

Two views of homosexuality

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

As with abortion, whenever the subject of homosexuality is raised, two extreme views push their way to the surface.

The first view denounces homosexuality as a moral and psychological aberration, worthy of the severest condemnation.

According to this view, the only appropriate social response to homosexuals is a quarantine. Keep them away from children, away from the military, away from the priesthood.

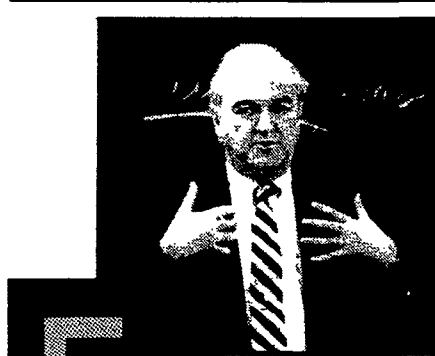
A second, opposite view places homosexuality on an exactly equal psychological and moral plane with heterosexuality.

Homosexual relationships and activities are as morally good — or bad — as heterosexual relationships and activities. The sole criterion for judging the morality of such behavior is its capacity for enriching or harming the self or the other.

This second view, like the first, has its condemnatory side. Its condemnations, however, are not limited to the out-and-out homophobe. Advocates of the second view also condemn anyone who raises any psychological or moral question whatever about homosexuality and homosexual behavior.

What can be said about the first view?

First, our most basic Christian principles and values affirm that gays and lesbians possess the same human dignity and deserve



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

the same fundamental respect as any other human being. Verbal and physical attacks upon gays and lesbians are sinful, plainly and simply.

Secondly, gays and lesbians are full and equal members of society. Discrimination against gays and lesbians should be illegal everywhere.

To the extent that civil ordinances can protect gays and lesbians against discrimination, especially in employment, such ordinances should be supported, enacted and enforced.

Thirdly, gays and lesbians are also equal members of the church. Within the Body of Christ discrimination against gays and lesbians is a violation of the Gospel.

Furthermore, if the church were to exclude from employment or from ministry any member whom it

deemed a sinner or one liable to sin, the church would have to close its doors. No one — pope, bishop, priest, religious, brother or lay person — is without sin or without a proneness to future sin.

Would this principle of non-exclusion apply even to the ordained priesthood? Why not?

Homosexuality in itself does not render a person incapable of effective ministry, any more than heterosexuality in itself fits a person for ministry.

Some readers undoubtedly know homosexual priests who are generous, caring, pastorally competent ministers. The church would be the poorer without them. The same readers also know heterosexual priests who are less than pastorally adept.

Does this mean that the second view is correct after all? Not quite.

A strong and fairly consistent Catholic teaching (recently reaffirmed by the Vatican) states that homosexual acts are, in themselves, "disordered" and sinful.

Advocates of the second view resent and reject that teaching and accuse the Catholic Church of institutional homophobia.

But even so-called progressive theologians continue to regard homosexual acts as essentially imperfect, and heterosexuality as psychologically and morally normative.

At the same time these theologians would not condemn every genital expression of homosexuality. They argue that, since no one chooses to be homosexual and since

few have the option of changing their sexual orientation, it is unrealistic to demand that homosexuals should live their entire lives as celibate and totally chaste monks and women religious.

This position is sometimes referred to as a theology of compromise. Its argument is that the expression of mutual love in a stable and monogamous homosexual relationship is a lesser evil than a life without intimacy and companionship.

Does this argument also apply to gays in the priesthood? Of course not, since gay priests are held to the same discipline as their heterosexual counterparts.

Furthermore, the church has the right and the duty to be concerned if 30 or 40 percent (possibly even more) of its candidates for the priesthood are gay, when estimates state that only 10 percent of the population is homosexual.

The church has to ask itself why candidates for the priesthood seem to be drawn disproportionately from the gay community, and to inquire about the effect of this trend on seminary life, on the vocational recruitment of heterosexual candidates, on priestly ministry in the parish, on rectory life, and on life in religious communities.

According to the second view, the very raising of such questions is tantamount to throwing in one's lot with the homophobes.

That explains why so few people will touch this subject. But the church can't afford not to.

Do you keep holy the Sabbath day?

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

The Third Commandment is a tough one for me: "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day."

When I was growing up in Rochester in the 1950s and '60s, my father ran Tellier's Food Shop on Ridge Road West across from the Eastman Kodak Company's old coal piles. His store was one of those "Mom and Pop" convenience grocery stores that did much of its business on Sundays and holidays so both he and his children worked many a Sabbath.

We never felt that we were sinning against the Third Commandment, because we believed that we were providing a genuine service to people who needed last-minute items that they could not get anywhere else. We also knew that we were providing a living for our family of 10, so maybe part of our position on our work on the Sabbath was rationalization on our part. (Several years ago, my parents did sell the grocery store and opened a

Logos Christian book store, which they did close on Sundays — even though it clearly cost them some business.)

Of course today every supermarket, department store and gas station is open every Sunday, and it has become one of the biggest sales days of the week. Recently, the bank with which my company does business announced that it, too, would remain open on Sundays. While I am convinced that Sunday banking is yet another small step in the destruction of the Sabbath, my company has left its account in that bank and has made no protest of the change in policy.

Certainly, some people must work on the Sabbath if the rest of us are to enjoy it: police officers, firefighters, ministers, entertainers and restaurant workers are some obvious examples. I'm sure there are probably even some "Tellier's Food Shop" kind of jobs that need to be done.

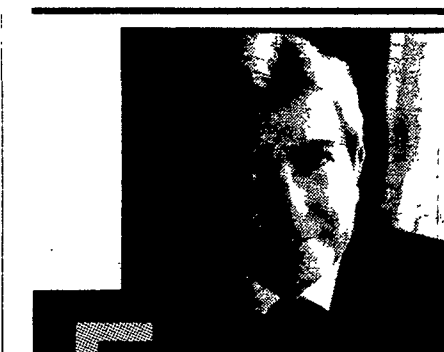
But what does it mean "to keep holy the Sabbath" beyond simply attending religious services? Should

we be shopping for anything other than true necessities? Or doing work that could be done on any other day of the week? Should employers require that employees work on the Sabbath if they do not choose to do so?

Shouldn't most of us be doing special family or spiritual or recreational or intellectual activities on Sunday? Or just relaxing and enjoying God's magnificent creation?

Father Thomas Paprocki of Chicago argues that to keep holy the Sabbath also "means that we not only do something special on the seventh day of the week, but that the rest of the week must be lived in a way that does not contradict or bring shame upon what we profess on the Sabbath. Thus, a person could go to church regularly every Sunday, but if the rest of the week is marked by behavior in stark contrast to what is professed on Sunday, then the Sabbath is a mockery and has by no means been kept holy."

In our workplaces, shouldn't we Christians be known as the people who keep holy the Sabbath — both



FAITH AND WORK

by how we spend our Sundays and by how we act Monday through Saturday?

One thing is certain: if American Christians were to take the Third Commandment more seriously, there would be a very noticeable change in how our society functions — week in and week out.

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