

Op-ed: Vatican Bans Gays, But E.T. Is OK?

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According to the Church, gays are unnatural, but aliens are not.

Two nights ago my husband and I heard of the Vatican's attempt to seek out extraterrestrials. This made me laugh at first, but then I became a bit angry – with all of the issues plaguing society, this is of utmost concern for the Roman Catholic Church? The Pontifical Academy convened the meeting to seek out an answer to the age old question as to whether or not we are alone in this universe. According to the Catholic News Service 30 high-level scientists from across the world met at the Vatican Observatory Nov. 6-10 to consider the possibility of alien life.

Then just yesterday I learned the State of the Vatican City, the world's smallest country incorporating 110 acres in the middle of Rome (and the global headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church) has banned gays and lesbians from visiting. And just how are the Papal Swiss Guards who keep watch over the Vatican to know you are gay? Is Hitler to rise up and tattoo a pink triangle on every LGBT individual, the symbol epitomizing homosexuality as created by the Third Reich during World War II?

Millions of tourists visit the Vatican annually, taking in its sprawling gardens, vast museums, glorious architecture, and of course religious services. It seems as if the Vatican must have lost sight of the fact that Michelangelo and Bernini, two of history's most prominent artists, (who are reputed to have been gay) helped make the Vatican what it is today. Michelangelo painted the famous ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in 1508, including the centermost portion of the ceiling with its iconic image of the hand of God giving life to Adam; and he designed the dome of St. Peter's Basilica, which currently stands as the world's tallest dome. Bernini designed the famed colonnade-framed St. Peter's Square.

When asked about the Vatican policy on gay and lesbian tourists, Bishop Janusz Kaleta of Holy See, the Apostolic Administrator of Atyrau, a city in Kazakhstan, said that "the mere presence of homosexuals constitutes a desecration of the holy site. I consider if someone is homosexual, it is a provocation and an abuse of this place... It is offensive to our buildings and our religion."

I must confess that I attended a Catholic middle school, then Baylor University, the world's largest Baptist university, yet I'm a Methodist. I've studied the teachings of Christ and the Bible for decades, and though a devout Christian, I've become increasingly incensed with what many call the fundamentalists for their intolerant and bigoted views.

Many fundamentalist Christians choose a particular passage from Leviticus 18:22 to denounce homosexuality – the passage states, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (King James Version).

While many scholars believe this scripture clearly condemns homosexuality, others believe that the terms used were meant to describe the homosexual behavior present at Pagan temples.

No matter the true meaning, it's clear that the Bible is meant to be a wonderful teaching tool, a study of the life of Jesus Christ, and how we are to lead our lives – not taken literally.

For if it was so, my lovely sister, who owns a western wear boutique in Texas, is to be stoned to death by the community she lives in for selling "garments made of two different kinds of thread" (cotton/polyester blend), also prohibited in Leviticus, 19:19.

And my in-laws shall be stoned to death for planting multiple crops in the same field of their Midwest farm. This act is prohibited in Leviticus 19:19.

But maybe my father-in-law is in luck, as he is the only male I know who doesn't shave his beard (as is expressly forbidden by Leviticus 19:27).

One can pull hundreds of passages from the Bible, that when taken in a literal context seem just as absurd. But for whatever reason, fundamentalists choose to forget about the literal translation of the others, and focus on the one passage to denounce homosexuals.

Either all of society has become so corrupt since the days of Christ, or as I believe is the case, society has evolved.

Regardless of one's religious beliefs, surely by now sane individuals and any church, temple or mosque can understand the value of teaching tolerance. The struggle we face with LGBT rights is not about a single class in society, but society altogether – the unity of America, the unity of humanity. Diversity and individuality are qualities that enrich this country.

Surely we can agree that any individual, group, or community that alienates individuals because of a differing perspective, does not reflect tolerant values as defined by God or by this country's founding fathers.

Differing sides may not always agree, but we must not focus on pious trivialities as this only corrupts our society. Only through social dialogue and shared sacrifices will humanity progress, and only then can we overcome any obstacle.

So E.T., I along with the Vatican welcome you with open arms, regardless of your background! And Pope Benedict XVI, since gays and lesbians are banned from your sacred home, I hope for your sake E.T. is straight.

<http://sdgln.com/news/2009/11/13/op-ed-vatican-bans-gays-et-ok>