

November 2006

In Vino Veritas

Jerry Pokorsky

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

Recommended Citation

Pokorsky, Jerry (2006) "In Vino Veritas," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 73 : No. 4 , Article 15.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol73/iss4/15>

In Vino Veritas

by

Father Jerry Pokorsky

The author is Director of Finance in the Lincoln Diocese.

In vino veritas. In wine, truth. In the early 1980s, after I announced to an elderly priest friend my plan to enter the seminary, he took me to a restaurant for dinner. During the meal, he noticed a retired priest and beckoned him to our table to introduce him to me. The retired priest never looked at me. He was angry and inebriated enough to speak his mind. Directing his attention to the priest alone, he asked:

Do you remember when we were seminary professors in the 1960s and the advice we gave the [orthodox] seminarians? We told them to keep their heads down and get ordained. But do you think they were any damn different after ordination? No! We trained them that way.

He meant that good priests kept their heads down. They didn't speak out when they should have, and they still don't.

This incident came to mind recently after I received a copy of a questionnaire administered to a class of seminarians during a "sexuality workshop" at a major American seminary in 1978. Here is a sample of the more than 80 questions:

- Who last touched you?
- Where did he or she touch you?
- What is your favorite feeling?
- Who is the person you are most likely to kiss next?
- Is there anyone else you would rather kiss?
- What part of your body first senses a drop in the temperature?
- After feeling chilled what part of your body wants to get warmed up first?
- What part(s) of your body do you almost entirely ignore?
- What is your favorite part of your body?

When was the last time you can remember being conscious of your ankles?

When, where, and with whom did you have a really good, loving kiss?

Write a detailed account of your first sexual experience

It is not difficult to imagine what would have happened to any seminarian objecting to the questionnaire. All of the clichés of the pop-theology era would be unleashed. He would almost certainly be identified as “uptight” or “rigid and conservative.” It would be said he likely has a good deal of unhealthy sexual “hang-ups” himself. Seminary formation personnel would fear that he would not be a “team player” as a priest. And he would not be long for the seminary.

Of course, it is equally easy to envision the naïve trust of all the immature candidates entering the workshop and “spilling their guts” to the other seminarians and facilitators, setting themselves up for future “grooming” by gays – or maybe blackmail. But it is a near-certainty that the orthodox seminarians “kept their heads down” and played along, in order to ensure that they would be ordained. Now, years later, have their attitudes and behavior changed *since* they were ordained? The question is important because, as I will argue, it leads to an explanation of the widespread active and passive complicity in the clerical sexual abuse cover-up scandal.

A Suspect Class

By now we all know the story. It began (or so we have often been told) in 2002, with the Boston Globe reporting how Cardinal Bernard Law and his auxiliary bishops conspired to shuffle Father Geoghan and others around upon learning of their predatory sexual behavior. Of course, it did not *really* begin in 2002. The child abuse “crisis” has been more like a long and painful march, and has been in the news, off and on, since the 1980s. It took the eruptions of 2002 to blow the lid off the true extent of the problem: the crimes committed, the people hurt and the millions of dollars – now over one billion – spent by the Church in America in lawsuits and payoffs.

There are those who call for full disclosure, and most of the bishops have cooperated. At times, they have even listed on the internet the names of any priests accused of sexual abuse (a shocking violation of the Eighth Commandment, I would say). The priesthood has been made a suspect class, in need of criminal background checks and fingerprinting. As Martin Luther did in the 16th century, some activists today also use the undoubted presence of scandal as an opportunity to attack the Church herself: to argue that we must allow married priests, ordain women, promote gay rights, and

so forth. The most predictable response has been from the bureaucracy of American bishops, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). If Martin Luther taught "salvation by faith alone," it might be said that the bishops' approach is "salvation by policies, procedures, and protocols alone."

