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Vatican to Check U.S. Seminaries on Gay Presence

By [LAURIE GOODSTEIN](#)

Investigators appointed by the Vatican have been instructed to review each of the 229 Roman Catholic seminaries in the [United States](#) for "evidence of homosexuality" and for faculty members who dissent from church teaching, according to a document prepared to guide the process.

The Vatican document, given to The New York Times yesterday by a priest, surfaces as Catholics await a Vatican ruling on whether homosexuals should be barred from the priesthood.

In a possible indication of the ruling's contents, the American archbishop who is supervising the seminary review said last week that "anyone who has engaged in homosexual activity or has strong homosexual inclinations," should not be admitted to a seminary.

Edwin O'Brien, archbishop for the United States military, told The National Catholic Register that the restriction should apply even to those who have not been sexually active for a decade or more.

American seminaries are under Vatican review as a result of the sexual abuse scandal that swept the priesthood in 2002. Church officials in the United States and Rome agreed that they wanted to take a closer look at how seminary candidates were screened for admission, and whether they were being prepared for lives of chastity and celibacy.

The issue of gay seminarians and priests has been in the spotlight because a study commissioned by the church found last year that about 80 percent of the young people victimized by priests were boys.

Experts in human sexuality have cautioned that homosexuality and attraction to children are different, and that a disproportionate percentage of boys may have been abused because priests were more likely to have access to male targets - like altar boys or junior seminarians - than to girls.

But some church officials in the United States and in Rome, including some bishops and many conservatives, attributed the abuse to gay priests and called for an overhaul of the seminaries. Expectation for such a move rose this year with the election of Pope Benedict XVI, who has spoken of the need to "purify" the church.

It is unknown how many Catholic priests are gay. Estimates range widely, from 10 percent to 60 percent.

The catechism of the Catholic Church says people with "deep-seated" homosexual tendencies must live in chastity because "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered."

The Rev. Donald B. Cozzens, a former seminary rector who set off a controversy five years ago when he published a book asserting that "the priesthood is or is becoming a gay profession," said in an interview yesterday that many in the church had come to accept his observation.

But he said he was concerned that the seminary review would lead the church to ask celibate faculty members and seminarians to withdraw.

"That would be a major mistake from my perspective," said Father Cozzens, who teaches in the religious studies department at John Carroll University in Cleveland. "First, I think it's unfair if not unjust for committed gay seminarians and faculty who are leading chaste lives. And secondly, I don't know how you can really enforce that."

The Rev. Thomas J. Reese, a sociologist who resigned in May as editor of the Jesuit magazine *America* under pressure from the Vatican, said that with the shortage of priests, the church can hardly afford to dismiss gay seminarians.

"You could have somebody who's been in the seminary for five or six years and is planning to be ordained and the rector knows they're a homosexual," said Father Reese, now a visiting scholar at Santa Clara University in [California](#). "What are they going to do, throw them out?"

"It's much healthier if a seminarian can talk about their sexuality with a spiritual director, but this kind of policy is going to force it all underground."

Archbishop O'Brien, who is supervising the seminary review, did not respond to requests for interviews made to his office in Washington. In an interview with *The Associated Press*, he said the Vatican document was being reviewed by the pope and could be released this year.

The seminary review, called an apostolic visitation, will send teams appointed by the Vatican to the 229 seminaries, which have more than 4,500 students. The last such review began about 25 years ago and took six years to complete.

At each seminary, the visitors are to conduct confidential interviews with every faculty member and seminarian, as well as everyone who graduated in the last three years.

A 12-page document with instructions for the review is now being distributed to seminarians and faculty members. It asks whether the doctrine on the priesthood presented by the seminary is "solidly based on the church's Magisterium," or teaching, and whether teachers and seminarians "accept this teaching." Among the other questions are these:

¶"Is there a clear process for removing from the seminary faculty members who dissent from the authoritative teaching of the church or whose conduct does not provide good example to future priests?"

¶"Is the seminary free from the influences of New Age and eclectic spirituality?"

¶"Do the seminarians or faculty members have concerns about the moral life of those living in the institution? (This question must be answered)."

¶"Is there evidence of homosexuality in the seminary? (This question must be answered)."

The questionnaire also asks whether faculty members "watch out for signs of particular friendships."

The Rev. Thomas Baima, provost of the largest seminary in the United States, St. Mary of the Lake, in

Chicago, where the Vatican is sending nine interviewers, said such questions were no surprise.

"The reason we're having an apostolic visitation now is precisely in the aftermath of the clerical sexual-abuse scandal," Father Baima said. "Issues about screening our candidates, about formation for celibacy, about how we teach moral theology are going to get more attention than how we teach church history."

But one gay priest, who said he would not give his name because he has been told by his order not to speak out, said the seminary review would demoralize gay priests.

"It says to gay priests, many of whom are hard-working, faithful men who live their promises of celibacy with integrity, that you should never have been ordained," he said.

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