

viewpoint JEN MABE



The sex abuse scandals challenged the faith of many Catholics, but a discussed (and disgusting) ban on gay priests is all about scapegoating.

A Catholic's faith gets rocked again

I WAS BORN AND RAISED CATHOLIC. Over the years, I've gone from feeling very close and rooted in my faith, to not wanting anything to do with it, back to feeling very rooted in Catholicism. These days, I attend Mass every Sunday, teach church classes and regularly attend parish functions. All this I do as an openly lesbian Catholic.

But since the beginning of the year, my faith — along with a lot of other Catholics' — has been rocked to the core by endless sex scandals and accusations of abuse by priests. Still, none of that has challenged me as a gay Catholic so much as the most recent blow: the discussed (and disgusting) ban on gay priests.

Most fellow Catholics I talk to view this as another insult in the long series we've suffered at the hands of the Catholic Church hierarchy. "Intrinsically evil" and

"objectively disordered" are doctrinal words about homosexuality we're all painfully familiar with.

This proposed ban on gay priests is a way of making them the scapegoats for the recent sex abuse scandals. In our minds we know this, but in our hearts, another piece of the foundation of our faith is being chipped away.

SENSIBLE CATHOLICS — BOTH GAY and straight — know that homosexuality has nothing to do with the horrifying scandals of late. I venture to say that even the powers-that-be in Rome know the scandals have nothing to do with homosexuality.

Those of us who take stock of what's really going on know that the sexual abuse has to do with people — both gay and straight — who have a pathological

disorder. That disorder is called pedophilia, not homosexuality, as Rome might have the general public believe.

I sometimes wonder if the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is aware that homosexuality was removed from the list of mental disorders back in the 1970s.

In my estimation, the single biggest problem with the Catholic Church — if it can be narrowed down to one — is this: the unwillingness to dialogue. Historically and certainly in modern times, the Catholic hierarchy refuses to sit down and address an issue — any issue — and come to a sensible conclusion. Those in the Vatican simply refuse to talk.

Concerning gay issues, we saw this unwillingness to dialogue in 1999 when Rev. Robert Nugent and Sister Jeannine Gramick, co-founders of New Ways Ministry, were "silenced." Rev. Nugent and Sister Gramick were told, by Rome, to shut up after nearly 20 years of simply providing an opportunity for gay and lesbian Catholics to dialogue with the church as a whole.

And now, the silence that has existed in the Catholic Church for centuries is what's destroying it. Not only are people rightly appalled by these heinous sex offenses, but even more by the way the church hierarchy has been deathly silent about it, even going to great lengths to conceal the abuse cases.

What was gained by their silence? Nothing. And now the Vatican is scrambling to find a quick solution to a lifetime of problems — a solution that preys on homophobia and bigotry.

WHY NOT, WHEN LOOKING FOR someone to lash out at for these crimes, go after gay priests? They are, after all (along with all homosexuals), "intrinsically evil" and "objectively disordered." It's the easy solution to a problem that's far from easy to solve.

My suggestion is this: talk. Rome needs to talk about what has happened, talk about what can be done to solve the problem sensibly and talk about how policies can be implemented to make sure the abuse and the silence never happen again. And when those in the Vatican think they can't possibly utter another word concerning this issue, they should talk some more.

Then, when every cause and solution has been considered, act. Implement new policies, screen new seminarians applying for the priesthood and act with the compassion and justice the Catholic Church was founded on. Don't go after the innocent simply because they're the easy target.

So why do I still choose to participate in the rituals of the Catholic Church? Because I believe my presence there, my refusal to be pushed out, speaks volumes more than simply dropping out.

The Catholic Church as a whole won't care if a few queers stop going to Sunday Mass. But if we stay, if we are in the pew every Sunday, they eventually will be forced to listen.

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viewpoint JOHN CORVINO



Can true Christians reject what the Bible has to say about homosexuality? Can gays accept that there are **atheists** among us?

Coming out skeptical

A YOUNG MAN NAMED JOSH RECENTLY wrote to me from Texas to ask, "Can you really be a true Christian with Jesus, accepting him as your savior, and still doubt the Bible?"

This was a hard question, and not because I hadn't given it thought before. Quite the contrary, I struggled with the question myself for years. Rather, the question was hard because I knew Josh wasn't going to like my answer.

Full disclosure: I'm an atheist. While I think it's *possible* that there's some higher power, I don't think we ought to alter our lives one bit because of that vague and unsubstantiated possibility.

Some would prefer to label me an agnostic, but the term is misleading in my case. "Skeptic" comes a bit closer. But whatever you call me, please understand: *I don't believe in God.*

This admission strikes many people as disreputable, even arrogant. After all, they point out, there are many intelligent people who believe in God. True enough.

But there are also many intelligent people who do not. Indeed, there are billions of people around the world — decent, well-meaning, and often quite intelligent people — whose religious convictions are mutually incompatible with yours, whatever yours might happen to be. Which goes to prove the fact that because many sincere and intelligent people believe something doesn't make it true.

WE AS GAY PEOPLE OUGHT TO understand that last point better than anyone. And yet I've often found coming out as an atheist to fellow gay people even harder than coming out as gay to straight people.

I've had gay friends snap back "No

you're not!" when I mention my atheism. That, by the way, is rude. I would never question the sincerity of *their* religious convictions.

However, while I don't believe in God, I have a soft spot for sincere religious people. Which brings me back to Josh, a gay college freshman struggling to reconcile his longstanding religious convictions with his budding awareness of his homosexuality.

So I began by informing him that although I myself am an atheist, there are plenty of devout Christians who believe that biblical faith and homosexuality are compatible.

Then I waded into somewhat deeper water: Those who believe in both the infallibility of the Bible and the morality of homosexuality argue that traditional prohibitions of homosexual conduct rest on misreadings of the biblical text. And these arguments have some plausibility.

However, there are good reasons to doubt the Bible is infallible, including internal contradictions, historical errors, and bad moral advice (for example, God's support of slavery in Leviticus 25).


A more coherent approach, I think, acknowledges that the Bible contains error but still considers it a valuable guide as a whole. As one friend put it, we ought not confuse complete faith in God with complete faith in our ability to discern God's voice.

THE PROBLEM WITH THIS APPROACH, as Josh seemed to suspect, is that once you allow that the Bible makes some mistakes, you might well wonder whether it makes mistakes on those very matters that led you to accept Christian faith in the first place.

After all, the very frailties and prejudices that led the biblical authors and editors to accept erroneous moral teachings (like the ones about slavery and homosexuality) might have led them to make mistakes about whether Jesus performed miracles, died for our sins, rose from the dead, and so on.

To say this is not to suggest that those who assembled the Bible were deceitful. It is simply to suggest that Christianity, like other world religions, may tell us more about human hopes, dreams, fears and foibles than about a transcendent God.

The biblical passages regarding homosexuality did not ring true to Josh, and he (quite rightly) began to doubt the Bible's infallibility. He wanted to know if he could do that while still accepting Christ as his Lord and Savior. Of course he *can*; many people do. I just don't think, in light of the evidence, that they should.

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