From their Dallas 2002 meeting, the bishops emerged with a "one strike and you're out" policy. Of course the policy applied to ordinary priests, not bishops. Bishops who lied would be exempt from censure. They learned from the example of President Clinton: hold on until the people and media lose interest. Bishop Wilton Gregory of Bellville, then president of the USCCB, suggested that the bishops were on a "learning curve" and needed to make sure priests knew their "boundaries" when dealing with young people. The "National Review Board" was established. Prominent laymen were appointed, including, among others, pro-abortion politician Leon Panetta as well as Bob Bennett, President Bill Clinton's attorney during the Monica Lewinsky affair. Judging by the pronouncements that followed, the National Review Board firmly opposed child abuse – at least certainly for those three out of four babies that survive the knives of abortionists.

During a February 2004 press conference, Judge Anne Burke, as interim Chair, spoke of the National Review Board's role in overseeing "audits" of the dioceses, ensuring that there were policies, procedures, and protocols in place to prevent the abuse of children. She said that the Board "was asked to oversee the Office for Child and Youth Protection's audit of every archdiocese, diocese, and eparchy in the United States to guarantee that in each diocese procedures for ensuring the protection of children and young people."

Nearly all of the bishops complied. Interestingly enough, a review of the audit results, posted on the web site of the USCCB, reveals that the dioceses which had seen the most egregious public scandals usually had the best scores for compliance with the new policies. In the rush to receive gold stars from the auditors, many bishops introduced new bureaucratic procedures that filtered down into parishes: diocesan offices were established; sex education ("Good Touch, Bad Touch," "Talking about Touching") curricula disguised as "child safety" programs were devised; priests, employees, and volunteers were fingerprinted; criminal background checks were demanded, thereby making not only priests but all Church employees a suspect class.

(Incidentally, when bishops force their priests to be fingerprinted and subject them to criminal background checks, they may have caused this unintended effect to arise over time: Priests are being trained by the bishops themselves to take recourse to secular authorities to solve ecclesial disputes. Canon Law may take a back seat to secular law when bishops and

priests disagree. The specter looms of priests and their bishops settling disputes in a secular courtroom.)

Policies and Procedures

In the aftermath of Dallas 2002, studies revealed that 78 percent of the victims of clerical molesters were males between the ages of 11 and 17. The exploitation may fit a statutory definition of “child abuse,” but the psychological and moral implications of the data are clear. The problem was not in the main “pedophilia” – that is, the abuse of prepubescent children; the major problem is clearly gay exploitation of underage adolescent males. But the *reasons* for such widespread exploitation need identification. In my view, denial and the cult of clerical secrecy prevent any serious effort to confront the problem.

After a meeting with Vatican officials in April 2002, Bishop Gregory expressed concern over the disproportionate number of men with a homosexual inclination in seminaries and the priesthood. It would seem that this was not an objection to the *fact* of homosexuality among priests, but merely to the *proportion* of gay to straight men among the seminarians. Yet even this relatively weak acknowledgement of the fundamental nature of the problem was met as a violation of a taboo. Father Stephen Rossetti, a psychologist and sex abuse consultant to the USCCB said, “What I’m afraid of is we’re going into this witch hunt for gays.” His fears were unfounded. The mainstream media could not be counted on to oppose the powerful gay lobby. Nor, evidently, could the USCCB.

So the Church’s bureaucracy moves in its distinctly worst direction: the demand for slavish obedience to bureaucratic pseudo-remedies, undertaken in an attempt to satisfy the media without alienating the gay clerical base within the Church. Just as Judge Anne Burke promised, policies, procedures, and protocols were handed down from on high and would henceforth presume to “guarantee” the safety of children. Early conflicts between the National Review Board and the bishops addressed policies governing disclosure and compliance with audits rather than the legacy of generations of dissent from the Church’s teaching on human sexuality. Apparently, carefully crafted policies were considered far more effective than God’s grace.

USCCB documents on the subject bore little evidence of a return to the authentic teachings of the Catholic faith. The USCCB’s revised “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” contains this revealing passage:

While the priestly commitment to the virtue of chastity and the gift of celibacy is well known, there will be clear and well-

publicized diocesan/eparchial standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for clergy and for any other church personnel in positions of trust who have regular contact with children and young people.

