

Welcome to my world... (notes on the reception of a bombshell)

By James Alison¹

So, the other shoe has finally dropped. The veil has been removed from what the French rather gloriously call a “secret de Polichinelle” - an open secret: one that “everybody knows” but for which the evidence is both elusive and never really sought. The merely anecdotal is, at last, acquiring the contours of sociological visibility.

Introduction

Frédéric Martel’s book *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality and Hypocrisy* is the first attempt of which I am aware at a properly researched answer to the question: “How and why is it that the principal institutional obstacle to LGBT rights at the worldwide level appears itself to be massively staffed by gay men?” This is not, by any standards, a stupid question. The search for evidence involved the author in several years of investigative journalism. He made multiple trips worldwide, spent months of residence both in Rome and within the Vatican, all under his own name. And he conducted hundreds of interviews with those involved in one way or another. From sex-workers to Cardinals, by way of journalists, doctors, police, priests, diplomats, and lawyers. The harvest of evidence yields a picture: that of the systemic way dishonestly-lived homosexuality creates a self-reinforcing culture of mutual cover-up. In other words: the structure of the clerical closet.

Some of what we learn is both new and genuinely shocking: the relations between General Pinochet, right wing gay Catholic circles in Chile and Angelo Sodano (who appointed many in the now disgraced Chilean hierarchy); The ability of the Argentine military junta of the 1970’s to blackmail the then Nuncio, Pio Laghi, owing to his use of “taxiboys”; whether learning about the state of sexual abuses in the Archdiocese of Havana was the last straw for Pope Benedict, triggering his abdication; Alfonso López Trujillo’s links with drug traffickers in Colombia as well as his sexual violence towards rentboys in Medellín; And so much more, both financial and sexual. Some stories were known in their countries of origin, at least to local journalists if not more publicly, but this is the first time all this evidence has been linked together worldwide.

While there are some monsters in Martel’s pages, as well as much that would scarcely be striking if it were not lived out in the midst of the otherwise

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bureaucratic lives of higher-up Church officials, this is not an especially salacious book. All the potentially sensationalist elements are played down in order to bring out the workings of a system which those involved think they are running, but which in fact runs them, sadly and cruelly. The author is clear that he comes across many gay men, but very few paedophiles, and, unlike some of those he interviews, he is perfectly aware that these are two quite different things. This is emphatically not a book about clerical child abuse; nevertheless the systemic nature of the mendacity that is revealed does have important consequences for understanding how the *cover up* of child abuse has been so prevalent. The same systemic mendacity throws light on how and why a whole generation of senior clergy, from the end of the Second Vatican Council onward, failed to engage with the public learning process concerning homosexuality, though this public learning has, to a greater or lesser extent characterised all of us, in all cultures, over the last fifty years or more. Survey after survey has shown that the senior clergy's recalcitrant failure to learn in this sphere has played as great a role in their loss for the Gospel of entire generations of the faithful as their tendency to cover up for priestly abusers.

Yes, but is it true?

Before I go any further: some disclosures. Of the many sources in this book, I am one of relatively few to appear under their own name. I was approached because a Parisian colleague of the author's tipped him off to my attempts, over the last twenty-five years, at writing and talking about this reality. To my considerable relief it turns out that I had indeed intuited many of the story's structuring elements. As a bonus, the author has treated me with undeserved generosity, even to the extent of including my French Bulldog, Nicholas, in his pages. I wish to disclose, however, not merely the fact of being a source, but also what I learned through the process of becoming one, since it has a direct bearing on whether the author is trustworthy, and whether what he says is true. These are questions which are likely to be raised given the need some people will surely have to shoot the messenger and downplay the message.

I had never heard of the author before he asked to interview me, and sent me a copy of his 2017 book *Global Gay* as an introduction to the kind of journalism which he practises. I read the book, which is an exploration of how the brand "gay" became a worldwide phenomenon, inculturated in different ways in diverse reaches of the planet. I know well several of the places he describes - for instance, Mexico City and Bogotá - and found his description of their gay life and ambience to match my experience. This made me think that he was, more likely than not, also reliable when writing about Tehran or Taipei, to neither of which I've been. Furthermore, he deployed anthropological nuance in his treatment of those he met and talked to, which made me think that he

would probably not be mindlessly monochromatic in his treatment of all the “shades of gay” that are at work in the Church. I noticed too that he was professional with his sources, protecting them carefully in countries or situations where they needed it, but allowing those who wished to go on the record to do so on their own terms.

