

Britain's top Catholic clergyman Cardinal Keith O'Brien accused of 'inappropriate behaviour' by four priests

- **Cardinal O'Brien, 74, faces claims of inappropriate attention by four priests**
- **One priest alleges 'unwanted behaviour' after late-night drinking**
- **Another priest said he was 18 when 'inappropriately approached**
- **O'Brien now faces demands for his immediate resignation**

By Olivia Williams

Complaint to the Vatican: Cardinal Keith O'Brien is facing claims dating back over 30 years

Britain's most senior Catholic clergyman, Cardinal Keith O'Brien, has been reported to the Vatican for inappropriate sexual behaviour, it emerged last night.

Three priests and one former priest have sent statements to the papal nuncio, Antonio Mennini, about sexual impropriety dating back to 1980.

As head of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, next week O'Brien will be part of the conclave choosing the next Pope, but now he faces demands for his immediate resignation.

As reported by The Observer, one of the priests alleges that he has needed counselling after an inappropriate relationship with O'Brien.

A second complainant said that he was 18-years-old when O'Brien made an inappropriate approach after night prayers.

A third said he was invited to 'get to know' O'Brien at the archbishop's residence only to face 'unwanted behaviour' from O'Brien after late-night drinking.

The four are all from the diocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

A spokesman for the cardinal said that he contests the allegations. The four are worried that their complaints may not be fully addressed fear that, if O'Brien casts his vote in the election of a new pope.

One said: 'The church is beautiful, but it has a dark side and that has to do with accountability. If the system is to be improved, maybe it needs to be dismantled a bit.'

Another, an ex-priest who is now married, was ordained after the alleged incident, but said in his statement that he resigned when O'Brien was promoted to bishop.

'It was assumed I left the priesthood to get married,' he said. 'I did not. I left to preserve my integrity.'

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Performing mass in Edinburgh: Cardinal Keith O'Brien in his role as Britain's most senior Catholic

'A GROTESQUE SUBVERSION OF A HUMAN RIGHT'

In March 2012 O'Brien wrote of his concerns over same-sex marriage in Scotland in The Daily Telegraph.

He said the proposal represents a 'grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right'. 'Same-sex marriage would eliminate entirely in law the basic idea of a mother and a father for every child,' he added.

'It would create a society which deliberately chooses to deprive a child of either a mother or a father.' He also opposed the introduction of civil partnerships, saying he believes that 'such relationships are harmful to the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of those involved'.

After he was awarded the 'Bigot of the Year' award, Stonewall Scotland director Colin Macfarlane said: 'In the past year the cardinal has likened the campaign for same-sex marriage to slavery, he has called it grotesque.'

Cardinal O'Brien, originally from Northern Ireland, has been Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh since 1985.

In November, he was named 'bigot of the year' by Stonewall, a gay rights charity, for his comments about same-sex marriage.

In August Cardinal O'Brien described it as a 'grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right'. Last week he said the Church should overturn centuries of tradition and allow priests to marry as many clerics struggle with celibacy and a wife and family could offer comfort and support.

He said: 'I would be very happy if others had the opportunity of considering whether or not they could or should get married.'

'I realise that many priests have found it very difficult to cope with celibacy... and felt the need of a companion, of a woman, to whom they could get married and raise a family.'

The cardinal also appeared to support the Catholic taboo of not allowing women priests, saying that the teachings of Jesus do not mention the issue.

Abuse claims have dogged the papacy of Benedict XVI, who is to step down at the end of February.

VIDEO Cardinal Keith O'Brien talks about choosing new pope

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