

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Are You Still a Catholic

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A columnist who just left the employ of the U.S. Catholic Bishops recently wrote in *The Pilot*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Boston, that homosexuality is the work of Satan. The Archdiocese has since apologized, saying the piece was based on faulty theology. The piece was actually based in faulty "love of the sinner" gibberish, better known as homophobia. The hatred of the bishops' man, and the Church politics he represents, is as evil as one can find. The institutional Catholic Church has lost the cultural war, and they know it. Their own people in the United States, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and throughout Central America are thumbing their noses at the Church's anti-gay rhetoric and marriage-inequality lobbying. So now, the Catholic hierarchy is focusing its attention on Africa, where it knows homophobia has squeezed the heart out of Uganda, Nigeria, and nearly all other countries in the "Dark Continent," save South Africa.

The question is often asked of me, "Are you still a Catholic?" It's usually not a disinterested query. Either the person asks strongly hoping that I am a Catholic, or strongly hoping that I'm not a Catholic. Their sexual orientation is rarely a factor, as gay, lesbian, and bisexual people can be either devoutly religious or devoutly irreligious. I am devoutly spiritual.

I respond, "No, I don't identify as Catholic except to help others understand that religion's influence in my life. My spiritual path today is influenced by Buddhism and Taoism." Though it's not my goal, the answer seems to appease everyone. The ones who are worried about my soul are happy that I'm still spiritual. The ones, who are worried about my sanity, are relieved to know I'm not still in the flock of Lord Voldemort and his Death Eaters. Despite the faith of the questioner, everyone seems to be in agreement that the Catholic hierarchy in Rome and in the United States today is an embarrassment. Jesus wouldn't wear Prada, nor preach hate.

While I no longer identify my beliefs or myself as Catholic, I admit to paying attention to what Catholics are doing. I was heartened by the news reports that most American Catholics support marriage equality. They do so despite the threats of the Pope and the conservative bishops he has cultivated. Our straight allies who have stayed in the Church vote contrary to Catholic teachings and still feel fully Catholic. The same is true for those lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people who identify as Catholic. I cheer them on, though I worry what staying in an abusive household will do to them.

I'm actually quite taken with gay, lesbian, and bisexual Catholics and former Catholics. The first group challenges my sense of reason, just as do lesbian, gay, and bisexual Republicans. It's my shortcoming, I suppose. It's really none of my business what someone else believes, and it only causes indigestion when you talk about it. That's why religion and politics aren't supposed to be discussed at the dinner table.

I do, though, gravitate in social settings toward former Catholics. I especially have a lot in common with those who went to Catholic schools in the 1950s and 1960s. I trust that they understand how I can both love parts of my past, and hate the character and the influence of the institutional Church, waning as it may be.

When former Catholics my age connect, we often talk about our early days of Catholic practice. Most of us were good boys and girls growing up. We sat up straight in our classroom seats, responded the rote answers to questions from the Baltimore Catechism, knelt silently as we waited to make our first confession, stood in line devoutly to receive our First Holy Communion, memorized answers for the bishop at our Confirmation, and treated the priest with great deference when he entered our home, the hospital room, or the funeral parlor.

But after a short while, we quit talking about the Church, except to say we have no use for it. The reminiscing creates a bitter taste in our mouths, as we silently recall the early horrors of hearing proclamations of "abomination," the anti-gay political campaigns of the hierarchy, and the question from our nearly-defeated parents, "Are you going to hell?"

Am I still a Catholic? No. I was at one time but I am no longer. I headed out the door when I realized the hierarchy of my Church was destroying my relationship with life and spirit. Their abuse of me felt like the work of the Satan.