By the time we met up, Martel had already been at work on his Church project for three years, and I was favourably disposed as to his trustworthiness. I shared not only my views on various issues but also the names of friends and contacts who might be useful for certain stories with elements of which I was familiar. I found that he fulfilled his promise of giving me a chance, prior to publication, to look over both direct and indirect quotes attributed to me. While some of these had, shall we say, “improved” with his editing, it was never in such a way as to traduce my intention.

As to the author’s handling of the stories about which I knew something, I can bear witness to his pages concerning the late Cardinal López Trujillo. I had heard, on a visit to Medellín in 2003, stories concerning this prelate and his need for violence in his sexual relationships with local rentboys. Naturally, at that time, with López Trujillo still alive, and powerful both in Colombia and in Rome, nobody wanted to talk about this in public. Fifteen years later my enormously brave initial host, Fr. Carlos Ignacio Suárez, had succumbed to pancreatic cancer. However, still in touch with others of my Medellín friends, I was able to point Martel towards some possible sources. When, finally, I read the relevant pages in the book, not only was what I had heard confirmed, but there was vastly more to the story than I could have imagined. Astoundingly, a great deal of it had been known both in Bogotá and Rome even while López Trujillo was alive.

I doubt that my experience as a source is unique: the author treated me professionally, and he discovered by hard work that what I had thought to be true, turned out to be significantly truer than I had thought. I am therefore inclined to believe that many of his unnamed sources will have had the same experience on reading the book, while unable to say so publicly.

A further point on this score. The subject of the book, the dishonest living of homosexuality which structures clerical life, is notoriously an area in and around which gossip flourishes. Discussion of this can therefore easily be dismissed as just that: mere gossip. The author has clearly talked to many, many closeted clergymen, any number of whom have been prepared to dish on the lives of others (and the others, of course, on them). As far as I can see on reading the book, he tends not to attribute homosexuality or its practice to anyone merely on the basis of the bitchy asides typical of the pre-Stonewall clubhouse atmosphere he so accurately describes. Rather he has sought out multiple

witnesses, and tried, where possible, to talk to the subjects involved to see what they would divulge. Forget canaries: Wagnerian divas would faint with envy at how long and how loud many of these men sang. Both by talking, and by trying to press their phone numbers upon the journalist's youthful male translators.

Sometimes I found the presence of insinuations and "*doubles entendres*" in the book troubling, maybe because it reminded me too much of my own experience. I remember a piece of South American gossip concerning a purported sexual relationship between myself and another member of the Order with which I was associated that is, as it happens, untrue. It could quickly have been debunked by anybody who had simply asked either of us and observed the evident hilarity with which each would have greeted the suggestion; or indeed, without going so far, by anybody who knew anything about my tastes. However, the purpose of the gossip was at least as much political manoeuvring as sexual insinuation, and those spreading it had no intention of, or interest in, determining whether it was true; merely whether it was useful.

In fact, there is no straightforward way an investigative journalist could navigate the clerical structure. In any "total" or oppressive régime, insiders both survive and protest through humour: I'm old enough to remember the (temporary) collapse of Spanish political humour after Franco's death. Just so, inside the total world that is the clerical closet, it is difficult to know where bitchy survivalist humour and insinuation end and evidence begins. And therefore where a journalist might merely, and unhelpfully, be fanning fire-less smoke, and where he is demonstrating that something is genuinely smouldering just out of sight.

