

Openly Addressing the Reality: Homosexuality and Catholic Seminary Policies

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In the year 2000, a Jubilee year for the Roman Catholic Church, an issue with which the Church has struggled over centuries came once again into public discussion through a number of published articles and studies. The newspaper, the *Kansas City Star*,¹ published a series by Judy L. Thomas discussing the high rate of AIDS infection among Catholic priests in the United States. The series also explored questions of homosexuality among U.S. priests and how the issue was handled in Catholic seminaries. A book by Fr. Donald Cozzens, President-Rector of Saint Mary Catholic Seminary in Cleveland, *The Changing Face of Priesthood*,² was also published in 2000. Cozzens argues that American Catholic seminaries were attracting larger and larger numbers of gay students and that “Should our seminaries become significantly gay, and many seasoned observers find them to be precisely that, the priesthood of the twenty-first century will likely be perceived as a predominately gay profession.”³ Recent years had seen attention to the issue by conservative groups such as The Roman Catholic Faithful, which operate a web page and have attacked organizations for gay Catholic clergy, such as the Chicago-based Communication Ministry, Inc. and the now defunct Saint Sebastian’s Angels web page.⁴

While not so widely in the popular media, the issue of gay seminarians had been a subject of study for the Catholic Church in the United States in the recent decades. Popular Catholic sociologist, Father Andrew Greeley, reported that a gay subculture of priests existed in most Catholic dioceses in a 1989 article in the *National Catholic Reporter*.⁵ An earlier example of concerns over homosexual Catholic seminarians is a 1966 workshop for psychologists engaged in the assessment of candidates for the priesthood and religious life which took place at the School of Nursing of the Saint Vincent’s Hospital and Medical Center in New York. Coville presented, “Perhaps the most troublesome and most frequent appearing sociopathic features or disturbances in assessment work concern the high incidence of effeminacy, heterosexual retardation, psychosexual immaturity, deviations or potential deviations of the homosexual type....A recent study of 107

male candidates, for example, shows that 8% of these were sexually deviant, whereas 70% were described as psychosexually immature, exhibiting traits of heterosexual retardation, confusion concerning sexual role, fear of sexuality, effeminacy, and potential homosexual dispositions."⁶ Coville was careful to point out that the sample should not be assumed to be representative.

The issue is not specific to the United States. Great Britain's *Channel 4* aired a documentary in 2001 entitled "Queer and Catholic."⁷ In the documentary, Fr. Kevin Haggerty, Rector of Saint John's Catholic Seminary, warned that gay students were forming "divisive cliques" in Catholic seminaries. Elizabeth Stuart's 1993 book, *Chosen*,⁸ is a collection of stories from gay Catholic priests in Britain. She found that the handling of the topic of homosexuality in British Catholic seminaries had not improved greatly between the 1950's and the 1990's. The Working Group of Catholic Gay Pastors of the Netherlands published its "pastoral letter," *Called to Blessing*, in 1989. The group was founded in 1980.⁹

In fact, the issue was still the concern of Rome in recent decades. The Sacred Congregation for the Religious, a Vatican congregation, stated in 1961, "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 the priestly ministry would constitute serious dangers."¹⁰

While I am reluctant to connect the two issues, I must acknowledge the 2002 media coverage of cases of sexual abuse of minors by priests in the United States. While such cases have been reported by the media for some time, this year has brought out more cases and more offensive behavior than previously shown. Again, I am reluctant to connect the two issues, but it is clear that the American public has been forced to think more about the sex lives of Catholic priests, especially where their lives involve sex with males. In the face of priest sex abuse scandals in 2002, 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 that seminaries must screen out homosexual candidates.¹¹

