

ARE AMERICAN BISHOPS GAY?



The short answer is yes, some are.

I am pursuing this discussion in the spirit of *contemplative transformation* espoused by Fr. Thomas Keating who challenges us to confront the biases that keep us from facing truth when we fail to ask penetrating questions: “*Are you so enamored with your religion that you have a naïve loyalty that cannot see the real faults that are present in a particular faith community? Do you sweep under the rug embarrassing situations and bow to the security or esteem needs of the community?*”¹

In 2004 a reliable source of information about the Catholic Church in the USA made me aware of a document concerning American bishops. A small group of insiders in D.C. including at least one bishop compiled it. That document claimed and named 134 bishops they said were homosexual in orientation and/or behavior. Several times over the past years I have asked the source to make the list public and to take responsibility for its conclusions, not only in order to further the dialogue about the “gay debate” that affects so many Catholics lay and clerical, but also to open up intelligent debate related to church teaching about human sexuality that affects every Christian. Every one of the authors still wants to preserve his anonymity; each still has to preserve his position and employment—understandable at this time. Tom Fox, a journalist I highly respect, voiced an objection and thought that I went “too far” when I first raised the question of bishops’ sexual orientation and posted some names on my Web page.²

Why start a dialogue about human sexuality with identifying gay bishops?

¹ Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation*. 1997 Harvard University, Harold M. Wit Lecture Series.

² Cf. www.richardsipe.com *Roma Locuta: Causa est Aperta*. August 1, 2006.

At first glance this focus may seem prickly, provocative and contentious. Not true. Rather this is an effort to define a *sexual reality* and not celibate failure.

Denial of the reality that clergy, bishops included, have some sexual orientation—whatever it may be—is destructive and forms a linchpin keeping a diseased process in place. Also in treating disease—in this case religious hypocrisy—one starts first to address the symptom. A boil can be an ugly and painful sign of a blood disorder; it has to be treated locally *and* systemically. The hypocrisy of some American bishops, their arrogance and duplicity patently manifested in their dealings with the victims of abuse by clergy, their pronouncements about the “intrinsic disorders” and “intrinsic evil” of masturbation, birth control and the whole host sexual behaviors common to Christian men and women cry to the heavens for an honest accounting and open discussion. Bishops need to be honest about sexuality—even their own. Painful as it might be the boil must be lanced. That is a start to treatment and cure.

A recent documentary film—*Outrage*—is devoted to the consideration of gay U.S. legislators who support antigay legislation. It merited this response from congressman Barney Frank, (D-Mass.), the first member of Congress to acknowledge his homosexuality, who puts it this way: “Privacy for private lives is crucial. However, it’s OK to invade that privacy when someone in a powerful position is hurting others—*The right to privacy is not the right to hypocrisy.*”³ It is exactly in that spirit that I raise the question of American bishops’ sexual orientation and behavior.

Am I proposing here an “outing” of gay bishops? No!

I am suggesting that the reality of bishops’ sexual orientation/behavior and the need to hide it is a significant element in clerical culture and structure that keeps us from facing basic facts about how that culture operates and affects millions of people.

Some U.S. bishops are or have been sexually active. This reality—usually unspeakable—emerges as a logical springboard for an adult, rational, and realistic dialogue about the Catholic Church’s teaching about human

³ Lee Grant. The San Diego Union Tribune, June 5, 2009.

sexuality—without any hypocrisy—(or as they say on TV news, *Without Bull.*)

Cardinal Jose Sanchez, at the time secretary for the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy, did not hesitate to say, “I have no reason to doubt the accuracy of those figures” when he was presented with studies that claimed that at any one time between 45 and 50 percent of clergy are not practicing celibacy.⁴

For the moment, let’s suspend judgment or arguments about numbers or sources of information, accuracy or validation of *The List*⁵ and bishops’ sex. One does not have to depend on that document to say responsibly that, yes, some U. S. bishops are gay and unfortunately some have been reported to be sexually active even with minors.⁶ Clerical sex activity presents complicated conundrums; we cannot deal with all of them at once. The pretense that celibate practice/observance is universal or even the most common state of affairs among the Roman Catholic clergy—including the hierarchy—is a deception of the highest order. This intentional hypocrisy is a travesty and perpetuates a destructive illusion that distorts all of Christian life.⁷

SEX: THE PERSISTENT CONCERN OF CHURCH OFFICIALS

Let’s start where the hierarchy has long staked out its sexual concerns—specifically about homosexuality even before the term came into common parlance in the 1850s. Same sex orientation and behaviors remain a perennial and major concern of Vatican officials both concerning laymen and within the clerical culture.

