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MARK ANCHOR ALBERT
AND ASSOCIATES

A SHORT HISTORY OF OFFICIAL AND SEMI- OFFICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH ON HOMOSEXUALITY

**The Roman Catholic Church's Struggle With Homosexuality
Within In Its Own Ranks-And Its Varying Pronouncements On
Homosexuality Over The Ages-Highlight The Need For Ever
Greater Tolerance, Respect And Love For All People,
Regardless Of Sexual Orientation**

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**The Author, a practicing Roman Catholic, was one of the lead defense counsel for
the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles in the Clergy Sex Abuse Cases.**

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Introduction

Roman Catholic pronouncements regarding its condemnation of homosexuality claim to be founded in the Holy Bible as well as the broader Magisterium of the Church, including the writings of Doctors of the Church from the first centuries of the Christian era. But on closer examination, we see that the Church's views on homosexuality are founded in large part on its historical experience with homosexuality in the ranks of its own clergy and religious.

Rather than focusing on the sinfulness that the Church sees in homosexual acts, the author believes that the Church and the faithful should accept and love, without prejudice or discrimination, all of our brothers and sisters everywhere, in all times and places, no matter what their sexual orientation may be. This is the true message of Christ: that we love one another. And it is the message that too often is hidden in the Church's official pronouncements on homosexuality, especially since the Clergy sex abuse scandal commenced in 2001.

Some of these pronouncements are set forth below.

Primary Biblical Proscriptions Cited By The Roman Catholic Church Against Homosexuality

The Genesis account of the destruction of Sodom is the foundational source of the biblical proscription against homosexual activities. Gen. 13:13; 18:20-22; 19:4-8; and 19:24-25 (Sodom story). Prohibitions against homosexual behavior are scattered throughout the Old Testament. *See, e.g.,* Leviticus 18: 22 ("You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination."); 20:13 ("If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a

woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them."); Deut. 23:18 ("You shall not bring the hire of a harlot or the wages of a dog [i.e., a sodomite] into the house of the LORD your God for any votive offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God.").

The New Testament is equally explicit in its condemnation of homosexual acts. Among the primary citations are I Cor. 6:9 ("Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor [an] effeminate, nor homosexuals. . . ."); I Tim. 1:9-10 ("[the] law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching").

St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans (Rom. 1:24-24), cannot be any clearer in his condemnation of homosexual acts:

"That is why God left them to their filthy enjoyments and the practices with which they dishonor their own bodies since they have given up Divine

truth for a lie and have worshipped and served creatures instead of the Creator, Who is blessed forever. Amen! That is why God has abandoned them to degrading passions; why their women have turned from natural intercourse to be consumed with passion for each other, men doing shameless things with men and getting an appropriate award for their perversion."

See also what St. Paul says of "masculorum concubitores" in I Cor. 6:10 ("Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders").

Thus, there can be no doubt that Sacred Scripture condemns homosexual relations as a serious depravity.

*Early Church Council
Proscriptions Against
Actively Homosexual
Clergy*

A comprehensive bibliography of early Church pronouncements and proscriptions against homosexuality is set forth at www.fordham.edu/halsall/pwh/lgbathbib1.html. The texts of several of the decrees of early Church councils relating to homosexuality are translated and printed in Derrick S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1975).

Apparently, the first council that addressed homosexuality in a major way was the

Council of Elvira, held early in the 4th century at Elvira, near modern Granada. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, it is the first council of which the canons have survived. Canon 71 condemned clergy who were "corrupters of boys."

St. Basil of Nyssa, in his First Canonical Epistle to Amphilochus of Iconium, (Epist. 117, canon 62), in 375, and St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his Canonical Letter to Letoious of Mytilene (Epist. canonica 4), in 390, also condemned homosexual acts by clergy.

Saint Basil's writings on monasticism emphasized the need to avoid situations where ephebophilia, i.e., sex between an older man and a teenaged boy, could occur:

"It is frequently the case with young men that . . . the glowing complexion of youth still blossoms forth and becomes a source of desire to those around them. If, therefore, anyone in the monastery is youthful and beautiful . . . you sit in a chair far away from that person . . . Do not be found with him either indoors or where no one can see you outdoors, no matter how necessary."