The purpose of this paper is to report a case study I conducted in Saint Louis, Missouri. I wished to investigate how homosexuality affected the policies of Catholic seminaries in the 1950's. I argue that the Catholic Church has long been aware that a significant percentage of its clergy are gay and that one demonstration of this is through the policies of its seminaries. I have used two data collection methods, document analysis of archival resources and interviews with gay men who are former Catholic seminar-

ians. I focus on the Saint Louis Seminary System through archives of its disciplinary policies in the 1950's and through an interview with one gay alumnus from that time, "Fr. Allen." I then provide a number of comparisons and contrasts to demonstrate that this was an issue for Catholic seminaries and not just a reflection of the policies for religious educational institutions in general. I contrast the Saint Louis Seminary system with Saint Louis University, a Catholic University, and with Concordia Seminary, an all-male, Lutheran seminary in the Saint Louis area through archival data of their policies in the 1950's. I also compare the Saint Louis Seminary System with Saint Stanislaus Seminary, another Catholic high school seminary in the Saint Louis area again through archival data of its 1950's policies. Finally, I contrast the interview data of Fr. Allen with an interview of a gay 1980's alumnus of the Saint Louis Seminary System ("Fr. Bob") as well as interviews with two other 1980's alumni from U.S. Catholic seminary high schools ("Patrick" and "Dan"). I interviewed Fr. Allen and Fr. Bob in 1994 and Patrick and Dan in 1996.

What becomes clear is that Catholic seminary administrators were very aware of the homosexual interests of a significant number of students in their institutions. This is clear through a number of rules enacted specifically to avoid sexual feelings and prevent sexual activity. These policies existed in Catholic seminaries, but did not exist at Catholic universities or at non-Catholic seminaries. The intent of these rules is further made clear by the results of their elimination after the 1960's; without these policies, Catholic seminarians formed sexually active relationships with each other.

I do have to make one caution very clear; the idea that the rules studied here had anything to do with homosexuality is totally a matter of interpretation. Rarely do any of the documents I studied give any reason for these rules, or for *any* rules. I can say that Fr. Allen certainly saw the rules as designed to control sexual activity and interests between students, and I would argue that the nature of the rules tends to indicate that intent in many cases. It should also be made clear that in a few cases, rules were not written, or at least did not exist in the archives. I have relied solely on Fr. Allen's interview in a few cases.

I also should be clear about my own background and how this created the lens through which I viewed the data. I was a student in a Midwestern Catholic seminary for one academic year, 1987-1988. While I was a student, I was very aware of sexual relationships between seminarians, and I was even more aware of the paranoid obsession it held for my fellow students and for some of the administrators. Gossip about who was gay and who was sleeping with whom formed a great deal of the conversations. Students and faculty did occasionally talk about the strange rules of "the old

days.” I would say, however, that it was not something that administrators and alumni liked to discuss. I have an uncle who was a priest at the time that I was a seminarian. He had attended another seminary in the 1950’s and 1960’s. I remember that he told me more about these strange rules than I had ever heard. When I asked him why they had these rules, he vaguely said, “Oh, who knows?” When I pressed further and asked, “Do you think it was to discourage sex between the students?” he responded, “I think so. And then it turned out most of the faculty were gay!” His seminary went through a scandal in the 1960’s that resulted in most bishops pulling their students out of the school, and the school almost closing. Clearly, there can be a variety of motivations for seminaries to avoid discussing “the sin which dare not speak its name.”

The rules I will be discussing in this article deal with “particular friendships” (basically, having a best friend), nudity, restrictions of visiting certain places and people, and a policy of eliminating effeminate students. In addition, I will explore the lack of discussion of sexuality and an atmosphere of isolation and terror that existed for gay seminarians in the 1950’s. First, I wish to give some historical context to the topic.

Historical Background

The seminary system for the Saint Louis Catholic Archdiocese dates back to 1818 when Saint Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary was established in Perryville, Missouri. The system underwent many changes in the following years, being located in Saint Louis and in Carondolet, Missouri, under a variety of names. The system did not operate between 1859 and 1893. The present Kenrick building was opened in 1915. The Saint Louis Preparatory Seminary (now known as Cardinal Glennon College) was opened in 1931. It housed the two-year philosophy program and the high school. The three programs (high school, undergraduate school of philosophy, and graduate school of theology) were each made into four-year programs in 1957.¹²