On the other hand, labelling something "mere gossip" can also contribute to cover-up. As long ago as 1987 I knew, as gossip, what turned out to be true about Fr Maciel. I knew, as gossip, what turned out to be true about Bishop Nienstadt a decade before it was established by professional investigators at the behest of Minnesota's legal system. I knew, as gossip, all about the famous McCarrick beach house long before it was confirmed in the wake of subsequent revelations. All those who dismissed those tales as "mere gossip" were, as a matter of fact, contributing to their cover-up. A proper investigation doesn't hide behind the impossibility, in almost all cases, of obtaining photographic evidence. It proceeds by filtering "gossips" until it becomes clear whether or not some are close to a genuine witness whose veracity can then be assessed. Eventually, if the matter is important enough, the subject can be questioned. In the midst of the highly mendacious set-up which is the clerical structure, and without the instruments of civil law - subpoenas, threats, depositions - to back them up, this is really all that journalists can do.

It seems to me that this is just what the author has done as far as he is able. And Martel is no tabloid journalist aiming for the big “gotcha”. He is the author of several books, and a publicly gay, centre-left figure in French political life who has been an advisor to a Prime Minister and several Cabinet ministers. While he describes himself as a culturally Catholic atheist, there is no resentment or anti-clericalism in his pages. In all this he compares rather favourably to the last person to engage in a mass-“outing” of the Vatican: Archbishop Viganò’s outings were ideologically selective (he curiously failed to include a number of those to whom he is close), somewhat confused and scattershot, with no evidence provided, and with an obsessiveness suggestive of a problematic relationship with the subject matter. Martel on the other hand, has nothing to hide. There is no doubt plenty that he knows but lacks sufficient evidence to tell; some, surely, that his publishers will have removed or re-phrased on legal advice; and still more that can only be told when those in question have gone to their reward.

What is once seen cannot be unseen.

I’d never quite understood why Socrates and Aristotle placed wonderment - *thaumazein* - at the beginning of serious thought until reading Martel’s pages. The overall picture that emerges from the book is astounding. I am an insider to all that is described; I have been living with the realities of it all my adult life; I have been trying to speak words to it publicly for these many years. And yet, I had nothing close to an accurate sense of the size and density of the clerical closet and how much it distorts every aspect of the life of the Church. It’s as if I had perceived an atoll at high tide, while Martel has revealed the volcano standing beneath. Stunned may be a much overused word, but it’s the best one I know to describe my wonderment at the dimensions of what has come into view.

Indeed, rather than any particular revelation concerning this or that high-ranking cleric who turns out to be a heavily disguised or self-loathing closet case, Martel’s book has the effect of suddenly making manifest for the first time quite how gay the senior clergy of the Catholic Church is. This is not simply a matter of the author providing more accurate than usual statistics (and he makes no attempt at statistical accuracy in a field where Bishops have about as much interest in knowing the truth as the NRA in allowing congressional research into weapon safety). Rather the wonderment takes hold as you follow his narrative over the last fifty years or more, and watch what opens up. Martel sets out to cumulative effect what has been unfolding in the Vatican since Paul VI’s pontificate and how these matters have been lived out in several key countries: Spain, France, Italy, Chile to name but a few. Time after time, we see the same

basic structure of induction into, and reproduction of, dishonestly lived homosexuality, a dynamic which has long been hiding in plain sight.

All this builds up to the realisation that you are seeing something which, once seen *cannot be unseen*. By anyone who has seen it. Once it is seen, it is known as a fact about the Church's institutional working that cannot be got around. To pretend otherwise is a sign of delusion. Before any consideration as to whether this is a good or bad thing, or any decision concerning what to do about it, it is worth just stopping and gawking, slack-jawed, at what is effectively an entirely new vision of a significant human cultural body, one that nobody has ever seen before.

And by nobody, I do mean nobody. Readers may imagine that somewhere, in the Vatican, or in some nunciature, there must be people who already *knew all this*, not just as speculation, but in detail: as an air traffic controller *knows* where all the airborne 'planes are in ways that no-one in the planes themselves or on the ground can see. Furthermore, readers may imagine that these people who *knew all this*, have deliberately been hiding it from the rest of us. Such a fantasy, of an all-seeing but malevolent panopticon is, like all conspiracy theory, attractive. Because it is, like all conspiratorial thinking, a short cut, and one that appears to offer clarity: quick shots of junk-meaning, with goodies and baddies in easily digestible array.

