



FAITH & REASON

THE JOURNAL OF CHRISTENDOM COLLEGE

Fall 1994 | Vol. XX, No. 3

“HOMOPHOBIA” AT SETON HALL UNIVERSITY: SOCIOLOGY IN DEFENSE OF THE FAITH

Joseph A. Varacalli, PH.D.



INTRODUCTION

LIKE MANY OTHER CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING, SETON HALL University has recently had to confront the issue of whether or not to officially recognize a student group on campus at odds with the Catholic faith as understood and defined by magisterial teaching. In the specific case in question, the student group was a homosexual organization named “Wilde!” To its credit, the university administration to date has refused, arguing that such recognition would not be consistent with the mission of Seton Hall University as a Catholic institution and as the official institution of higher education of the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey. In doing so, the action of the Administration of Seton Hall University is consistent with the thinking of the Doctrinal Congregation’s Letter to Bishops, “The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons.” As the Letter declares:

All support should be withdrawn from any organizations which seek to undermine the teaching of the Church, which are ambiguous about it or which neglect it entirely. Such support or even the semblance of such support can be gravely misinterpreted. Special attention should be given to the practice of scheduling religious services and to the use of church buildings by these groups, including the facilities of Catholic schools and colleges. To some, such permission to use church property may seem only just and charitable; but in reality it is contradictory to the purpose for which these institutions were founded. It is misleading and often scandalous (Ratzinger, 1986: 382).

The purpose of this essay is twofold. First of all, it is to present a brief description of the Seton Hall University controversy. More importantly, it is to provide a sociological analysis that both debunks the homosexual agenda vis-a-vis Catholic higher education and offers support and insight for those faithful college administrators intent on keeping and strengthening the orthodox Catholic nature of their institutions.

THE CONTROVERSY IN BRIEF

The controversy under discussion can be reviewed by examining the student newspaper, *The Setonian*. It started with a letter to the editor written by an avowed homosexual student, Jonathan Samarro (October 1, 1992). He starts by claiming to observe that “on utilizing the public restrooms of this campus, I was originally shocked, though now comprehend, the amount of anonymous homosexual activities that take place.” He continues by declaring that “high

percentages of ... (Seton Hall) ... students are homosexual and bisexual, including students in the School of Theology.” Samarro, later to be the first (unofficial) president of Wilde!, concludes by suggesting that “a gay and lesbian union would effect the opportunity for healthy homosexual contact, as well as stifle or end the amount of exhibitionist, yet underground extreme sex acts in our public bathrooms.”

Two weeks later, the paper featured a headline story written by Editor-In-Chief Maria M. Perotin entitled, “Students Propose Gay Rights Group” (October 15, 1992). The two students involved were Jonathan Samarro and Paul Bogan, the latter identified as a “straight” student. The article noted that Bogan had just recently “approached the Student Senate about the procedure for starting a new student organization” and that Samarro intended to name the organization Wilde! “after the Irish poet, dramatist, and novelist Oscar Wilde ... (who faced) ... homophobia to the full extent.” This edition also contained a short piece on “National Coming Out Day Celebrated by Gays” and a viewpoints exchange between Perotin, supporting official recognition for Wilde!, and Setonian Associate Editor, Larry Karg, arguing against the granting of such legitimation.

Perotin’s next article, “Student Senate ‘Wilde! About Gay Rights Group” (October 29, 1992) informed the Seton Hall community that “the Student Senate decided Tuesday to recognize Wilde!, an organization to promote awareness about gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues, with a secret ballot vote of 9-6 with three abstentions.” The piece also stated that the 13 member group elected Samarro as President, Bogan as Vice-President, and Jean-Marie Navetta as Secretary. Philip Kayal, the chairman of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, was named Faculty Advisor. The article also noted that “the group cannot officially become a recognized organization until it receives approval from the university administration.” Of additional importance were the claims made by the homosexual activists that they had been harassed by students since attempting to create the organization, that the atmosphere at Seton Hall is hostile to

homosexuals, and that Wilde! will do nothing to promote homosexual activity.

