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December 23, 2010: The Repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell

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Title: The Repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell

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12/23/2010—Of course the signing into law of the repeal of DADT was a great accomplishment. But any joy over the change is diminished by two realities. First, why in the world was this change so difficult to bring about? For all the talk of bipartisanship, and there was Republican support, the repeal required an overwhelming Democratic majority in order to block a Senate filibuster. The repeal simply would not have happened in the next session, with its larger Republican representation. So, unlike race and religion, equality in this arena is still a political issue. It is still permissible in America to deny someone the right to serve, in fact die, for his or her country because of the gender of that person's sexual partners. That seems unbelievable. But that is not the worst part. The source of this bigotry is largely, almost exclusively, religious. And people wonder why organized religion is dying. I don't think young people care that much what attitude our religions take in terms of their own members. So, if many Christians consider homosexuality a sin, that is certainly their business. However, the church is clearly imposing its own sexual ethics when it comes to the military. This is not even as justified as religious opposition to gay marriage. At least when it comes to marriage, our religions have always had a civil role to play. There is no such justification when it comes to military service. It was not necessary for religious conservatives to claim that the Bible opposes gays in the military. There never was any theological justification for such a position—the military is engaged in killing after all, so its fundamental sinfulness in terms of the Gospel dwarfs any concern about sex. But there also was not any institutional justification. These religious groups could just have stayed out of it. The fact that Christian conservative found it necessary to go to extreme lengths to oppose the repeal of DADT marks the Church in the eyes of many as a bigoted institution. It is just one more nail in the coffin of proclamation of the Gospel.