When James Hickey, later cardinal of Washington D.C. was rector of the Pontifical North American Theological College in Rome, a sign posted on a

⁴ BBC (Panorama production by Mark Dowd, 1993) and “*Sins of the Fathers*” 1995.

⁵ I shared the existence of the list with Kristin Lombardy when she was on the staff of the VILLAGE VOICE, but could not reveal the name of my primary source. I suggested that the National office of Dignity might have a copy. They denied any knowledge of the List.

⁶ Cf. <www.BishopsAccountability.org> for partial list: The following list comprises bishops as of 2009 who have been publicly alleged for sexually abusing minors. | Arzube | T.Brown | Brom | Dudley | Dupré| Ferrario| Gelineau| F. J. Green| J. Green |Harrington | Hart | Hubbard | O’Connell | Rausch | Rueger | Ryan | Skylstad | Soens | Symons | Weldon | Williams | Welsh | Ziemann | (It does not include bishops accused of sexual misconduct with adults, such as Archbishops Robert F. Sanchez, Eugene Marino, or Theodore Mc Carrick | Bishops Manuel D. Moreno or James F. McCarthy.)

⁷ Cf. Sean O’Conaill. “Goodbye and Good Riddance to Irish Catholic Serfdom?” *Doctrine and Life* 2009. This is a most penetrating analysis of the effects of RC clerical structure on a culture.

bulletin board in the college stated “*Overt homosexuality will not be tolerated in this seminary.*”⁸ A priest from Louisiana took a photo of the bulletin board when it appeared.

William Levada, in 2006 after he was appointed Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and created a cardinal after Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope, addressed the seminarians of the same College; he stated that seminarians should keep their sexual orientation “secret.”⁹

A 2002 Vatican directive to investigators for the study of seminaries in the United States were to look for “particular friendships.” This is the antique and consistent term used for (potential) homosexual associations or activity between seminarians.¹⁰ The report of the seminary investigation released in English in 2009 noted that there were indeed “*difficulties in the area of morality...Usually this meant homosexual behavior.*” In the same paragraph the report states that problems were usually solved by the appointment of “*better superiors (usually rectors)*” and continues “*Of course, here and there some case or other of immorality—again, usually homosexual behavior*” —still occurs.

The Vatican earlier (2005) concocted a new categorization, *transitory homosexuality*, for the evaluation of seminarians.¹¹ No doubt this invention comes out of its vast experience with homosexual behavior and orientation in the priesthood. (Psychological professionals would likely refer to this phenomenon as *situational homosexuality*. The fact that Vatican officials would find a unique designation is in itself telling.) It calls into question these men’s fitness for ministry, but offers them a pass that it denies men

⁸ Hickey served as Rector 1969 to 1974.

⁹ Levada was appointed to his position in Rome in 2005 and in February 2006 created a cardinal; his first address after his elevation was to these seminarians (NYT). Prior to this, in April 2005, he led a march of approximately 1,000 people through the streets of San Francisco to protest gay marriage. In 2004 he wrote: “Heterosexual marriage, procreation and the nurturing of children form the bedrock of the family, and the family unit lies at the heart of every society. To extend the meaning of marriage beyond a union of a man and a woman, their procreative capacity, and their establishment of family represents a misguided understanding of marriage.”

¹⁰ Vatican 2002. *Instrumentum Laboris for the Apostolic Visitation of the Seminaries and Houses of Priestly Formation in the United States of America.*

¹¹ The document in this context also refers to the Vatican 2005 *Instruction concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of their Admission to the Seminary and Holy Orders.*

with “deed-seated homosexual tendencies” along with those who “practice homosexuality” or support the “so-called gay culture.”