Quoted in J. Boswell, "Homosexuality and Religious Life: A Historical Approach," in J. Gramick's (ed.) *Homosexuality in the Priesthood and Religious Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 12.

A century later (in the 5th century), St. Benedict, in his Rule, established similar prophylactic rules designed to discourage homosexual activities among Benedictine monks:

"All monks are to sleep in separate beds. . . if possible, they should sleep in one room. However, if there are too many for this, they will be grouped in tens and twenties, a senior in charge of each group. Let a candle burn throughout the night. They will sleep in their robes. . . The younger brothers should not be next to each other."

Quoted in J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 187-88.

St. Augustine reportedly warned his own sister about lesbians when she entered the convent in the year 423. See Michael J. Maher, "Openly Addressing the Reality: Homosexuality and Catholic Seminary Policies," *Religion & Education*, Vo. 29, No. 2 (University of Northern Iowa, Fall 2002).

The Second Council of Tours, c. 14, in 567, decreed that monks must not sleep two to a

bed. Subsequent councils apparently also railed against homosexual practices.

The first General Council expressly criticizing homosexual acts was the Third Lateran Council in 1179. In canon 11, it is stated:

"Whoever is caught involved in that incontinence which is against nature, and because of which 'the wrath of God came upon the sons of disobedience' (Eph. 5:6), and five cities were consumed by fire (Gen. 14:24-35), if they are clerics, they should be deposed from clerical office and placed in a monastery to do penance; if they are laymen, they are to be excommunicated and completely isolated from contact with believers."

It is noteworthy that, while clerics guilty of sodomy were placed in monasteries to do penance, laymen guilty of sodomy were to be excommunicated altogether, a much harsher sentence.

The Fourth Lateran Council in the 13th century also condemned sodomy by priests. See J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning*

of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

The Council of Paris (1212) and the Council of Rouen (1214) required nuns to have separate beds and also required that a lamp burn all night in their sleeping rooms. See J.C. Brown, "Lesbian Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," in Duberman, M., Vicinus, M. & Chauncey, G. (eds.) *Hidden from History: Reclaiming our Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Meridian, 1989).

Finally, according to the Fordham University bibliography cited above, various local synods in the 13th century issued canons which referred to sodomy: Paris 1212[ii.21], Rouen 1214, Angers 1216/19, Beziers 1246; also constitutions of Fulk Bassest for London 1245/59, Alexander Stavensby for Coventry, 1224/37, Peter Quinel for Exeter 1287; also Dominican statutes, 1238, Carthusian statutes, 1261 and Cistercian statutes, 1279. For all see Michal Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice* (Santa Barbara, Ca.: ABC-Clio, 1979), 45-46.

Modern Vatican Proscriptions Against Homosexuality

Preliminary research did not uncover any 19th century or early 20th century pronouncements by the Vatican regarding homosexuality in general or homosexual seminarians in particular. Set forth below are the specific Vatican-issued or approved pronouncements in that regard from the Vatican II-era forward.

- **1961 -- "Careful Selection and Training of Candidates for the States of Perfection and Sacred Orders"**

The first modern-era proscription by the Holy See against homosexual seminarians that I have located was issued in 1961 (i.e., immediately prior to Vatican II) by the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for Religious, under Pope John XXIII. It is entitled "Careful Selection and Training of Candidates for the States of Perfection and Sacred Orders." At the time of its publication, the documents was referred to by the Sacred Congregation for Religious as "a matter of public law." It apparently was first published in the United States in The Canon Law Digest, Vol. 5, 1963, Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee. The document states, in pertinent part, as follows:

"Advancement to religious vows and ordination should be barred to those who are afflicted with evil tendencies to homosexuality or pederasty, since for them the common life and priestly ministry would constitute serious dangers."

▪ **1975 -- "Persona Humana: Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics"**

In 1975, Cardinal Franjo Seper, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued a "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics." In this official pronouncement, the Vatican

"repeat[s] the Church's doctrine on certain particular points, in view of the urgent need to oppose serious errors and widespread aberrant modes of behavior." Art. VI. It reiterates the "Christian doctrine" that "every genital act must be within the framework of marriage." Art. VII. "[D]issolute sexual union defiles the temple of the holy spirit which the Christian has become." *Id.* Persons who "judge indulgently" or even "excuse completely" homosexual relations do so "in opposition to the constant teaching of the Magisterium and to the moral sense of the Christian people." Art. VIII.