However, one of the things to emerge from the book is that only an outsider, with a great deal of patience and diligence, could possibly have the capacity to see through and across so many different closets - a honeycomb of closets to use Mark Jordan's excellent phrase - and so give the first ever X-ray vision of the whole. None of the insiders, those within any of these closets, have more than a perfunctory awareness of what is going on in other than a few nearby cells of their honeycomb. And this is scarcely surprising. We're not talking about one single big lie, where all these men butch it up in public until they get back behind the Vatican walls; at which point all can relax together in a theatrical green room, let down their hair and call each other Monica, Morgana or Mechthilde while swapping hot takes about their respective beaux.

Rather we are talking about endless small lies, defensive manoeuvres, acts of hiding of self, adoptions of positions, fear of loss of livelihood, betrayals of friends, disguises of love, hints of blackmail, bizarre alliances, coded exchanges, and resilient creations of habitable bubbles. We are also talking about the ways this system of mendacity reproduces itself through newcomers joining in playing the game. All involved are lying to and about themselves and each other; and yet, at the same time they both know and don't know what each other knows. Furthermore, many are tortured by their own duplicity, not yet having achieved the perfection of polished cognitive dissonance at which some of

those whom Martel interviews have obviously arrived. This matches what I have myself observed: the most venomous anti-clericalism and hatred of the Vatican comes from the mouths of its own clerical employees.

No, be assured that many of those within the clerical system, many of those interviewed for these pages, both on the record and anonymously, will themselves be as astounded as I was, and I think most readers will be, when they read the book. These insiders will get a view into how and where they live and work that they have never had before. Sociology done well does facilitate a perspective on those living within a structure that they could never have achieved themselves. And of course, their taking that perspective on board is itself going to alter the structure from within in ways we cannot anticipate.

Let's take a step back and go slowly.

There will be a number of immediate reactions to Martel's book, attempts to make it part of current culture-war discussions, quite possibly a deluge of outrage from people who have not bothered to read its more than five hundred pages. Indeed, while Martel's prose is clear, elegant, and sometimes very funny, this is a sophisticated book. When was the last time most of us read a lengthy work peppered with quotes from Rimbaud? Or one where a discussion of the cultural world of Jacques Maritain and the gay literary circles of early twentieth century France has bearing on the central thesis? So, it will be some time before readers can assess the book themselves, and time again before what we learn from it sinks in. Of one thing I'm sure: what is once seen, cannot be unseen. And once it is seen, that very fact will cause deep disruption to the system of mendacity that is both being brought into the light and shown a mirror.

In order to understand what we are seeing, I think it worth saying something which I hope is obvious: it was only a matter of time before a book of this sort appeared. This is so for two reasons. On the one hand because, both for good and for ill, institutional structures at a world-wide level are becoming ever more porous, less credible, and less able to command deference; thanks to social media we are much more aware of the personal lives of those involved in them in one way or another; and the mystique associated with any surviving myth-generating all-male "man houses" (whether those of tribal Papua New Guinea, the Vatican, or GOP Senators) has faded to the point of a sometimes comic, sometimes brutal absurdity.

And on the other hand because the general tendency since the end of World War II towards the visibility and non-pathological normalcy of gay people has proved to be not a fad, nor some form of societal degeneration, but a genuine process of human learning of something true about ourselves. Church authority

showed itself to be learning about the shifting of institutional structures at the time of the 2nd Vatican Council, but thereafter became so panicked by the emergence of gay normalcy as to deny reality and double down in enforcing dishonesty on its own very large gay population. This book witnesses to the failure of that campaign, for what used to be unmentionable has become more and more easily talkable without much fuss. People have ever higher expectations of honesty in this area. More and more young people can detect straight away that a clergyman who refuses to say whether he is straight or gay, but hides by saying that he is celibate, is in fact a dishonest gay man, with all the resulting social dysfunctionality which can be expected from that. Where strident homophobia used to be read as a sign of true masculinity, now it raises more titters about the one speaking than about the objects of his aversion.