Elimination of all clerics who get involved in homosexual acts would decimate the ranks of the Catholic clergy beyond restoration. Despite this, Joaquin Navarro-Walls, spokesman for Pope John Paul II, floated the idea that gay oriented men could not be validly ordained since celibacy (the promise not to marry) is a prerequisite for ordination; the vow, so Vatican reasoning goes, has no meaning for gays because they lack the essential capacity for a *spousal relationship*. The discussion went so far as to question whether or not orientation invalidated the ordination of gay priests and compared their situation to people who had similar grounds for the annulment of a marriage.¹²

The 2009 seminary report like so many other documents dealing with seminary formation before it,¹³ places great emphasis on the system of spiritual direction to inculcate celibacy in seminarians. In my experience this intimate setting of sharing personal concerns is frequently the context of sexual exchanges between the priest/spiritual director and the penitent. This dynamic has been documented for centuries.¹⁴ Even if a sexual exchange does not take place between a spiritual director and his subject this setting and relationship is often the site of permission or tolerance of activity in the seminary¹⁵ with others, often with priests outside seminary grounds. Documents from the records of clergy abusers are prolific and revealing.¹⁶

But the awareness of gay clergy and seminarians (the population from which bishops are selected) is recorded by a broad segment of researchers and writers. Already in 1980 a priest sociologist wrote, “There is an informal

¹² Cf. NYT March 2002. Quoted by Peter Freiberg in *The Advocate*, April 30, 2002

¹³ In 1961 the Vatican promulgated a directive to all seminaries and religious houses on the *Preparation of Candidates for Religious Life and Sacred Orders*. This document stated that men with a homosexual orientation or background not be admitted to either.

¹⁴ Cf. *De Crimen Sollititationes*, 1922, 1962 and prior Vatican documents dating to the 11th Century.

¹⁵ Cf. 1964 Letter of Fr. G. Fitzgerald duplicated on this site.

¹⁶ Dr. Francis Braceland, medical director of the Institute for Living wrote to Most Reverend Ernest J. Primeau May 11, 1964: [our staff psychiatrists have] “*become quite adept at homosexual priests*], *because, unfortunately, there is more and more of it coming to the surface in young clergymen. The trouble frequently begins in the seminary and apparently some spiritual directors just think it will go away if they pay no attention to it. Actually, anybody in an overt situation ought to be dismissed, because eventually he is going to get into trouble—more often than not trouble with young boys.*”

network of gay priests operating in just about every section” of the United States.¹⁷ He among others estimated at that time that 30 percent of Catholic clergy were gay. On the basis of my 25-year ethnographic study¹⁸ I estimated in 1990 that the proportion of gay oriented U.S. priests was twice the number of gays in the general population or 20 percent. The Los Angeles Times conducted a survey of 1,854 priests in 2002 and came to the same conclusion. Tim Unsworth, a well-respected Catholic journalist writing about clerical culture in 1993 described the prevalence and atmosphere of the “lavender rectory.”¹⁹ And in 2000 the rector of a major seminary prognosticated that the priesthood was becoming “a gay profession.”²⁰

THE SEX ABUSE CRISIS IN THE UNITED STATES

A treasure trove of documentation about Roman Catholic clergy sexual activity has been amassed since 1983.²¹ Much of it was precipitated by and focused on what has come to be termed *the Clergy Sex Abuse Crisis in the United States*.²² In addition to the flood of media coverage—Grand Jury findings, civil and criminal proceedings, depositions of cardinals, bishops, chancery officials, priests and victims—the U.S. bishops commissioned two independent studies²³ that concluded that the responsibility rests squarely at the bishops’ feet. All the attendant records memorialize as never before in the history of the Church the actual sexual pattern and practice of the clerical culture.²⁴ These are not the product of historians—they are history.

¹⁷ Richard Wagner, *Gay Catholic Priests*. Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, San Francisco, 1980. P.12.

¹⁸ My study, *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy*, 1990 represents an aspect of anthropological research in which one learns about the culture of a society through fieldwork, the data-gathering methods that are combined with and/or built upon first-hand participation and observation in that society. Cf. Pp. 67 -102.