The casual dismissal of the “priestly commitment to the virtue of chastity and the gift of celibacy” as “well known” is astonishing. The virtue of chastity and the discipline of celibacy are among the most misunderstood, deliberately misinterpreted, maligned, and disobeyed teachings of the Church in our time. As if to confirm the misunderstanding, the author(s) of the Charter continue by promising “clear and well-publicized diocesan/eparchial standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries....” It does not warrant discussion that man’s wounded nature can be healed by God’s grace in an encounter with Christ in the sacraments, with consequent growth of sexual self-control and chastity. Man’s wounded human nature can only be remedied in a serious way by USCCB policies, procedures and protocols dictating certain “boundaries.” This statement reveals at best a misunderstanding of the author(s) of the Charter in matters of human sexuality. At worst – and I truly suspect this to be the case – the authors are speaking in code.

Code Words

In a popular sense and in a shorthand way, we might speak of certain “boundaries” for our behavior. But such language is unworthy of an ecclesial document promoting Christian virtue. But that criticism is irrelevant, of course, if the Charter is not truly promoting Christian virtue, but carefully avoiding the language of virtue in favor of the language of political correctness – or worse, even deferring to the gay agenda.

During my seminary training in a major Midwestern seminary, it did not take long for me to crack the celibacy code. To the gay seminarian (by “gay” I do not mean a man with a homosexual orientation; I mean a man who has a homosexual orientation, does not see it as a disorder, and acts accordingly), “celibacy” simply means that he was not to be married. Homosexual activity was acceptable as long as it was discreet. In fact, homosexual activity for a so-called celibate was preferable to heterosexual activity. Early in my priesthood, I heard a priest – a former seminary professor – privately admit that “it’s no secret” that seminary authorities were more indulgent toward the sexually active gay seminarian than the sexually active heterosexual seminarian. (It was one of those *in vino veritas* moments, I’m afraid.)

In the contemporary view of human sexuality, homosexual acts are the safest form of sexuality because there is no risk of conceiving babies.

Unwanted babies can get in the way of clerical careers; homosexual acts afford the most effective form of contraception. Here the peculiar understanding of celibacy held by many seminarians drew support from a more general failure to advance Church teachings. Since most Catholics now accept contraceptive sex, why would they object to their priests having a little fun while remaining "celibate?" A clerical culture deformed in its understanding of human sexuality was clear to me in the seminary; and it should not be surprising that I now see the same distortion – or the use of code words – in full flower in an official document of the USCCB.

To illustrate the unhealthy trend within the Church, I recall a situation (long ago and in a foreign diocese) in which a priest, in a moment of weakness, gave in to sexual temptations and fathered a child. Reporting his sin to his bishop, he found himself on the way to a clerical sex therapy center. The center was a nightmare. Most of the priests under treatment were gay; a few were alcoholic or addicted to drugs; only a fraction of them were being treated for heterosexual impropriety. The erring priest reported that almost all of the therapists appeared to be gay, and they advised the gay priests, when they returned to ministry, to "be discreet" and "respect boundaries." The priest reported that an important part of their therapy was to "get in touch with their gay sides," adding that the heterosexuals were clearly held in disdain by the therapists. Indeed, the treatment of heterosexuals often was extended for months, while the gay priests enjoyed early release for a happy return to their parishes. (I could go into greater detail as to their therapeutic practices, but my sense of propriety prevents it.)

Hence, as I read them, words and phrases such as "be discreet" and "boundaries" are code words, redolent of the gay subculture. So it is truly disturbing to see this vocabulary in an official document of the USCCB. The implication is clear: The issue of homosexuality in the priesthood is sidestepped, effectively denied by the use of Orwellian language. The "celibacy" question is resolved by policies of "boundaries." Sexual relations with young people under the age of 18 are "out of bounds." Left unstated is the suggestion that sexual relations with individuals *over* the age of 18 are merely a matter of discretion.

Trained to be Silent

Why have good priests not objected more vigorously to the policies and programs put forward by the "experts" and the USCCB? Why has there been such a silence from the clerical ranks, amid such an obvious crisis in chastity and celibacy? I suggest that the answer lies in the point made above: we as priests have been trained to remain silent.