Most historical accounts of gay life in the United States in the 1950’s record the era as repressive and frightening. In the public dialogue, homosexuality began to be associated with Communism, the great threat of the decade. Russo¹³ provides several examples of the comparison. In a 1950 *New York Times* story, Guy Gabrielson, the Republican National Committee Chairman, stated that “sexual perverts who have infected our government in recent years are perhaps as dangerous as actual Communists.”¹⁴ By December of that year, nearly five thousand suspected gays and lesbians were fired from the Federal Government. Also in 1950, *Coronet Magazine*¹⁵ described homosexuality as “the new menace.” In 1956, *Time Maga-*

zine quoted psychologist Edmund Bergler who described the gay man as “Unreliable...and always hates his family. There are no happy homosexuals.”¹⁶

Russo further argues that movies of the 1950’s were affected by these popular attitudes about homosexuality. Two documentaries were released in the 1950’s. *Children of Loneliness* warned the viewer of the dangers of homosexuality in a style similar to *Reefer Madness*. Ed Wood’s now famous documentary *Glen or Glenda* begins with Bela Lugosi giving a monologue among smoke pots and skulls. In “buddy films” of the time, the closer the relationship of the two men, the more the characters acted out violently (to prove their manhood). While openly gay characters were virtually nonexistent, characters who were implied to be gay inevitably came to a violent death in 1950’s films.

At the same time, the Gay Movement was beginning to grow in the United States. Berube¹⁷ has demonstrated that World War II had a profound effect on the lives of Gay Americans. Young gay men from small towns were suddenly put together with thousand of men in the armed services, and there they discovered that they were not as unique as they had previously thought. Discharge from the military for homosexuality forced many to publicly acknowledge their homosexuality. After the war, many gay servicemen did not wish to return to their hometowns. Often, they stayed in the large port cities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and New Orleans upon return from the war.

The *Matachine Society* was founded in Los Angeles in 1950 by Harry Hay. It was the first U.S. national gay organization. Harry Hay, a member of the *Communist Party USA*, was thrown out of the party in 1951 for his homosexuality. He was also thrown out of the Matachine Society in 1953 for his political beliefs.¹⁸ Other organizations were formed at this time as well. *One* was founded in 1952 and began publishing *One Magazine* in 1953. The Matachine Society began publishing *The Matachine Review* in 1955. Also in 1955, the lesbian organization, *The Daughters of Bilitis* formed and began publishing *The Ladder* the following year.¹⁹

To understand how gay life in the United States intersected with life in Catholic seminaries in the 1950’s, some discussion of the Catholic history on the topic is necessary. An early policy to prevent gay relationships in a Catholic institution for men comes from Saint Basil’s Fourth Century writings on monasticism. His writing is significant because he defines the purpose more clearly than later sources. “It is frequently the case with young men that...the glowing complexion of youth still blossoms fourth 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 outdoors...no matter how necessary.”²⁰ Saint Benedict, writing *The Rule* in the Sixth Century, also has rules to prevent homosexual activity, but does not explain them as being for this purpose. “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.”²¹ Both Benedict and Basil restricted their monks from having close friendships with each other.²²

Love between monks and clerics seems to have not been uncommon in Medieval Europe. Saint Aelred had several love relationships with his monks and compared them to the “marriage” of Christ and Saint John the Beloved.²³ The *Fourth Lateran Council* of the Thirteenth Century condemned sodomy by Priests.²⁴ Saint Peter Damian presented his treatise against clerical homosexual practices, *The Book of Gomorrah*, to Pope Leo IX in the mid-eleventh century. Damian had traveled throughout Southern and Central Europe and was appalled by the large number of clerics who engaged in homosexual acts and the evidence that the practice was becoming more common among clerics. He called for all clerics who had engaged in any such acts at any time to be expelled from religious life. Pope Leo IX responded by thanking him for his research, but cautioned expulsion should only be used in extreme cases.²⁵

Catholic Institutions for women also developed similar rules and concerns. Saint Augustine warned his sister about lesbians when she entered the convent in the year 423. 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. From that time forward, rules began to be written for nuns ordering them to stay out of each others’ rooms and to leave their doors unlocked so that the abbesses could check on them.²⁶

The 1950’s were a time of both repression and growth in the Gay Movement in the United States. For gay seminarians, however, the institutions in which they lived had a very long history of controlling homosexual thoughts and behavior.