¹⁹ *The Last Priests in America*, Crossroad: New York, 1993. P.249.

²⁰ Donald Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*. Collegeville, MN. 2000. P.107.

²¹ The Fr. Gilbert Goethe criminal abuse case in Lafayette, LA was the first major breakthrough into the national media. The National Catholic Reporter editor, Tom Fox and journalist Jason Berry spearheaded the coverage. The Boston Globe unleashed the floodgates of media awareness when it began publication of its series of articles about abuse by Boston priests on January 6, 2002. These articles were corroborated by documents from church files.

²² This is the title given the Report of the National Review Board published February 27, 2004.

²³ *A Report on the Crisis in the Catholic Church in the United States* authored by the National Review Board for the Protection of Children; Established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. And *The Report* of the survey of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

²⁴ Current data rivals that of Peter Damian’s Letters to Pope Leo IX in 1049.

Despite Vatican and clerical protestations the undeniable conclusion is that church officials know and have known for a long time about the sexual behavior of many of its priests and bishops, including sexual violations and assaults on minors.

The second undeniable conclusion is that the hierarchy has had clear knowledge and awareness of homosexual activity and orientation in the clergy population—seminarians, priests, bishops, and cardinals.

The protective wall of secrecy that formerly shielded the private lives of clergy has crumbled like the walls of Jericho. The trumpets that brought the wall down were multiple: prime was the introduction of psychiatry²⁵ and psychology into the communication system of sacred clerical culture—secret lives of victims and perpetrators were shared and paraded around in a budding secular profession outside traditional clerical control; public media blasted open a tantalizing view to the hidden lives of some priests and bishops;²⁶ spectacular legal cases brought national publicity and large monetary judgments against dioceses that rocked clerical presumptions that “no one will dare to sue the Church.”²⁷ The voices of victims so long intimidated found megaphones and international audiences that added their own formally silent suffering to validate the message now heard with deafening decibels. The message was loud and clear. Some Roman Catholic priests and bishops sexually abuse minors and others have sexual lives across a spectrum of behaviors.

The most modest and realistic estimates of the homosexual orientation within the RC priest population in the U.S. are 30 percent.

Are bishops excluded from this estimate?

There is urgency to a focus on the sexuality of bishops: To use a cliché, ‘it is the elephant in the sanctuary.’ As the facts of sexual abuse by clergy unfolded in the United States the underlying structure of the clerical sexual system has been exposed. Corruption, hypocrisy, and sexual deviation come

²⁵ Cf. Doyle, Sipe, Wall, *Sex, Priests and Secret Codes*. Chapter 2 Pp. 67-84. 2006.

²⁶ *Sins of the Fathers* is used for the title of literally hundreds of print articles, TV presentations, and documentaries from 1990 to 2009.

²⁷ A Dallas jury awarded a 119.6 million judgment against the Dallas diocese in the 1997 case against priest abuser Rudy Kos who was given a life sentence in prison.

from the top down. Sexually active superiors are tolerant or permissive of sexual activity within their ranks.²⁸

The pattern of sexual activity within the clerical system is woven into a clerical culture that despite verbal protestations and written directives does not really exercise informed discretion in the selection of its candidates; and most importantly the church *does not educate* its members for celibate living. Bishops and religious superiors are singularly resistant to explicit sexual and celibate training for clerical candidates; they rely on the tutelage of confessors and spiritual directors²⁹ and the seminary schedule—*horarium*—to inculcate spirituality and the discipline of celibacy. The system fails in too many instances and those failures expose a flawed system based in part on a defective understanding of human sexuality.

Sex is the central and key problem of the Roman Catholic Church in this 21st Century—for lay and clergy alike.

The sexual abuse crisis confronting the Roman Catholic Church is important, but it is merely one aspect of the unaddressed sexual concerns of the Church. It is clear from the response and cover-ups of the hierarchy to the clergy abuse crisis that they cannot deal with the sexual problems in their own ranks. One reason is the fear of exposing their sexual proclivities and practices.