There are those who have a vested interest in silence. There are those with dark secrets that extend to those sexuality workshops in the 1970s, 1980s, and maybe 1990s. And there are those orthodox seminarians who were told to “keep their heads down” and “hurry up and get ordained.” But we are no different after ordination. The habit of “minding one’s own business” (a fairly good policy in most matters), combines with fear and denial to become part of who we are. I recently read an article by a seminarian suggesting that effeminate seminarians should not be advanced to the priesthood. Prudently, he did not release the paper until he was safely ordained. Well, he made it. Now we will see if he pays for publishing his views.

Certain other cultural currents need to be acknowledged. I am persuaded that one of the important factors never addressed in the famous Boston Globe probe into Cardinal Law’s dereliction of duty is the complicity of the police and the judicial system. I have little doubt that the police and the judges were at least to some degree aware of these problems, and contributed to the cover-ups. The same cover-up mentality is alive and well in all of our secular institutions. The public school system, by various accounts, has been thoroughly compromised by the same behavior that the Church has uncovered. The difference is that the American public schools are locally administered, not centralized like the Catholic Church. But the standby argument of certain apologists – that the abuse of children in the Church is at the same rate as in the public at large – is no more consoling than the statistic that the abortion rate among Catholics is the same as in society at large. All this reveals is the collapse of the Catholic culture in this country, beginning with the collapse of sacred institutions.

But aren’t these sins of the past – ancient history? Not exactly. The rector of the seminary that conducted the corrupt 1978 sexuality workshop that I described at the outset is a bishop today. The rector of a seminary I attended in the mid-1980s – who allowed all kinds of deviations from Church teaching because, he said, “Rome is over there” – remains a prominent priest in his diocese. For years he was an official on an inter-seminary academic accreditation team.

“...To Do Penance...”

It is not likely that there will be radical changes in the USCCB. In a recent posting on a Catholic internet site, an anonymous author listed a dozen bishops who have been publicly implicated in homosexual activity. None of them was censured by his brother bishops; all were “outed” by the media. Most are now off the job, but several are still active and “bishops in good standing.” To the best of my knowledge, not one of these bishops heard a word of dismay from Church officials upon his resignation. On the

contrary, in many cases the disgraced bishops were portrayed by their colleagues as unfortunate victims of a media frenzy.

It seems to me that this shamelessness is rooted in the loss of a sense of the horror of sin. The sexual exploitation of children is not only a civil crime – it is more seriously a crime against God. It doesn't matter whether the legal boundary of age-of-consent has been honored. The nature of the sin remains the same and the interest of a wise bishop remains the same. Most practicing Catholics – presumably including priests and bishops – recite the traditional "Act of Contrition" frequently enough. If there is a single prayer that should guide bishops and priests when caught in wrongdoing, it should be this prayer. In the most traditional form, there is the promise to "do penance." With all due respect for the bishops, I have never seen this essential element of the spiritual life promoted in any serious way by the USCCB. And in this case penance must include, in my view, resignation in disgrace as part of the necessary reparation for certain sins.

Resignation and penance are good for the soul. (In preparing these reflections, I have become more aware that I personally have much work to do in cultivating a penitential spirit!) Years ago, it was revealed that an archbishop was alcoholic and had engaged in a heterosexual affair. He resigned his office and spent the rest of his life doing penance. When he died, news of his penitential life after resignation surfaced. I hope the reports are true, and if they are, I would hope that the USCCB takes note and takes that prelate as a model. In contrast, a few years back, a California bishop resigned in disgrace due to financial irregularities linked to an alleged extravagant gay lifestyle. In recent news reports, he is said to be living in a comfortable monastery and enjoying the local nightlife. Archbishop Rembert Weakland's case shows the same shamelessness. In May 2002, at a Milwaukee prayer service he apologized for the "inappropriate nature" of his "relationship" with a Marquette graduate student with whom he had sex and then paid off with \$450,000 of the faithful's money. He received a standing ovation. Other examples abound. But these few cases should provide sufficient illustration that many of our bishops do not really believe in the need for penance and reparation. (This may explain in part why novenas in reparation for sins against the Sacred Heart of Jesus have long disappeared in Catholic devotional life, under the watch of these same clergymen.)