Rules of the Saint Louis Seminary System of the 1950’s

As I stated above, the rules I will be discussing deal with “particular friendships” (basically, having a best friend), nudity, restrictions of visiting certain places and people, and a policy of eliminating effeminate students.

In addition, I will explore the atmosphere of isolation and terror that existed for gay seminarians in the 1950's.

It is important to understand that rules were a major part of life in the Saint Louis Seminary System, and the seminary system itself had a tight schedule. Documents from the archives confirm an incredibly rigorous schedule allowing virtually no free time for students. Documents show that students were restricted from leaving campus without permission, especially overnight. Dating as far back as 1910, long lists of inexcusable reasons for absence were recorded in the documents. In a 1931 document from Cardinal Glennon College, leaving campus without permission was one of four violations listed which incurred dismissal. Fr. Allen told me that the prohibition of leaving campus was strictly enforced. He had summers off, two weeks at Christmas, two days at Easter, and 12 hours at Thanksgiving. Reading materials were restricted from 1910 to 1960. In 1910, even daily newspapers were restricted. Reading material had to have a faculty member's approval. Students had to wear clerical garb most of the time. This ended in 1982.²⁷ No guests, not even parents, were allowed in the 1950's. Dating back to 1910, students were prohibited from talking with "externs" (People from outside the seminary) and servants. While smoking was allowed, alcohol had restrictions. (Alcohol restrictions were true also for Concordia Seminary and Saint Louis University. No records for this topic were available for Saint Stanislaus Seminary.)

Fr. Allen said reasons were never given for rules. He believed at the time that the rules discussed below had to do with homosexuality, but thought straight students didn't understand. Few students transferred into the system in the 1950's; most began in high school and continued. Those who transferred into the system found the rules strange. Rules were never discussed with the administrators.

Particular Friendships

"Particular friendships" ("PF's") were restricted in the Saint Louis Seminary System. In short, this meant that students were not to have a best friend. Little documentation was found that referred to this very specifically. From the 1940's to 1964 *The Rule of Kenrick Seminary*²⁸ urged students to converse with *all* their classmates. Fr. Allen told me that students were warned at the seminary not to have close friendships. These did exist, and often times students scrutinized them as closely as the faculty. If a pair became very "obvious" in their close friendship, the seminary administration would often investigate the relationship. He was aware of one investigation which resulted in one of the students leaving the seminary.

Another priest writing about life in the Catholic seminary in the 1950's, ("Father Paul"), called "Particular Friendship" a code word for homosexual relationship.²⁹

Nudity

In the 1950's, high school seminarians who did not live near the campus had to live on campus. All high school seniors and college students were required to live on campus. High school students lived in large sleeping dormitories while the college students had individual rooms but used common bathrooms. According to Fr. Allen, students had to wear robes to and from the shower. In the sleeping dormitories, students would put on their robes *over* their pajamas, undress *under* their robes, go to individual shower stalls, return and dress *under* their robes. Students never saw each other nude, and very rarely without a shirt. He told me about one college student who transferred into the system who had been in the Marine Corps. On his first day, the student walked from his room to the showers in the nude with a towel over his shoulder. When he began this the next day, other students informed him of this rule. The *Saint Louis Preparatory Seminary Disciplinary Regulations*³⁰ for 1950 specify that robes were to be worn to and from the showers and to the swimming pool, but were not as specific as Fr. Allen's report to me. The *Student Rules: Cardinal Glennon College*³¹ for 1965 were specific, "Bathrobes are to be worn to and from the showers and in dressing and undressing in the dormitories." While I do not have data from the Saint Louis area on how this compares with other Catholic institutions, data from another study indicates that during this time, at an all-boys Catholic high school in another U.S. city, it was common in gym class for boys to swim in the nude.³² This would tend to indicate that this is not simply part of "Catholic school culture," but was particular to the Catholic seminary life.