Already in 1986 theologian William Shea listed what he called the *tangle of issues* that Catholic religious leadership is failing to face. No one has identified the reality of the challenges better or more succinctly: “*They are: family life, divorce and remarriage, premarital and extramarital sex, birth control, abortion, homosexuality, masturbation, the role of women in the ministry, their ordination to the priesthood, the celibacy of the clergy, the male monopoly of leadership. Some have suggested that sex is, at bottom, the issue that clogs up our Catholic calendar. Fear of women, and perhaps hatred of them, may well be just what we have to work out of the Catholic system.*”³⁰

²⁸ *Blackmail and the Genealogy of Abuse*. www.richardsipe.com.

²⁹ The danger and failure of that secret mechanism has been recorded in multiple documents that deal with solicitation. Clinical experience validates the danger of the system and the frequency in which sexual activity occurs in this context.

³⁰ Commonweal. November 7, 1986

I contend that the active sexual lives of priests—especially bishops—are what keep realistic and meaningful discussion of the sexual agenda under wraps. Although the whole area of clerical sex and celibacy is delicate to approach the subject of homosexuality is super sensitive and taboo. My good friend, the most talented and productive researcher in clerical matters, the late Dean Hoge of the Catholic University of America, said in discussions from the inception of our professional contacts in 1989 that homosexuality in the ministry was one subject that could not be raised for research. Strictly taboo. In discussions with him shortly before his death in 2008 he opined that perhaps the time had come to tackle this conundrum.

WHERE TO BEGIN?

In this dialogue I propose to consider directly just one item on Shea's agenda: *homosexuality*, and more specifically—homosexuality within the American hierarchy.

Despite the importance of the broad sexual agenda and the immediacy of the problem/crisis of sex abuse of minors by clerics that the church faces, the questions of homosexuality and the sexual orientation of Roman Catholic Bishops is central to confronting the agenda outlined above.

The sexuality of U.S. priests and bishops is complex because it spotlights a secret area where complete abstinence—*perfect and perpetual* chastity and celibacy—is presumed and proclaimed. Tremendous cultural pressures oppose raising questions directly related to clergy sexual behavior even when it is criminal, as we have all seen as the sexual abuse of minors exploded before the whole country.

Any inquiry into the sexual proclivities of clerics is still deemed impolite to the point of effrontery. But it is by no means prurient or peripheral to the sexual crisis in the American church—and to the authentic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church—to question how bishops behave in defiance of what they teach. That questioning stance is as old and solid as the Gospel accounts of Jesus confronting the religious leaders of his time.³¹ To question authority is dangerous, but it is an urgent necessity in order to openly address Christian sexual morality.

³¹ Cf. Mk 12:37-40; also Mt 23 and Lk 11:37-53. All demonstrate Jesus' antipathy to the religious leaders of his time; especially criticizing their hypocrisy.

Until recently only novels could safely and subtly raise the question of clerical sex—virtue and hypocrisy.³² Father Andrew Greeley outlined the clerical celibate/sexual system most elegantly and accurately in his novel *The Cardinal Sins*.³³ Struggles and failures around power and celibacy are personified in two boyhood friends who become priests. Pat Donahue is a prototype of the clerical sociopath who even violates a classmate and sneaks dates with girls while in the seminary. As he ascends the clerical ladder to become a cardinal he has sexual encounters—some sadistic—with women, fathers a child, and is dominated by bi-sexual passion that is equaled only by his limitless ambition and ecclesiastical *savoir-faire*. Kevin Brennan the faithful celibate friend and fellow priest repeatedly covers up for Donahue and saves him and the Church from scandal.

Although Greeley could hardly have intended it at the time of writing, the book remains a paradigm of the clerical culture and the celibate/sexual structure—homosexual Vatican *Monsignori* and all—that constitutes clerical society. Greeley’s “novel of grace” has the status and force of a parable: clerics collude to cover clergy malfeasance to preserve the Church from scandal. The sexual abuse crisis in the U.S. (and Ireland) spotlights that paradigm with glaring clarity.

