



The Gist

# The Vatican's Closet

## Gay Bashing Becomes Fashionable With the Church

By Michelangelo Signorile

As sexual abuse scandals have rocked the Catholic Church for several months, exploding with new details by the hour, the skeletons in the Vatican's vaults - some of them quite frightening—have been popping out like there's no tomorrow. And that is good.

Some people have been shocked and horrified by what they've heard from the Vatican in the past two weeks—talk that sounds like a new Inquisition, this time focused on gay priests, whom the Vatican has blamed for the sex abuse cases. But really, before hatred can be purged it needs to be drawn out, like puss from a boil. That is the process we're going through at the moment. It'll probably get uglier before it gets better - and, at the rate the Catholic Church moves, it may take a century or so—but it needs to happen.

The issues the current crisis underscores bring me back to a column I wrote last Fall about Pope John Paul's accepting the helmet of Mychal Judge—the gay New York Fire Department chaplain who was killed in the September 11th attacks at the World Trade Center—in a ceremony in St. Peter's Square.

I contended then it was a supremely hypocritical action on the pope's part because of the Vatican's decreeing that homosexuality is "evil" and "intrinsically disordered," terminology that in my view

amounts to gay-bashing. Here was the Pope now honoring a man who embodied the very "evil" and "disorder" the pope rails against, accepting a hero's helmet that he surely didn't deserve.

As you might imagine, I was lambasted to holy hell in some circles for that column. James Taranto and the other conservative moral arbiters at *The Wall Street Journal's* Opinion Journal website put me on their "Stupidity Watch."

The Catholic League sent around a breathless alert, quoting the organization's pit bull president William Donohue actually making a tasteless sexual reference — opining how "surprising" my comments were coming from someone who has so much "practice" at "turning the other cheek." (Glad to know Donohue has some kind of a sense of humor, but he does seem a tad obsessed with cheek action, don't you think?).

The angry letters came pouring in. I was a sinner, a monster and the devil incarnate, not to mention, according to several of the nice Catholic letter writers, "a faggot." In corresponding with some of these individuals, it became clear to me that it didn't matter to them that I was speaking as someone who was raised Catholic, who attended 10 years of Catholic school, who was an altar boy, and who, for a brief period as a teen, even entertained the notion that I

might become a priest (Yes, the church got lucky on that one, and so did I).

As far as they were concerned, any strong criticism of any kind of the church, and more so of the pope, made me a Catholic-basher, end of story.

observed in The List, his widely e-mailed column, "It now seems the pope may be returning that helmet." Desperate as all hell, the church is looking for a scapegoat, and that old standby — equating pedophilia with homosexuality — is its new strategy. (Never

**"Desperate as all hell, the church is looking for a scapegoat, and that old standby—equating pedophilia with homosexuality—is its new strategy."**

The more intelligent of the negative letters, the ones that went into a bit more detail, all seemed to make the same point: "The church doesn't condemn homosexuals - it condemns homosexuality."

In other words, the church doesn't engage in gay-bashing, it engages in homosexuality-bashing. Apologists have a way of splitting hairs to the point of ridiculousness, and they'll cite the Catechism until they're blue in the face. They cling to this explanation - the "love the sinner, hate the sin," policy - because it comforts them as they blindly go along lock, stock and barrel with a church that promotes hatred against an entire group of people, the kind of hatred that results in violence.

So now here we are, not five months later, as the church is embroiled in a sexual controversy that finally has some prominent, long-time Vatican defenders for the first time offering blistering criticisms. And lo and behold, the two issues they seem to be focused on are hypocrisy and gay-bashing.

In op-ed pieces across the country, religious Catholics and theologians are speaking out. Many now clearly see that the same church that ostracizes divorced and gay Catholics, and tells us all that sex outside of heterosexual marriage for the purpose of procreation is "evil," protects pedophile priests, allowing them to continue on in their duties even after knowing they've abused the very young people who put their trust in them.

After remaining silent for weeks the Vatican has chimed in with its inquisition talk, something few can now ignore: It announced that this entire affair is the fault of those perverted homosexual priests—no matter, it seems, even if they've remained celibate—who must now be banned outright from the priesthood.

"People with these inclinations just cannot be ordained," the pope's spokesman, Dr. Joaquin Navarro-Valls, said.

As web columnist John Aravosis

mind that most pedophiles are straight men who molest little girls, and that banning gays will have little impact on that).

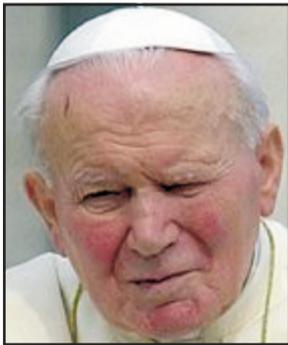
This is not exactly the supposedly nurturing and understanding "love the sinner, hate the sin" policy toward homosexuals. It sounds more like a "blame all of our centuries-in-the-making, self-inflicted problems on the poor sinner, and then grab the sinner by the neck and throw him out on his ass" policy.

Of course, banning gays from the priesthood - which, according to some estimates in the media in recent weeks, may be as much as 50 percent gay — would not only be an end to the already dwindling priesthood; it 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.

How on earth the Vatican would go about instituting such an inquisition is mind-boggling. And it in a way it doesn't matter, as last week, with Navarro-Valls' words, the war between the church and gays reached a new level. Whether or not the Vatican actually tries to ban gays, its gay-bashing is now completely out of the closet.

The Vatican has finally articulated that it believes homosexuals—not just homosexuality—are bad, and that they must be ostracized from the church clergy. The church apologists can no longer realistically split hairs about the loving church having compassion for the homosexual who doesn't act on his desires. And bringing the gay-bashing out of the Vatican closet is the first step toward exorcising it forever

*Michelangelo Signorile is the author of Queer in America: Sex, the Media, and the Closets of Power, and the acclaimed bestsellers Outing Yourself and Life Outside: The Signorile Report on Gay Men.*



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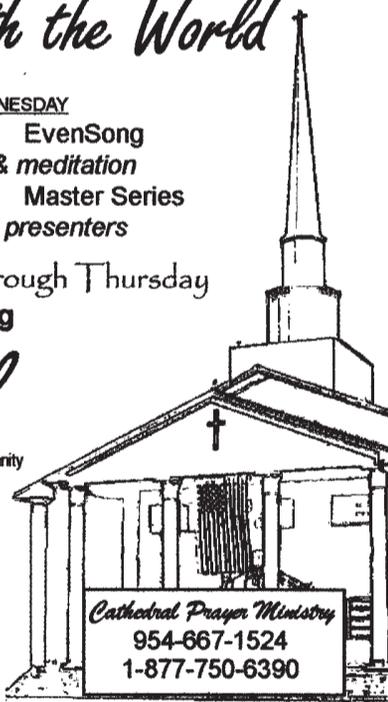
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