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Gay clergy will live in torment until the Catholic church drops its hypocritical oath of celibacy

Monday 10 September 2018, by [MCKENNA Kevin](#) (Date first published: 24 March 2018).

Instead of tolerance, a grotesque group of inquisitors are alienating the faithful

The most human response to the [death of Scotland's shamed cardinal](#) came from the journalist whose articles forced his resignation. [Catherine Deveney](#) spoke with compassion and pity as [she expressed the hope](#) that Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien had found peace and forgiveness at the end. Deveney's [articles](#) for the *Observer* in 2013 revealed that O'Brien had, for many years, conducted a series of inappropriate relationships with young priests under his jurisdiction.

Like others, she had been aware of a whiff of scandal surrounding this widely admired man who, unlike many of his predecessors and contemporaries, seemed to possess something that endeared him to people. It was only when O'Brien began to front an ill-advised and nasty campaign against same-sex marriage that three priests who had been in sexual relationships with him felt they had to speak out and subsequently approached Deveney with their stories.

A few months before this, I was informed by the editor of the *Catholic Observer* that O'Brien had chided her for publishing an article of mine in which I had criticised his attitude to gay people and the use of the word "grotesque" in describing their sexuality. Yet I didn't derive any delight at his public outing, only a sense of deep sadness that a man with great qualities of leadership and compassion had been brought low by a lie that had probably stalked half his adult life. What misery and self-loathing must he have endured as he preached his fables about human sexuality. And yet what damage had he caused to the faith of thousands not by being revealed as a sinner but as a hypocrite.

Ironically, the term "grotesque" can be more accurately applied to a bitter and vile band of ultramontane Scottish Catholics who have been permitted to roam the country, spreading fear and hatred within the Catholic church. These haters barely deserve to be called human, such is their contempt for those who do not adhere to their distorted form of [Christianity](#). They have conducted a reign of terror among priests they suspect of being gay by threatening to "out" them lest they recant and repent. On other occasions, they have stalked successful young single women in the church and asked inappropriate questions about the status of their relationships.

In some corners of Catholic [Scotland](#) a special level of suspicion is still reserved for Catholic women who have reached their 30s "without a man". If Dante had existed today he would have reserved a special circle of pain and torment for this band of latterday inquisitors and social misfits.

Catholic leaders are in denial about sexuality and especially the "grotesque" form of it that they fear more than anything else. Latterly in his ministry, something caused O'Brien suddenly to begin

deploying more militant and unpleasant language in describing gay people.

This would all be hilarious if it weren't so tragic. The Catholic church is absolutely hoaching with gay priests and bishops. There are so many residing within the Vatican that they could probably form their very own order. I've been contacted by several in Scotland over the past few years, simply for highlighting the hypocritical oath that holds sway in the Catholic church and that has made their lives miserable.

It's not difficult to understand why so many gay Catholics are attracted to the priesthood. In many traditional Catholic households, homosexuality is simply not allowed to be mentioned. In such an environment, a Catholic adolescent male who is encountering issues around his sexual identity might be told to take some headache pills and go for a lie down until the feeling goes away. Indeed, that pretty much sums up the entirety of Catholic teaching on this matter. These young men, already hating a part of themselves, are then drawn to the priesthood that offers them a state where they can embrace celibacy and subjugate their sexuality. It is an ecclesiastical and bizarre set-up with disastrous consequences.

A stance of denial has, of course, also been apparent in a different realm - namely, the lamentable response of the hierarchy (and the reactionary praetorian guard of lay civil servants that surrounds it) to the decades of sex abuse by Catholic clergy in Scotland. The week before O'Brien's death, Father Paul Moore, an 82-year-old retired priest, was [convicted of sexually abusing three children and a student priest](#) over a period spanning more than 20 years. Without going into the details, the abuse was as bad as it gets. His bishop knew about this many years before, yet chose to park the issue by moving him on. He was only doing what other bishops are told to do.

The principal victim who gave eight days of evidence has fought for many years to bring his violator to justice. During this time, he has been treated with a level of contempt and disdain by his own church which was astonishing to behold and utterly callous. There are thousands like him, stretching back decades, and yet the church now boasts of having the right safeguards in place to prevent future abuse. I'd be interested in examining these safeguards and asking why they were constructed without talking to any of the groups of people who survived widespread clerical sexual abuse.

[Pope Francis will visit Ireland](#) in August, where he will preach to the converted. It is a home game for the pontiff where he will encounter few protests. I'd encourage him to visit Scotland and find out for himself why tens of thousands of the faithful have abandoned the church. He might also wish to conduct a review of a hierarchy that, with a few exceptions, is no longer fit for purpose.

- Kevin McKenna is an Observer columnist
- This article was amended on 28 March 2018 to make clearer that a sentence reading, "Some of this has been evident in the decades of sex abuse by Catholic clergy" was referring to a stance of denial by church officials.

Kevin McKenna

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