

Fr. Robert Sirico on gay marriages he once performed

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 18, 2010 Distinctly Catholic



While the Catholic hierarchy, from Maine to Minnesota to

California, seeks to prevent same-sex marriages from gaining legal recognition, one conservative Catholic commentator, Fr. Robert Sirico, has special expertise on the subject, although in recent years he has said nothing about that expertise. In Washington state and Colorado in the 1970s, Sirico performed some of the first same-sex marriage ceremonies in history.

Sirico is most known as a regular commentator on EWTN's "The World Over" with Raymond Arroyo. There, Sirico frequently excoriates those whose understanding of their faith differs from his own. Sirico also is the head of the Michigan-based Acton Institute, an organization that is dedicated to laissez-faire economics. His commitment to libertarian ideas in economic matters may lack any precedent in Catholic social teaching, but they echo a libertarian commitment from earlier in his career.

In a 1972 interview with the *Seattle Times*, while he was serving as pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), reprinted below, Sirico announced his intention to perform same-sex marriages. The MCC is a non-denominational church organized by and for gays and lesbians. Sirico had earlier been ordained as a Pentecostal minister, according to the newspaper, and in 1971 he explained his faith-healing ministry to the *Seattle Times*.

In 1975, Sirico performed what was reported to be the first "gay marriage" ceremony in the history of Colorado, held at the First Unitarian Church in Denver on April 21, according to an article in the *Denver Post*, reprinted below. Eventually, Sirico returned to the Catholic Church and was ordained for the Paulists, then affiliated with the Diocese of Lansing, Michigan, and finally transferred to the Diocese of Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he is currently serving.

Last week, I called Fr. Sirico and asked for an interview. He requested that I submit my questions to him by e-mail, which I did. We agreed that I would re-print his replies without editing, which I do here.

My questions were:

?1) Now that same sex marriage has become controversial again, how do you reflect on your own participation in such ceremonies in the 1970s in Colorado and Washington state? Do you have special insights on the subject

that might be helpful to the Church as it navigates this complicated issue?

2) Were you ordained for the MCC? One news account said that you had been ordained for a Pentecostal church, but it did not indicate whether you had also been ordained for the MCC?

3) When you re-joined the Catholic Church, and entered seminary, did you receive a dispensation to be ordained in the Catholic Church? It is my understanding that ordination in a non-Catholic Church is an impediment to orders.

4) I watch you on EWTN and you seem quite willing to render criticisms of people like Sr. Carol Keehan for deviating from your sense of what a Catholic should do and believe. You said that the inclusion of female altar servers in the masses with Pope Benedict XVI in the UK evidenced "an agenda." Do you think your own circuitous route to the priesthood might suggest more sympathy with those who disagree with your understanding of orthodoxy??

Fr. Sirico replied:



?I formally left the Roman Catholic Church when I was 13

years old, in the middle of the 1960s. About decade later, when I was still outside the Church, I underwent a process of conversion, initially political, which then led to a religious conversion. I have spoken about this numerous times in various settings. The concomitant development of my thoughts and spiritual life led to the abandonment of the left-wing ideas I held in that period and to my formal return to the Church. From that time some 35 years ago to the present I have faithfully believed in and practiced that faith.

An agreement with a professional journalist to whom I have been giving a series of interviews about the details of this journey prevents me from cooperating in any kind of profile of my life with you. I can, however, respond to a number of your questions for the article you are writing which do not compromise this agreement. I trust you understand my obligation to honor my previous commitment.

1. When I entered religious formation and at every stage of both my vocational and professional journey, I have always been transparent, giving the relevant details of my background to my superiors and close colleagues. I placed my confidence in my superiors for any dispensations or other requirements of Canon Law at each step of the way.

2. I believe that my activities in the 1970s, though representing a very different political and theological stance to the ones I hold today, nonetheless help me to understand the complex issues that go into the debate ?gay marriage.? These insights have also been helpful in my pastoral work with persons who have same sex attractions and have given me a greater sensitivity into the struggle to live a chaste life.

I worked on the editorial committee of the Manhattan Declaration and its section on marriage reasonably expresses my view of the matter today and as well as outlining what I see as a needed and balanced concern that emerges from my own past my experience of having advocated positions opposed to those of

the Church when I was outside her fold:

In particular I see the current ?impulse to redefine marriage in order to recognize same-sex and multiple partner relationships [a]s a symptom, rather than the cause, of the erosion of the marriage culture.? In this regard I believe the ?gay marriage? question arises today because as a culture we no longer fully understand what marriage itself is in its biblical and theological meaning. To abandon the Church?s view of marriage will erode the marriage culture itself, with wide and deleterious repercussions. It would, as the Manhattan Declaration states, ?lock into place the false and destructive belief that marriage is all about romance and other adult satisfactions, and not, in any intrinsic way, about procreation and the unique character and value of acts and relationships whose meaning is shaped by their aptness for the generation, promotion and protection of life.?

At the same time, we must confront the reality that there are those who are, to a greater or lesser degree, inclined towards homosexual relationships. The same Church that authoritatively and truthfully teaches that such activity is immoral also authoritatively demands charity on the part of the faithful towards those so disposed. Persons who experience same-sex attractions deserve respect as human beings who possess an inherent, profound, and equal dignity as do all human beings. I have a personal awareness of the grace necessary to live a life worthy of one?s own dignity, a dignity so generously restored by Baptism and reinforced by the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

As I have pondered these matters, I have come to one simple conclusion, and that is that I love the truth more than my freedom; indeed, that I love the truth more than myself, because it is only in the embrace of that Truth, Who is also the Way and the Life, that my own life will ever have any meaning or peace. I fully understand that for some people it is a difficult thing to say ?yes? to something that appears and even deeply feels, like a denial of one?s own self. Yet, that is precisely what Jesus asks of us. To say yes to the Cross is to say yes to the Risen One. As one prelate of the Second Vatican Council (Cardinal Journet) said, under different but for him no less arduous circumstances, ?When one tears something dear away from us, and when this is demanded of us in the name of obedience ? for a future which is yet hidden from us ? one must say yes, one must be content in saying yes, one must be content even to feel suffering?But it is with happiness one suffers, for he has something to give to God.?

This entire discussion will be elevated to a higher level when we can all engage the question by first understanding that our disagreements, profound as they sometimes are, can never give us license to vilify each other. At the same time, our compassion can neither give us license to lower the standard our morality to that of our inclinations or lifestyles.?

Below, we reprint the original articles from the Seattle Times and the Denver Post. In a sense they speak for themselves but, as a blogger, I do not think anything speaks for itself and I shall be posting a commentary shortly.

- The 1975 *Denver Post* article: [2 Men Wed In Denver Church Rite](#) [1]
- The 1972 *Seattle Times* article: [Pastor to perform homosexual marriages](#) [2]

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