Visiting

By reading the archival documents, I could be convinced that the greatest sin a seminarian could commit would be to be in another seminarian's room with the door closed. The rule existed in the system dating back at least until 1910, and the 1931 *Saint Louis Preparatory Seminary Disciplinary Regulations*³³ gives it as one of four reasons for dismissal. The rule persisted at Kenrick until 1964. Several 1950's documents from both preparatory (high school) seminary and Kenrick state that a student must receive permission to visit another person's room, state length of time and

purpose, and leave the door open. Documents for Cardinal Glennon College³⁴ indicate the same. Students were never to sit on another's bed, and visits were never allowed after night prayer.³⁵ Fr. Allen told me that students actually did visit each other in rooms with the door closed. The common practice was to stand behind the door in case someone came in. This usually took place after night prayer. If caught, the two students would face an investigation.

There were also regulations on visiting faculty in their quarters. High school seminarians and undergraduates were not allowed to visit faculty after 9:45pm.³⁶ "Fr. Paul" wrote that he was warned not to visit older students when he entered the seminary in the 1950's.³⁷

There were also a number of restricted areas. From 1910 through 1960, many places were listed as off limits for students. The places varied over the years, but often included the kitchen, mechanical rooms, the convent, faculty quarters, servants' quarters, the attic, the dining room when not in use, and outdoors after dark. Students were not allowed into the dormitories except at prescribed times.³⁸

Effeminacy

It is difficult to describe this as a "rule" because there is really no documentation of it being written or even verbally articulated to students, but Fr. Allen told me that any student showing signs of effeminacy was dismissed from the school. The documents can only be seen as referring to this through a great deal of interpretation. They do indicate that students who were a "bad influence" or who acted with "conduct unbecoming" or with "ungentlemanly behavior" could be dismissed. *Student Rules*³⁹ did state that the administration had the right to dismiss a student without giving reasons to the student or to others.

Atmosphere

Fr. Allen told me that sexuality was not discussed except at some lectures and retreats. It was never addressed at the academic level until the third year of graduate school in classes. All classes were lectures without discussion.

When I asked Fr. Allen what it was like to be a gay student in the Saint Louis Seminary System in the 1950's he described it as "total, continuous fear of being discovered and kicked out." Students who were dismissed left in the middle of the night with no explanation given to other students. For much of his time in seminary, Fr. Allen believed that he was the only

gay student there. While he was a graduate student, he attended a private party with other seminarians over the Christmas break. He and another seminarian went outside to urinate during the party. The two began to engage in some minor sexual play with each other through this act. After this, he became more aware that other students were also gay “through looks people would give.”

Again, I wish to emphasize that the intent of these rules is subject to interpretation. Explanations for them simply were not provided. I do believe, however, that the nature of these rules indicates their intent to control sexual behavior and thoughts. In comparison to many all-male environments of the time, why else would students be so restricted in their bathing habits? Why else would students not be allowed to visit another room with the door closed? Why else would effeminate behavior result in expulsion? Why else would having a best friend be a threat? Further comparison and contrast provides evidence that it cannot be argued that these practices were typical of Saint Louis, typical of seminaries, or typical of Catholic education. They were specific to Catholic seminaries. The results of their removal from Catholic seminaries in the 1960’s also indicate their intent.

Comparisons

In this section, I will contrast the Saint Louis Seminary System to two other institutions in the Saint Louis area in the 1950’s, Concordia Seminary and Saint Louis University. Concordia Seminary is a Lutheran seminary. In the 1950’s its student body was completely male. The students were actively discouraged from marrying at that time, so it may be assumed that they were single, and presumably thought to also avoid sexual activity. Saint Louis University is a Catholic university in Saint Louis. It was coeducational in the 1950’s, but men and women lived in separate dormitories. I will also compare the Saint Louis Seminary System with Saint Stanislaus Seminary. It was a Catholic high school seminary located in the Saint Louis area. Students were preparing for priesthood in the Jesuit order. They were required to live on campus. Finally, I will contrast the Saint Louis Seminary System of the 1950’s with the same system in the 1980’s, when many of these rules had been relaxed. I will also provide data from other U.S. residential seminaries from the 1980’s.