Priest writers the likes of Dominican Provincial, Donald Georgen,³⁴ and Franciscan Michael Crosby plead their case for clerical sexual integrity from extensive personal experience with clerics. Diocesan priest Donald Cozzens, the former seminary rector already cited, raised directly the question about the numbers of gay oriented clerical candidates that could lead to the priesthood becoming a “gay profession.”³⁵ Other knowledgeable seminary

³² *The Red and the Black (Le Rouge et le Noir, 1830)* by Stendhal is considered by many the first psychological and realist novel that was dedicated to “the truth, the harsh truth” about the hypocrisy and materialism of the Roman Catholic Church and French society. Also Ethel Voynich in *The Gadfly, 1897* powerfully portrays a dynamic of clerical sex in this novel. I analyze it in *The Serpent and the Dove: Celibacy in Literature and Life*, Pp. 147-55, 2007.

³³ 1981. Follows thirty years in the lives of Kevin and Patrick, two Irish Catholic boys from the west side of Chicago, who grow up together and enter the seminary to become priests.

The essence of the story is about one who maintains celibacy but repeatedly covers up for the failings of the other who violates celibacy over a range of behaviors and relationships from homosexuality to rape.

³⁴ *The Sexual Celibate*, Seabury, 1975.

³⁵ Donald Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, Liturgical Press, 2000. Fr. Michael H. Crosby has also been an outstanding rational voice in debates about celibacy: *Celibacy: Means of Control or Mandate of the Heart*, 1996 is one example.

staff members admit to similar observations, of course on condition of anonymity.

A longtime religion reporter/editor for a prominent daily remarked one time during an interview that he was struck by “all the beautiful young priests” who were in attendance to bishops he had interviewed during his career. Similar innuendoes and jokes are circulated among the Rome Press Corps about a young priest-secretary who attends Pope Benedict XVI. The pope’s red Gucci pumps and his obvious predilection for fashionable miters and robes (in addition to his long assault on the *intrinsically disordered* population) do nothing to establish a secure masculine image.³⁶

Many books on celibacy do exist. My bibliography and library has over 250 titles, many recent. Many are defensive or polemical. Most avoid the question of actual behaviors and even lack adequate discussion of the practical definition and discipline required for the process and practice of celibacy, or they are mystagogical³⁷ and abstract; many bypass the questions to argue for a ‘married priesthood’ as if it were the solution to celibate pressure and miscreant sexual behavior. These can be valuable contributions to the research and dialogue about religious celibacy although they remain contextual and peripheral and are used in denial of the central issues about behaviors of those who proclaim moral principles and pass judgment on sexual behaviors.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO OBSERVE AND RECORD SEXUAL ORIENTATION & BEHAVIOR OF MEN WHO PUBLICLY PROFESS CELIBACY?

A problem prior to communicating data about clerical sex is collecting data. And the homosexuality of bishops is neither an easy nor obvious starting point to open a discussion about Roman Catholic sexual teaching and practice. But my years of observation and research convince me that this is the Achilles’ heel of the Catholic sexual teaching and clerical celibacy.

³⁶ This is in stark contrast to John Paul II who spoke frequently on sex and marriage without creating an image of homosexual orientation. Cf. *Theology of the Body: the collected writings of John Paul II*. Also Hogan & Levoir, *Covenant of Love: Pope John Paul II on Sexuality, Marriage and Family Life*, 1985. Torode & West, *Purity of Heart: Reflections on Love and Lust: Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body in simple language*. 2 Vols. 2003.

³⁷ Robert Barron, “Priest as Bearer of Mystery” in *Priesthood in The Modern World*. Smith, Ed. 1999. P. 99.

A priest from the Midwest chided me for earlier comments on the question of sexual orientation and the unreliability of my method. He, however, went on to say: “I am personally aware of five bishops who are certainly gay, but I don’t know if they are active.” That is a valuable observation from inside the clerical system if one adds it to the observations of many other “informants’ and *Participant Observers*.

Many clerics resent any discussion of their sexuality as an intrusion even if they agree that it is factual and accurate; and as one archbishop wrote: “*it [A Secret World] certainly corresponds with so much I learned these twenty-seven years as a [superior]...[priests] are indeed tired and a bit angry at priests who have resigned and who seem then to take advantage of the knowledge they have to lower the reputation of those who stayed. That perception is out there and it is unfortunate. I guess there is a kind of voyeurism about the sex life of clerics and I wonder if it is really so healthy for the whole of society.*”³⁸ When I reviewed some of the results of my study prior to publication with a priest in Baltimore his only response was: “Prove it.” When I talked about the same material with a psychiatrist who had many years treating over 300 Catholic religious he said: “What you say is true, but they [the Church] will crucify you if you say so.” I admit that my work has intruded and challenged the most secret world of Catholic clergy.