In summary, according to the Vatican (circa 1975), homosexual acts are contrary to the "objective moral order," are condemned by Sacred Scripture as a "serious depravity" and "even presented as the sad consequence of rejecting God," are "intrinsically disordered," and "can in no case be approved of." Art VIII.

The Declaration goes on to direct the Bishops "to see that a sound doctrine [i.e., about the sinfulness and depravity of homosexual acts] enlightened by faith and directed by the Magisterium of the Church is taught in faculties of theology and in seminaries." Art. XIII.

At the same time, the Declaration distinguishes between homosexuality that is transitory or not "incurable" and homosexuality that is definitive and permanent from an "innate instinct" that is incurable. It affirms that homosexuals must be treated with understanding, that "their culpability is to be judged with prudence," that "no moral justification for acts because of the homosexual condition can be given," and that "we cannot conclude those who

suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible."

- **1985 -- "A Memorandum to Bishops seeking advice in matters concerning homosexuality and candidates for admission to Seminary"**

In 1985, Cardinal William Baum, then Prefect of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, issued to Bishops in the United States "A Memorandum to Bishops seeking advice in matters concerning homosexuality and candidates for admission to Seminary." The Memorandum again emphasizes a strong Vatican position against active homosexuals being accepted into United States seminaries:

"A candidate for his homosexually active or who leads a homosexual lifestyle (whether he is homosexual or not) is not acceptable [as a seminarian]."

"[L]atent or repressed homosexuality is also a counter-indication requiring that the candidate not be accepted -- it would not be faith to the individual nor to the seminary community."

"We feel that the distinction that has been made in the past between homosexual practice and orientation seems to us to have become blurred, with

'orientation' now allowing of the embrace of an unacceptable 'commitment' to or support of homosexual practices or lifestyles."

"We prefer to distinguish between practice, orientation and temptation, the first two being counter-indications of acceptability. Temptations may involve or depend on orientations, but we prefer to use the word temptation when the behavioural [sic] impulse, inclination or appetite does not involve the orientation of the kind described above."

- **1986 -- "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons"**

In 1986, the Vatican's Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith issued its "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons." This document again clearly identifies homosexuality as a grave disorder: an evil and depravity. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith made clear that "although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and this the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder."

Referring to its "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics" of December 29, 1975, the Congregation dispelled any possible support for "an overly benign interpretation [being] given to the homosexual condition itself." In clarifying and emphasizing its rejection of homosexual activities as contrary to natural law and the Church's Magisterium, this document stresses the following points:

Although the mere inclination to homosexuality not a sin, it nonetheless is a tendency towards an intrinsic moral evil. The inclination itself, therefore, must be seen as an "objective disorder."

There is a clear consistency in Scriptures on the immorality of homosexual behavior.

When they engage in homosexual activity, homosexuals confirm in themselves "disordered sexual inclination" which is "essentially self-indulgent."

A person who engages in homosexual behavior acts immorally.

Although the practice of homosexuality seriously threatens the lives and well-being of a large number of people, its advocates remain undeterred and refuse to consider the magnitude of the risks involved.

It nevertheless is deplorable that homosexual people are object of violent malice in speech or action; such treatment deserves condemnation from pastors. It reveals a disregard for others endangering the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. Each person's intrinsic dignity

must be respected in word, in action and in law.

When it is claimed that homosexual condition is not disordered or when homosexual activity is condoned we should not be surprised when "irrational" and violent reactions increase.

All support should be withdrawn from any organizations which seek to undermine the teaching of the Church regarding homosexuals and homosexuality, which are ambiguous about it or which neglect it entirely.

- **1990 -- "Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes"**

In 1990, the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life issued its "Directives on Formation of Religious Institutes." In its prefatory comments, it states that the document has "the weight of an Instruction according to can. 34 of the Code of Canon Law" and was approved by the Holy Father.

In the section II.D., entitled "Sexuality and Formation" the Directives state that "those who do not seem to be able to overcome their homosexual tendencies, or who maintain it is possible to adopt a third way, 'living in an ambiguous state between celibacy and marriage' (104) must be dismissed from religious life."