Concordia Seminary

At Concordia, I found no indications on restrictions of reading materials in the archival information for the 1950’s. While students were re-

stricted from areas with mechanical equipment, other, non-threatening areas were not restricted. I found no evidence that visiting other students' rooms was prohibited in any way. Students were allowed to sunbathe on campus and be on the athletic field shirtless.⁴⁰ Students were not restricted from leaving campus, and were encouraged to visit sights in Saint Louis.⁴¹ Students did have a curfew, but they could be out overnight if they informed the proctor before *or after* being gone.⁴² Women were allowed into the dormitory buildings at certain times, and arrangements could be made for overnight male guests. I found no restrictions on forming best friends in seminary. In short, despite being a Christian seminary for single men, the policies for students at Concordia were totally different from those in the Saint Louis Seminary System.

Saint Louis University

Archival information for Saint Louis University was very lacking. Most observations here come from a 1947 *Housing Directory and Regulations*,⁴³ but a document from 1952 and one from 1956 were also helpful. For men's dormitories, I found no restrictions on visiting rooms except that doors had to be open "when playing games." This was in a section that prohibited gambling. I found no restrictions on reading material. Men did have a curfew, but could be out past curfew if they obtained permission before 6:00pm. Women were never allowed in men's dormitory buildings, and male guests were only allowed on the first floor of the building. While these regulations show some greater strictness than at Concordia, still Saint Louis University, a Catholic institution with all-male dormitories, was a very different life than at the local Catholic seminary.

Saint Stanislaus Seminary

This Catholic seminary in the Saint Louis area demonstrated a great similarity to the Saint Louis Seminary System. The *Selection of Faults for Chapters*⁴⁴ includes violation of the rule of not touching each other, speaking to members of "other divisions" without necessity and permission, and being too often with the same companions. The 1957 *Regulae Communes* of General Congregation XXX (a document which would have applied to Jesuit seminaries throughout the world) prohibited touching ("even in a joke"), entering another's room without permission of the superior, being outdoors after dark without permission, talking with externs or servants, writing about internal affairs to outsiders, and restricted reading material. It is clear that individual shower stalls existed in the dormitories at the time.⁴⁵ Family visits

were limited.⁴⁶ Students were restricted in the number of letters they could write, and had to keep letters unsealed.⁴⁷ In *Use of the Pool*,⁴⁸ silence was required in the bathhouse and in the showers. The same was true in *Swimming Regulations*⁴⁹ which also required two-piece swimsuits and restricted sunbathing. Other documents from the time indicate that the pool was to be for exercise, not place to socialize or lounge. In her 2000 series for the *Kansas City Star*,⁵⁰ Thomas interviewed some alumni who attended Saint Stanislaus Seminary in the 1960's. They reported that particular friendships were forbidden. They were told not to be in pairs; "*Non quam duo, semper tres*. Not in two's always three's." One alumnus she interviewed reported that sexuality was never discussed there. In deed, many of the rules at the Saint Louis Seminary System were also very present at Saint Stanislaus Seminary.

Catholic Seminaries in the 1980's

By the 1980's, many of the rules discussed here were dropped in the Saint Louis Seminary System. Fr. Allen believed that the Second Vatican Council "changed everything." I will go over some of the changes that the archival data indicate. I will also provide data from my interview with "Fr. Bob," an alumnus from the Saint Louis System in the 1980's. Finally, I will include some data from another study which give a picture of life at other U.S. Catholic seminaries in the 1980's.

Leaving campus moved from sign-in/sign-out to simply leaving a note on door in 1980's.⁵¹ High school and college students were not allowed to be "palling" with each other.⁵² One restriction on dress still remained; the wearing of earrings was forbidden. "Despite the acceptance of this in certain circles of our society... it is not universally accepted and, in fact, has negative connotations with many people."⁵³

According to Fr. Bob, the restriction of older students socializing with the high school students tended only to be enforced when it became a problem. He believed that some older students would frequently break the rule because of their sexual interest in the younger students. He did not believe, however, that these relationships were physical. He also saw the rule as used to create a distinction between high school and college so that high school students would make friends with college students when they graduated rather than continue to socialize with old friends still in high school. He said that curfews were rarely enforced in the 1980's. Kenrick students did sunbathe on the building's rooftop, and a few even discretely did so in the nude. Quite a few students transferred into the system by the 1980's; only half of Fr. Bob's ordination class was in his freshman class of high school.