It is scarcely surprising, then, that by the end of the Ratzinger pontificate a very large number of younger and middle-aged employees of the Vatican found themselves near boiling point thanks to the cognitive dissonance forced upon them by a false teaching, pretend obeisance to which is the *sine qua non* of their employment. And please notice that it is not the observance of sexual continence that is the *sine qua non*. To the probable bafflement of moralistic Anglo-Saxon northerners, quite genuinely no one in this Mediterranean culture seems particularly bothered about that, as long as scandal is avoided. No, the *sine qua non* is “thou shalt not be truthful, and act and live honestly as a publicly gay man, however chaste”: for that would be to raise questions about all the others, as well as publicly to contradict the official position that you are suffering from a grave objective disorder which makes you unsuitable for the priesthood. It is this mixture of longing for an honesty that is available elsewhere, and the pressure of cognitive dissonance, growing greater with each generation, that helped open up to Martel all those doors inside the Vatican, as well as inside Bishops’ Conferences and Nunciatures worldwide, prompting their denizens to blab.

Anyone who thinks that an anti-clerical journalist cruelly fooled his interviewees in a bid to “out” the Church completely misses the point. Often enough, we find a rather relaxed and non-judgmental journalist, who actually rather likes many of his interviewees, allowing voiceless church employees to express through him, at last, their anger, despair and sadness at this obviously unsustainable system.

Hints of a non-scandalised reaction.

I would wish that Church authority might receive the knowledge imparted by this book with serenity and gratitude as a genuine boost to living the Gospel more fully. But I would be mad to count on it. No critique of clericalism of the

sort Pope Francis urges upon us can now avoid taking on board the systemic mendacity concerning badly-lived homosexuality which becomes clear through Martel's pages. Yet everything we're learning about collapsing institutional structures worldwide reveals how completely at sea are most of those charged with their re-invention in the face of contemporary realities. Even so, I'd like to point towards some reactions which I think are unlikely to be helpful, as we wait for what is now visible to sink in and inform our process of discernment.

The first unhelpful reaction will surely come from those for whom each new episode in the rolling scandal caused by clerical cover-up of child abuse is used opportunistically to attack gay priests, as though there were something inherent in being gay that makes people more likely to abuse minors. Here after all is a book which confirms that the senior clergy is gay in proportions unimagined even by the denunciations of Cardinal Burke, Archbishop Viganò, or, in particularly hysterical form, the late Bishop Morlino. I doubt however that haters will derive much solace from the evidence to match their dismay, since it is perfectly clear from the same evidence that gay men with double lives are, if anything, even more present in the traditionalist, and publicly gay-hating, wing of the Church than elsewhere. Who is to conduct the purge for which they long, if the need to purge homosexuality in others is itself one of the strongest indicators of badly-lived homosexuality?

No, if there were an inherent link between homosexuality and paedophilia, it would be remarkable that there have not been vastly more cases of clerical child abuse over the last fifty years, given the improbably high proportion of gay priests. What the evidence suggests is not that the high proportion of gay men among the clergy leads to more child abuse, but that the universal clerical dishonesty concerning homosexuality, independently of whether continence is practised, is strongly correlated to the ecclesiastical habit of cover-up which has kicked in wherever questions of child abuse have been raised. It is widespread blackmailability, whether real or imagined, and not homosexuality, that is the issue here.

A second unhelpful reaction will come from those who say "Well, I can't see the problem with having all these gay men as priests, Bishops and Cardinals, just so long as they honour their commitment to sexual continence". I call this "unhelpful" with care, since some of those who argue in this way do so as thoroughly decent straight Catholics who have no desire to be homophobic, and merely wish gay priests to be held to the same high standards as straight ones. "For as long as the discipline of celibacy is in force, it should apply equally to all orientations. *Sexit* means *Sexit*."

I'm going to "gaysplain" why this is unhelpful, and must ask you to suspend any belief that I am engaging in some form of special pleading for why gay

priests should be allowed greater sexual license than straight priests. I'm not. I would strongly welcome a Church in which, whatever discipline is in force, it be applied equal-handedly. But for that to be the case, both straight and gay candidates for the priesthood would have to begin from a level field. They do not.