Accurate study of sexual behavior in any population is not easy to conduct. In an age of surveys, computers, poles and instant analysis ethnography is often dismissed as primitive and unreliable. I have addressed some of the investigative challenges cursorily in *Celibacy, Sex & Research* and *Sexually Active Catholic Clergy: Squabbling About Numbers*.³⁹ I am convinced that an ethnographic approach is eminently practical to understanding the clerical culture of the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. That conviction—prompted by advice from Margaret Meade—has guided my research since 1966. In short, my work is *A Descriptive study of a particular human society conducted by a participant observer*.

Britannica defines ethnography more formally: *Ethnography is a branch of anthropology dealing with the scientific description of individual cultures. Contemporary ethnography is based almost entirely on fieldwork. The*

³⁸ Personal letter signed and dated October 11, 1990.

³⁹ www.richardsipe.com, June 15 and July 16, 2009.

*ethnographer lives among the people who are the subject of study for a year or more, learning the local language and participating in everyday life while striving to maintain a degree of objective detachment. He or she usually cultivates close relationships with "informants" who can provide specific information on aspects of cultural life. While detailed written notes are the mainstay of fieldwork, ethnographers may also use tape recorders, cameras, or video recorders. Contemporary ethnographies have both influenced and been influenced by literary theory.*⁴⁰ Monastic life, my years of active ministry, treating and teaching Roman Catholic priests and seminarians, the records of those dialogues and years of contact with “informants” identify my research as ethnography.⁴¹

BASIC ISSUES FOR DIALOGUE

What does the very existence of a question about gay bishops—their orientation, their behaviors and their teaching about sexuality—mean?

We have to enter into dialogue about it. I offer four areas for exchange: The evolution of sexual morality beyond scripture; the lived experience of responsible people about sexual development; the realities—scientific and lived—of homosexual orientation and behavior; and the whole area of the Nature of human sexuality. Let’s talk.

⁴⁰ Cf. *The Serpent and the Dove*, 2008 that was an offshoot of my investigations and teaching.

⁴¹ No research that I am aware of with the exception of the John Jay study that reviewed diocesan records in regard to child abuse has looked at specific sexual behaviors of Catholic clergy; Fr. Andrew Greeley reported that 37% of priests had their sexuality “under control.” (*Priests: A Calling in Crisis*, 2004) Other surveys rate priest "satisfaction" at 93% (LA Times Survey, 2002); that has little meaning in relationship to actual sexual behaviors. Self-reporting surveys that address questions about sexual activity over a period of time are better (Cf. Kotze, 1991; Rodreguez, 1996). I used the corroborating reports of priest and lay partners, of sexually active priests as well as housekeepers, gardeners, chauffeurs and other church workers who observed the daily activities of clergy [bishops.] In the early 1970s while I was teaching courses on human sexuality at a Catholic college and seminary I also interviewed clerks at adult bookstores, hookers and hustlers regarding clergy clients. Informants reported behaviors for minimum of 3 years; some had contacts and provide records over a 25-year period. Data about the range of clergy behavior was published in 1990. The John-Jay Study commissioned by the US bishops reported in 2004 that 6 ½ percent of priests ordained between 1960 and 84 were reported for abuse of minors. (Pp. 30-37) My ethnographic study that covers those same years said that 6% of priests abuse minors. The study sought a baseline of behaviors including abuse of minors that violate celibacy as the Church defines it. Pornography and fantasy often lead to masturbation or other forms of acting out including anonymous homosexual liaisons.