- **1992 -- "Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons"**

In 1992, the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a statement entitled "Some Considerations Concerning the Catholic Response to Legislative Proposals on the Non-Discrimination of Homosexual Persons." The document evidently was designed to influence Catholic opinion in response to proposed equal rights legislation for homosexuals. It describes homosexuality as an "objective disorder" and a "tendency ordered towards an intrinsic evil." Rejecting the concept of homosexual "human rights," it asserts that there is "no right" to homosexuality and that civil liberties can be "legitimately limited for objectively disordered external conduct."

The significant points include the following:

Sexual orientation does not constitute a quality comparable to race, ethnic background, etc. in respect to non-discrimination.

There are areas in which it is not unjust discrimination to take sexual orientation into account, e.g., adoption and foster care, employment of teachers and athletic coaches and military recruitment.

Although all persons have the right to work, housing, etc.,

rights are not absolute; they can be legitimately limited for objectively disordered external conduct as in the case of the physically or mentally ill.

There is no right to homosexuality which, therefore, it should not form the basis for juridical claims.

The problem of discrimination does not usually arise if homosexual people do not publicize their sexual orientation.

It is inappropriate for church authorities to endorse or remain neutral toward adverse legislation even if it grants exceptions to church organizations and institutions.

- **1994 -- Catechism of the Catholic Church**

The official Roman Catholic Catechism strongly condemns homosexual activities, labeling them as "acts of grave depravity," "intrinsically disordered," and "contrary to the natural law." Catechism § 2357. Judging that homosexual acts "do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity," the Catechism declares that "[u]nder no circumstances can they be approved." *Id.*

- **2002 -- Pope John Paul II Himself and Various Vatican Spokesmen Speak Out Against Homosexual Seminarians**

In apparent response to the clergy sexual abuse scandal in the United States, the Holy Father himself, Pope John Paul II,



as well as Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls and Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone, have all stated unequivocally that seminaries must screen out homosexual candidates. See E. Rossini, "Pope to Church: Risky Seminarians Must Go," *National Catholic Register*, 15-21 Sept. 2002. J. Thavis, "Vatican's Spokesman's Comments Highlight Debate Over Gay Priests," *Catholic News Service*, 6 March 2002.

In particular, Pope John Paul II's spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, citing canon law on homosexuality in a March 3, 2002 interview with the *New York Times*, said, "People with these inclinations just cannot be ordained." Dr. Navarro-Valls continued, "That does not imply a final judgment on people with homosexuality," and added, "But you cannot be in this field."

Zenit News reported that "John Paul II pointedly instructed bishops to be extremely careful in their selection of candidates for the priesthood, in order to avoid a repetition of the scandals linked to emotional disorders." Zenit continued that the Pope said "it would be lamentable that youths with obvious signs of emotional disorders, be admitted to ordination" and that mistakes in choosing such candidates for the priesthood "can cause grave scandal in the consciences of the faithful and obvious harm for the whole Church." Catholic World News also used the term "emotional disorders". The story also is printed on the EWTN

website at <http://www.ewtn.com/vnews/getstory.asp?number=29282>.

CNN reported "Pope John Paul II says that to preserve itself, the Roman Catholic Church has to be much more careful not to let men with 'deviations in their affections' enter the priesthood." See <http://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/09/05/pope.priests/index.html>. ABC News also used the term "deviations in their affections". See <http://www.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/09/05/pope.priests/index.html>

The December 8-14 issue of the *National Catholic Register* quoted the Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Cardinal Jorge Medina Estévez, as follows:

Ordaining homosexuals "is absolutely inadvisable and imprudent and, from a pastoral point of view, very risky. . . [A] person who is homosexual or has homosexual tendencies is not, therefore, suitable to receive the sacrament of holy orders."

Pro. n. 886/02/0 Vatican City, May 16, 2002.

The Jesuit's Catholic weekly, *America*, reports that the Rev. Andrew R. Baker of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for Bishops noted that the homosexual orientation "is fundamentally flawed in its disordered attraction because it can never 'image' God and never contribute to the good of the person or society." A Catholic News Service story (*Am.*, Signs of the Times, 10/21) discussing an anticipated position paper on the subject quotes an unnamed source

saying, "The document's position is negative, based in part on what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says in its revised edition, that the homosexual orientation is 'objectively disordered.' Therefore, independent of any judgment on the homosexual person, a person of this orientation should not be admitted to the seminary and, if it is discovered later, should not be ordained."