Here is what a level playing field would look like: young adults of whichever orientation would have grown up, from childhood onwards, knowing that marriage to someone they love is not only a real, but a desirable possibility. One that will bring them happiness and honour, and strengthen their family bonds. From early adolescence onwards they will have been gradually socialized, by a mixture of family and peers, into courtship; and, if they are lucky, into some form of introduction to the humanization of their sexual urges with relation to possible future partners, about whom their dreaming out loud will have been the source of endless humour to their families and classmates. Experimentation, whether emotional or erotic or both, will have been if not encouraged, then expected or tolerated.

Some very few of these young adults, at peace with their sexual orientation, advancing in emotional and sexual responsibility, find that they are called not to continue along the majority path towards marriage, but to choose the single life as their way to follow Jesus. This choice will offer them a different sort of flourishing as they become available to give themselves away in varied forms of pastoral work which will take them outside the earning structure necessary to support a family. Such young adults are then welcomed into the seminary, where as part of their theological education they are able to share their life stories so far, and undergo appropriate training to enable them to develop into psychologically healthy single adults with good support networks as they are prepared for their working world.

Well, I hope you can see that currently, and at a worldwide level, this picture, while highly idealized for straight seminary candidates, is simply unavailable for gay ones. In the first place, Church authority still teaches that a young gay person cannot appropriately be socialized into the humanization of their emotional and sexual urges while dreaming of being married to someone they love. Indeed, far too many Catholic high schools, especially in the United States, are viciously legalistic in their attempts to apply these teachings to their employees and young charges. Further the authorities teach that such a young gay person does not have freedom of choice concerning whether to opt for marriage or a single life. They have a solemn obligation to singleness, with the threat of Hell a powerful enforcer.

Yes, the authorities really do deny there to be such a thing as an emotionally and psychologically balanced openly gay person who, therefore, might make a

free choice between marriage or celibacy and so become a straightforward, honest candidate for seminary. Their own document of 2005 sets it out quite clearly. Both the Cardinal who signed the document, and its public defender, Mgr Anatrella (now himself suspended from the priesthood under suspicion of adult same-sex abuse) put it beyond doubt: even chaste gay men cannot be priests because of their inherent psychological inadequacies. The only proper conversation between a gay candidate and a vocations director is one in which the candidate has the obligation to say he is gay, and the director to say that the candidate must withdraw. This prohibition is still in force as of 2016.

Now, that the official position is a lie is obvious to everyone, and scarcely applied anywhere. Even hardline Bishops claim that they do not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, but instead on the basis of something they call “emotional and affective maturity”. But that effectively means that they do not believe their own teaching, for they are admitting people who their own official teaching claims not to exist. Such candidates are automatically implicated in the dishonesty of their superiors simply by being there. Furthermore, any gay candidate need only learn how to pretend not to be gay, for which many of them have had a whole adolescence-worth of training, and they will certainly find enough seminary officials who will induct them into playing “wink wink, nudge nudge”, having themselves become masters at the same game.

In short, long before any issue of a candidate’s sexual practice comes up, whether in the past, the present or the future, he finds that the one thing that is impossible is straightforward, first-person narrative honesty. He neither finds an institution that is prepared publicly to back up a candidate’s first-person narrative honesty against haters both within the seminary and without. Nor does he find an institution which offers the candidate a lifelong socialization alongside admired senior members, themselves examples of first-person narrative honesty as they strive to live their option for sexual continence, helping each other through their rough patches.

To those who say “Well, all we ask is that continence be observed by gay as well as by straight men” I want to say: that is the perfect recipe for no change at all in the current set up. If it really were as easy as doubling down on the insistence on continence, then what about the gay priests who presumably have maintained continence, either wholly, or after recovering from some lapse which they recognize to have been inappropriate? Why have they not spoken up in the first person? They might have done so in order, for instance, to bear witness to the unrelatedness of gayness to pedophilia, or simply to be visible role models for distressed young people. My friend Fr Jim Martin assures us that there are thousands of faithful gay priests of this sort, and I agree with him. But why, then, their clamorous silence? In a recent article on the subject of gay

priests, Andrew Sullivan, also my friend, was able to get only one very brave US priest to go on the record, talking in the first person.