The basic teachings of the Roman Catholic Church about sex are well known and widely propagated: *All sexual activity outside marriage is gravely sinful* (Any voluntary movement in thought, word, desire or action). Those dicta include masturbation, all sexual experimentation prior to marriage, any sexual contact outside marriage, all means of birth control except the rhythm method, and all homosexual behavior [masturbation and homosexual acts along with acts of birth control are considered “*Intrinsically Evil*”]. Vatican documents declare their positions *irrefutable and immutable* based on three supporting arguments from scripture, tradition, and nature. *Authentic and Orthodox* are the code words in their pronouncements and arguments.

Does that portray the complete an accurate picture of human sexual behavior? Are discussions and dialogue unnecessary?

1. The arguments from scripture that hold that same sex behavior is against the divine law are not as iron clad and irrefutable as often postulated.⁴² Others have adequately made the argument that scripture and tradition do and have evolved even in this area; I am not going to re-argue those questions, but there are some basic realities about scripture, nature and behavior that need to be sorted out and acknowledged.

2. The idea that masturbation and birth control are intrinsically evil cannot be rationally defended. Scientific observation, human experience and rational judgment reject that concept. Most educated Catholics reject the Vatican stance.

3. The concept of homosexuality as an orientation and the word itself are of recent origin.⁴³ The adjective *homosexual* can describe orientation, behavior, relationships, or people. It literally means "same sex." Although major biases still dominate about human sexuality there should not be embarrassment in talking about any sexual orientation despite Vatican pronouncements authored by Pope Benedict XVI when he headed the Office of the Doctrine of the Faith. For instance: “Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong

⁴² Daniel A. Helminiak. *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality*. 2000. John McNeill, S.J., Jeffrey Siker, Ed. *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*.1994. John J. McNeill, S.J. *The Church and the Homosexual*. 1976.

⁴³ The first known appearance of the word homosexual in print is found in an 1869 an anonymously published German pamphlet by the Austrian-born novelist Karl-Maria Kertbeny,

tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an *objective disorder*.”⁴⁴ Later the same Vatican stance was reinforced: “thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.” People with Homosexual tendencies are “*objectively disordered*” and “inclined to an *intrinsic evil*.”⁴⁵

Sexual orientation is God-given. Most ethicists agree that heterosexual orientation is genetically determined; but in contrast to the Church’s view homosexual orientation is equally genetically determined or is so conditioned by (early) experience that it has the force of a genetic trait.

4. The Church’s use of *Natural Law* regarding sex is misused. Properly defined: *Natural Law is the system of rules and principles that should guide human behavior which, despite any laws or other regulations enacted, might be discovered through rational intelligence and morality.* The Church bypasses the fact that natural law is rational and discoverable without divine or ecclesiastical guidance. Natural law is the authentic guide of conscience. The Church appeals to a social science definition; *Lex naturalis or the law of nature is a theory that posits the existence of a law whose content is set by nature and that therefore has validity everywhere.* To be credible the Vatican needs to discuss human sexuality on the basis of its Nature. That is not a biblical question any more than cosmology is a biblical question. The nature of human sexuality at base is a set of scientific questions. Certainly the Bible and traditional doctrinal pronouncements hold wise practical and moral guidelines, but it is no more a treatise on human sexual nature than on creation and the physical operation of the universe.

This invitation to dialogue is intended to instigate a serious consideration and discussion of the above issues. Anyone can easily find multiple reliable historical accounts of clergy, including bishops and popes, who violated not only their vows of chastity, but also the norms of human decency.⁴⁶ The fact that I use the sexual orientation and behavior of bishops (and cardinals) to prod discussion is not in the service of recrimination, but to aid the credibility of Church and its ministers. People—in droves—abandon the

⁴⁴ (October 1, 1986) “Letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexual persons.” Salient to all discussions are Vatican statements about homosexuality that continue define the orientation and thus the person as *intrinsically disordered*.

⁴⁵ “Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics” of December 29, 1975.

⁴⁶ Chief among the overviews is Henry C. Lea’s *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*. It was originally published in 1867, but the third revised edition of 1907 is readily available.

religion of their birth⁴⁷ if they perceive hypocrisy in those meant to give example and serve. This is one solid and consistent moral teaching from scripture and tradition.

⁴⁷ Cf. 2008 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life that reported that 31% of adult American men & women who had been raised Roman Catholic had abandoned their religion.