Fr. Bob vacillated between describing the seminary as supportive or unsupportive. He felt that there was support for gay students except in cases where a relationship between two students became “unhealthy.” One faculty member advised students “*Until* ordination, be prudent.” Some students moved from being homophobic to coming out of the closet. Sometimes, factions would develop over the gay issue. Sexuality was addressed in the spiritual formation program rather than in the academic sector. Homosexuality was not really discussed. Celibacy and sexuality were discussed as part of identity, but not sexual activity.

I also rely on data from two subjects I interviewed for another study.⁵⁴ Both “Patrick” and “Dan” attended Catholic boarding seminary high schools in the 1980’s. Patrick was familiar with many of the rules of the 1950’s, but said that these had been abandoned at his seminary. He also said that homosexuality was discussed in classes such as psychology. He viewed his school as more progressive than public schools in this regard. He also said that gay cliques would sometimes form among the students, and sometimes conflicts developed between gay and straight students. Several straight students left the school because there were too many gay students. His intense fear of being caught prevented him from forming a relationship with another student while he was in school. This contributed to a deep sense of isolation and loneliness. He said that in actuality only two students were expelled for homosexuality while he was there; one was having a relationship with a man in his thirties outside the school, and one had been very sexually active with a large number of students. He felt affirmed by the priest who was his spiritual director in high school. He believed that the school was very tolerant due to many of the faculty being gay.

At Dan’s high school seminary, homosexuality was still a taboo topic. It was not discussed openly in class or other venues. Dan saw his school’s administration as focussing on a very masculine identity for the students. “It was also a formational issue a lot of times. A character issue was that a male student was not supposed to act that way. They made an effort; if you were feminine, they really tried to ‘butch you up’ so to speak. It would be brought up in your evaluation if they thought you were taking on feminine characteristics.” One interesting thing was that it was a common and encouraged practice for senior students to take a freshman “under their wing” while there. These students would spend a great deal of time together in each other’s rooms, and even sleep in the same bed at times on the weekends. The administration did nothing about this practice because, as Dan saw it, that would have forced them to deal directly with the topic of homosexuality. Dan did have the sense for part of his time in seminary that he was the only gay student there.

Percentage of Gay Seminarians and Frequency of Sexual Activity

Two necessary questions in this study are, “Just how many seminarians were gay, and how common was sexual activity between them?” To a great extent, these questions can only be discussed, not quantified. Some studies indicate that between 10% and 50% of U.S. Catholic priests are gay.⁵⁵ Wolf found that gay priests were more likely to be more sexually active after ordination than before ordination.⁵⁶ Wolf also found that gay priests who were ordained in 1960 or before estimated on average that 50.9% of seminarians were gay when they were in seminary, while those ordained from 1981 to 1984 estimated that 70.5% of seminarians were gay when they were in seminary. Sipe⁵⁷ found that the percentage of clergy reporting homosexual behavior or identity increased from around 20% in the 1960’s to around half by the mid-1980’s.⁵⁸ Thomas argues that the rate of AIDS infection among U.S. Catholic priests is at least four times the national average, and she argues that this is due to a large percentage of priests being gay.⁵⁹ Fr. Allen said he was certain that 10-12% of his class was gay, but believed the real percentage was probably higher. Fr. Bob believed that 50% of his class was gay, and thought this was true in all classes at the seminary in the 1980’s.

Fr. Allen didn’t think any sex was going on in seminary in the 1950’s although “PF’s” were common. “Fr. Paul” wrote that sex in the 1950’s seminary was “unheard of,” but he had a “PF.”⁶⁰ Fr. Bob thought 50% (all the gay seminarians) had a gay relationship some time in seminary that was always sexual. He also thought 50% had a relationship with a woman. He believed there was some overlap; some had relationships with both men and women while in seminary. Fr. Bob distinguished between “healthy” and “unhealthy” relationships. Unhealthy relationships were those so secret that they became only sexual; students would meet in a room for sex but not speak to each other all day because they were afraid of others becoming suspicious. He was involved with another seminarian for three to four years. The relationship began when he was an undergraduate and ended in graduate theology school. He also had some shorter relationships with other seminarians while he was in the Saint Louis Seminary System. Fr. Allen began cruising parks and bathhouses in St. Louis after ordination in the 1960’s. He also met other priests there. Fr. Bob chose celibacy after ordination.