No, the silence of these very many fine priests tells us that it is public honesty about who they are rather than continence which is really the problem. Even the few who have no incident in their past life about which they might be embarrassed will not speak. Is it that by doing so they will make all their peers afraid of them? You will lose all your friends if they will be “outed” by association with you. If you cannot be blackmailed in a field where so many can be, then how can you be relied on to keep anyone else’s secret, or to behave with appropriate discretion in their company? Then again, if you speak out honestly as a gay priest, however chaste you be, you are, intentionally or not, witnessing publicly against official teaching. This teaching describes you as bearer of an objective disorder which incapacitates you for proper exercise of your role. In other words, honesty would cause you to lose friends and have your employment prospects reduced to the ecclesiastical equivalents of Siberia.

This is where my “gaysplaining” is often difficult for straight people to understand. By comparison with the issue of first person truthfulness concerning being gay, the issue of continence is, for most clerical gay men, nugatory. In the first place, despite the endless moralistic hullabaloo which surrounds them, sexual acts between consenting adult members of the same sex are about as inconsequential as any human activity can be. They harm no one, and produce neither babies nor any noticeable physiological or intellectual alteration in those participating. There is no noticeable difference between a monsignor who has a “friend with benefits”, and a monsignor whose friend comes “without benefits”. Furthermore, if Fr X goes on holiday each year with his friend Brian, can anyone say whether they have sex or not? More to the point: who on earth could care! The matter has no discernible consequence.

This is not the same with straight people, where sexual acts can have notable consequences, and where the relationship between a man and a woman very quickly raises questions of justice, given that the woman will likely be the more economically vulnerable partner, and her childbearing years have an “end by” date. So Fr Y going on holiday each year with his friend Sylvia, unless she is known as the sort of woman who loves the company of gay men, will raise eyebrows. Straight clerical incontinence is consequential in matters of justice and of reproductive possibilities in a way that gay clerical incontinence just isn’t. This is not to make a claim about any of this being good or bad, it is merely to point out, in purely functional terms, that whether a gay clergymen is “practising” or not may be a matter of spiritual importance to him personally, but as regards the working of the clerical system, it is both invisible and irrelevant.

So, the presence of homosexuality in the clergy is not itself the problem, since homosexuality in itself is no more an indicator of pedophilia than heterosexuality. The question of whether or not any particular gay priest is “practising” has zero impact on the continued functioning of the system of mendacity. No, the really hard nut to crack, the one facing up to which is now ineluctable thanks, among other factors, to Martel’s book, is the issue of honesty: truthfulness of life lived by sufficient numbers that blackmailability by the *omertà* of badly-lived homosexuality is no longer a real threat.

Here I turn to my third unhelpful reaction: that of demanding honesty by decree. Some will say, “Well, all these guys are being dishonest. They should just be honest.” In one sense that’s obviously true. But as a demand, it is a farce when made by those who are themselves party to the dishonesty that is being decried. Imitation is a much stronger force than instruction, and any gay candidate for seminary will see many others like himself already in the seminary, and will be interviewed by others like himself on the seminary staff. If in the midst of this he is presented with the instruction “You are required to be honest about being gay, and if you are gay and honest, your vocations counsellor is required to tell you that you cannot join,” he is not really being presented with a straightforward moral choice. In context, he is being presented with a hurdle, and his capacity to jump it will show whether or not he will be a suitable game player like all the others. Just in case the hurdle seems a little high, and if the vocations director likes the candidate, he may suggest that the kid is not really gay, just suffering from a transitory form of “same-sex attraction” or some other ecclesiastically convenient fiction. If the vocations director doesn’t like him, then, indeed, the fact that he is gay can be used to keep him out.

A dishonest system cannot demand honesty from its recruits, since in a dishonest system even the demand is dishonestly made and will be dishonestly received. The Holy Father said, in a somewhat muddled and unprofessional section of a recent interview, that he thought that gay priests should leave rather than lead a double life. Well, of course! Which of us would want to live a double life, or want any of our friends to live one, or to have our priest living one? But his request will have zero effect while the issue of *what sort of double life, and why*, is not examined more closely.

