are dominated by same-sex attraction have no place in the priesthood, and compassion would not put someone in a place of so much temptation, nor would wisdom allow them to be placed in a position of authority where they could hurt others along with themselves.

Any change in this position is a recipe for disaster.

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