“Patrick” from my other study believed that a very high percentage of students in his seminary high school were gay. He also believed that many straight students engaged in sex with other students while they were there. He claimed that over 30% of his class was gay, and that over 85% of his

class had had sex with another seminarian while they were in school. At his school, students slept in large sleeping dormitories divided into cubicles with partitions. Older students were prefects for these. He said that the prefects were very tolerant of students having sex with each other, which was a very commonly known occurrence because the sound traveled through the partitions at night. “Dan” from my other study also reported frequent sexual activity between students, and even encounters between the priests who were faculty and the students. He told me that he had sexual encounters with over one third of the students in his class and the class behind him. His school did have one case of pedophilia involving one of the priest faculty and a student. Dan himself joined the order that ran the school, and he developed a sexual relationship in his college freshman year with the priest who had been his dormitory dean in high school.

Conclusion

In the 1950’s, the Catholic Seminary System of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis had a number of rules for its students that it abandoned by the 1980’s. The documents gave no reasons for the rules discussed in this study, but some of its students saw these rules as designed to prevent homosexual activity among students. It seems to me that the nature of these rules would indicate that this was their purpose. The fact that homosexual activity between seminarians seems to have increased when these rules were abandoned also indicates that this was the purpose of these rules.

A comparison between these rules at the Catholic Seminary System of the Archdiocese of Saint Louis and similar institutions seems to show that these rules were typical of Catholic seminaries but not other Catholic, all-male educational institutions or other all-male, non-Catholic seminaries. Historical documents from earlier centuries indicate that similar rules existed for Catholic institutions for clergy. I conclude that the Catholic Church has been aware of a high percentage of gay Catholic clergy for some time and had instituted policies in its seminaries to prevent homosexual activity among seminarians. This case study of the Saint Louis Catholic Seminary System is one example of this.

This study does pose a question; what works? A further question arising from this is; how do we define “works”? From an educational perspective, if a goal of Catholic seminary education is to prevent seminarians from having sex with each other or other males, then the strict rules of the 1950’s have the better track record; seminarians in the 1950’s were not likely to have sex with each other. On the other hand, the educational goals of seminaries do not end with ordination. Their goals are a formation that

should last a lifetime for their graduates. In this case, the strict rules of the 1950's failed; Fr. Allen did indeed have sex with other men after he graduated. Fr. Bob on the other hand, while not chaste in seminary, did choose a life of chastity after ordination. I am reluctant to draw a more general conclusion from these two comparisons, however.

The goals of the seminaries must also pay some attention to the candidates they attract. It would appear that the removal of strict rules after the 1960's has allowed more openness for gay men in seminaries and more freedom to have sex with other men. A secondary effect of this, it seems from other studies, is that the percentage of gay men in seminary has increased.

It may be easier to discuss what hasn't worked. Knowing that a large number of gay men were attracted to seminary, the Church enforced strict rules for centuries. This has not prevented Catholic clergy from engaging in sex with each other and other men. When these rules were removed, what remained was silence, which also did not work. Silence is not the answer.

There are also questions raised beyond the simple educational goals of American Catholic seminaries. Should there be a more public debate about gay priests in the same way that debates about married clergy and women's ordination have been in the Catholic dialogue? Can American Catholics accept that while their priests are celibate (specifically, unmarried), they may not be chaste. Can American Catholics accept an ever-increasing percentage of gay priests? Does a lack of chastity among gay priests present different issues than a lack of chastity among straight priests? With the shrinking number of priests in the United States, do these questions matter as much?

The Church and its seminaries *should* be able to discuss these issues; they have been dealing with them for centuries, although not with as many eyes of "externs."

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