For instance: it is not infrequent that conflicted young gay men join the seminary or its equivalent, initially playing along with whatever dishonesty is required. This may merely be the same hypervigilance that they were living with as not yet “out” adolescents brought up amidst religious aversion to homosexuality. If the general theological and human education they receive in seminary is any good (which it very often is), if they are taught properly to read and to understand the Gospels, if there are genuine and decent spiritual directors available to them, it is not at all surprising that they will discover over

time what is in fact true: that there is nothing wrong with who they are, and that official teaching on the matter is simply false. Grace will have its way!

That these men should then, as time goes by, find others like themselves, whether clerics or laymen, and in some cases form couples, is par for the course. They will probably have discovered that their commitment to celibacy is null. Because at the time their commitment was made, one party - Church authority - was lying to them concerning both who they are, and their freedom to opt for partnership. Any marriage would likewise be null under similar circumstances of one party lying to the other. As these men come into good conscience about themselves, why should they consider that they are doing something wrong? After all, their growth in grace and honesty came as they perceived the dishonesty towards *them* of the official position of the institution which gives them a living.

Within the system as it stands, a wise superior or Bishop will often not interfere with something which manifestly makes the members of the couple to be healthier people; he will just hope that they are discreet, and will beg not to be told about it so that he doesn't have to "know about it" on the record. The couple themselves will understand that the only rule that matters is "thou shalt not cause scandal". The duplicity that will hit them is nothing to do with their sex life, in which no one at all is interested. It will be that they cannot even hint in public that being gay is OK, and that forming a same-sex couple is OK for those to whom they minister. The price they will pay for a quiet life is an agreement not to tell the truth, and not to interfere with Church leaders' propagation of a lie. That is the pain of the double life: not that you are doing something sexual you know you shouldn't be doing. You've learned that not to be the case. But that the price for a quiet life, whether you stay together, or break up, is not being able publicly to challenge the institutional lie. This is a real dilemma for the priestly vocation. If you leave, the liars triumph, if you stay, the liars triumph. What should you do?

No, honesty can neither be ordered by decree, nor demanded by the power-brokers of a dishonest system. But truthfulness, without which there can be no honesty, can be facilitated by Church authority. And this will be the most interesting thing to watch for as we take on board what will surely become even more visible in the wake of Martel's book. How will Church authority facilitate institutional truthfulness so that it impacts the two ends of the spectrum that matter structurally: children, who might grow up wanting to come into the priesthood; and Bishops, who alone can create a context of truthfulness in which limpid ordination promises can be made ?

It is only when it is clear to the former that God made them as they are and loves them as they are, and that the process by which they will come to

humanize their own capacity for loving can legitimately take various forms, that you will, in a generation or so, get perfectly straightforward seminary candidates for whom being gay or straight is an issue of no importance, one where casual first person self-presentation is unremarkable, and what matters is the project of the Kingdom whose workers they are whole-heartedly to become.

And at the other end of the spectrum: when Bishops themselves are honestly living whatever their orientation is, in a way that is publicly known and accountable; when they are able to offer a context of truthfulness within which their ordinands can make promises or vows without both parties playing some sort of “don’t ask don’t tell” game; then it will be reasonable for there to be an expectation of honesty among the clergy.

And of course both of these: teaching the truth about themselves to gay kids, and expecting truthfulness from gay Bishops, will only be possible when authentic Church teaching relating to what is genuinely the case about the human beings involved has asserted itself, breaking out from under the recent circular obfuscations of the Roman Congregations. You need only look at what Vatican II had to say, in a text much weightier than any of the subsequent documents concerning homosexuality, to get a glimpse of what the teaching of the Church may eventually turn out to have been all along, despite the desperate attempt to hold it back from the mid-seventies onwards. Here, in the now-jarring sexist language of the time (1965) is *Gaudium et Spes*:

§ 36 ...If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God...

Learning, and then teaching, the truth concerning the regularly occurring, non-pathological minority variant in the human condition called “homosexuality” is what will set us free. I hope that Martel’s book gives strong impetus to that process. Those trapped in the self-reinforcing structure of systemic mendacity which he describes, as well as those they serve, are, whether they know it or not, crying out for that mercy.

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