A Crisis of Truth

To date, the solutions that have been proposed to remedy the scandal in the American Church have been deficient precisely because of their neglect of Catholic truth. While the USCCB promotes salvation by policies and procedures, others insist that Church teaching on human sexuality

should be changed. Presumably their answer is a return to the 1978 (and countless other) human-sexuality workshops that have compromised so many priests of recent generations. The Church faces an Eighth Commandment crisis as much as a Sixth Commandment crisis. It is not only a crisis of the abuse of human sexuality; it is a crisis of Catholic truth.

Paradoxically, the USCCB's neglect of Catholic teaching does offer us hope. Just as the corrupt medieval popes were too busy with their corruption to undermine the teachings of the faith, the USCCB – busy issuing statements on boundaries and policies and audits to satisfy the media frenzy – has no time or energy left to distort the faith. There is not even the pretense by the USCCB of solving the crisis by using truly Catholic means: confession, penance, the Eucharist, and God's grace. Instead of recoiling at the very mention of these sins and calling down God's mercy to exorcise them, the bishops' conference treats them like curiosities, specimens for the busywork of a laboratory, workshop, committee, board, policy paper, and ultimately for the clinic to prepare for recycling. Meanwhile the authentic teachings of the faith remain intact, silently indicting bishops and priests.

So where do we go from here? It is essential for priests and for the faithful at large to recognize and admit that we are dealing primarily with a gay problem, not a pedophilia problem. We are dealing with a failure in truth and courage, not a breakdown of policy and procedure. The failure in courage to discipline pro-abortion "Catholic" politicians coincides with the failure to deal quickly and justly with clerical perpetrators. The failure in justice and reparation has led to an incapacity for Christian mercy. We also need to recognize the homosexual network in the priesthood and episcopacy, with all the possibilities for blackmail that it may imply. Plans to interdict the network, while fraught with danger, are also necessary.

In many respects, the hierarchy of the Church in America has become like a police force that has become corrupt. A corrupt police force is, needless to say, very disturbing, because law-abiding citizens want law and order and police protection. As Catholics, we may be discouraged by the dereliction of duty by many bishops, but we should take some consolation that we do still desire the true faith, and want our priests and bishops to act like true priests and bishops. Priests in particular must take great consolation in this fact. If we find ourselves discouraged, we can compare the eloquent truths of the Catechism of the Catholic Church to the dreary documents of the USCCB. We can also be consoled that time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away. Natural attrition, as usual, will solve a good many of the problems in the long run. Judgment Day is at once a fearful "day of wrath" and a consolation to the soul wearied by injustice.

Meanwhile it is a moral imperative to break the vicious culture of silence in which we have been formed and which has so damaged the Church in our time. Breaking the culture of silence is important for me, personally. If I sound harsh in my assessment of the problem and the necessary punishment for transgressions, I am motivated to a large extent by self-interest. I want my own words to indict me should I fail; and, with the grace of God, I want my words to protect me from even considering succumbing to temptation. I am fully aware, with St. Augustine, that "there, but for the grace of God, go I."

A poorer Church – and after \$1 billion in damage payments, with the promise of more to come, poorer she clearly will be – may bring out the best in us. In preparation, priests must let their objections to the neglect of the Catholic faith – and the outright attack on the Catholic faith – be heard. The Church's authentic moral teaching must be our compass, with Canon Law our practical guide. The self-perpetuating blight of an emasculated and effeminate priesthood must be broken with the confidence that Christ promises in the Gospels when he repeats, "Fear not"

There's an old saying, "Friends come and go, but enemies accumulate." It is safer (in human terms, but not in supernatural terms) to criticize Church teaching than to criticize the bishops' dereliction of duty. There will be various forms of recrimination. Priests who dare to confront the clerical cult of silence in the face of evil may not be promoted to pastor or to prominent chancery positions. But they will be free and honest, with no need for alcohol to dull a bad conscience.