U.S.C.C.B. pronouncements on homosexuality and homosexual clergy

- **1976 -- "The Gift of Sexuality"**

In response to the uproar in the Catholic gay and lesbian community over the "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics" issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on Dec. 29, 1975, Bishop Francis Mugavero of Brooklyn N.Y., on behalf of the Bishops of the United States, issued a pastoral letter on February 11, 1976, entitled "Gift of Sexuality." In it, Bishop Mugarevo commenting in a very sensitive way on the C.D.F. Declaration. It emphasized that "Homosexuals, like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights, They have a right to respect, friendship, and justice. They should have an active role in the Christian community." It did not waiver, however, from the Church's firm prohibition of homosexual activities.

- **1976 -- " To Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life"**

In 1976, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops also published "To Live in Christ Jesus: A Pastoral Reflection on the Moral Life" In it, the Bishops acknowledged that homosexual orientation is not voluntary. It calls for homosexuals to live a life of chastity.

- **1991 -- "Human Sexuality"**

In 1991, the United States Catholic Conference published *Human Sexuality*. The ADLA has excerpts from it regarding pastoral and pedagogical approaches to the question of homosexuality in its Vocations office. *Human Sexuality* reiterates the Church's concern that homosexuals and persons with homosexual tendencies "must certainly be treated with understanding." The requirement that homosexuals live chaste and celibate lives is stressed. Educationally, the issue must be skirted but instead "faced in all objectivity by the pupil and the educator when the case presents itself." While respect must be taught for every human being regardless of sexual orientation, "the unambiguous moral norms of the Christian tradition regarding homosexual genital activity" must be presented "clearly and delicately." For persons struggling with his or her homosexual orientation, the pastor and educator should bear in mind that the distinction between *being* homosexual and *doing* homosexual genital actions, "while not always clear and convincing, is a helpful and important one when dealing with the complex issue of homosexuality."

- **1998 -- "Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of**

Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers."

In 1998, the National Conference of Catholic Bishop's Committee on Marriage and Family issued "Always Our Children: A Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers." In it, the United States Catholic Conference seems to depart from the Vatican's position in the 1986 "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," namely, that a homosexual orientation, by its very nature, "is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder."

In particular, the 1998 NCCB statement says that "by itself, therefore, a homosexual orientation cannot be considered sinful, for morality presumes the freedom to choose" The American Bishops further stated that "Homosexual persons who are living chaste lives should have opportunities to lead and serve the community." It is unclear whether they refer to the "Church" community, or the community at large.

Some other key points include:

Sexuality is a gift of God. Everyone should acknowledge and accept [his] sexual identity which helps us define the unique

persons we are. One component, sexual orientation, is a deep-seated, relatively stable dimension of one's personality experienced as a given and not something freely chosen.

Homosexuals are still people of God and are "gifted and called" for a purpose in God's design.

Nothing in the Bible or Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards homosexual people.

The fundamental rights of homosexual persons must be defended and all must strive to eliminate injustice, oppression or violence.

Homosexuals have a right to be welcomed into the community, to hear the word of God and to receive pastoral care.

It is God's plan that every act of sexual intercourse occur only in marriage between a man and a woman and be open to new life.

Conclusion

In summary, official and semi-official Vatican pronouncements since the clergy sexual abuse scandal erupted in 2001 suggest a distinct hardening and narrowing of the Vatican's position with respect to the admission of homosexuals into Catholic seminaries in response to the clergy sexual abuse scandal, i.e., that persons with a homosexual orientation, even if they do not practice homosexual acts, should not be admitted to, and if

they are admitted already, should be dismissed from, seminaries.

This signals a marked departure from the pre-scandal statements that :

Nothing in the Bible or Catholic teaching can be used to justify prejudicial or discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards homosexual people.

The fundamental rights of homosexual persons must be defended and all must strive to eliminate injustice, oppression or violence.

Homosexuals have a right to be welcomed into the community, to hear the word of God and to receive pastoral care.