The January 21, 1993 issue included another article by Perotin, “School Rejects Wilde!,” in which the administration rejected the request of the homosexual group to be formally recognized. As Perotin reported, the Reverend Thomas Peterson, University Chancellor, “said the Executive Cabinet did not recognize the organization ... because the group planned to remain neutral on the issue of the acceptability of an active homosexual lifestyle.” The Chancellor, who informed Wilde!’s founders of the decision before winter break, is quoted by Perotin as follows: “In terms of the clear teachings of Catholicism, an active homosexual lifestyle is unacceptable. Consequently, for a Catholic university to say that it could approve an organization that would be neutral on this is something that I could not square with the commitment of the university.” Chancellor Peterson, furthermore, indicated that he would establish a task force of administrators, faculty members, and students to address homosexual issues “in a way that doesn’t compromise the commitment of the university.” He indicated that the Task Force “would address what he considers Wilde’s ... (stated) ... objectives: prevention of harassment of gay and lesbian persons and the education of the campus community.” Samarro indicated that he was “considering whether to file suit against the university and that he contacted the American Civil Liberties Union to see if it is interested in the case.” Kayal, for his part, asserted that “the decision not to recognize Wilde! ... makes it apparent that gay and lesbian students are not welcome at Seton Hall. It’s a terrible form of discrimination.”

The February 11th issue of *The Setonian* included a piece, “Senate Forms Strategy for Wilde!,” by Perotin indicating that the Student Senate “decided this week on a

seven step strategy, including a petition campaign and an organized protest, for obtaining formal university approval of Wilde!, the gay awareness organization that was rejected by the administration last semester.” While deciding to continue support for Wilde!, the Student Senate reprimanded the organization for contacting a local T.V. station,



WPIX, without prior consultation.

The February 11th issue also contained two student written letters-to-the-editor, one in favor of and one against officially recognizing Wilde! More significant, however, was a much longer letter to the editor written by Philip Kayal, chairperson of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and (unofficial) Faculty Advisor to the homosexual club, entitled "Professor Reframes Wilde! Issue, Questions Double Standard of Morality, Rejects Proposed Task Force." Among numerous other points and allegations made, Kayal argued that "homophobia - not homosexuality - remains a certified mental illness and this is what we need to address. The ... (Chancellor's proposed) ... Task Force would deflect attention from the real issue of Wilde!'s legitimacy and the right of gay and lesbians to establish a safe haven free of abuse on a campus that is supposedly their own..." A small notice, "Senate to Meet With Chancellor" authored by staff writer Lisa Cantwell (March 4, 1993), indicated that the Reverend Thomas Peterson would soon be meeting with members of the Student Senate to discuss the controversy over Wilde!

The next issue of the student paper contained an article by Perotin entitled "Chancellor discusses Wilde! with Senators" (March 11, 1993). The story started by exposing a sharp difference of opinion between Chancellor Peterson and Student Senator Chris Evans. Father Peterson informed both the Student Senate and Wilde! that "they can accomplish nothing through confrontation." Evans responded that Peterson was "insulting our intelligence" arguing that "the civil rights movement and the success of Martin Luther King proved confrontation is effective ... That's what this country is about. ..." In this same issue, the Chancellor explained that "when Wilde! was under discussion, there were some events that created problems for me ... There were indications that what Wilde! was asking for was not what it was seeking." The Chancellor continued, citing three examples of "the organization functioning as though it exists, when it does not have university recognition." There was a T.V. appearance on "The Jackie Mason Show" by Samarro and Navetta, the distribution of flyers on campus inviting students to a New York City based AIDS dance-athon, and an interview offered by Samarro and Bogan to WPIX, T.V. News. The Chancellor, furthermore, argued that "he has tried to meet Wilde's primary objectives of providing education about homosexuality and bisexuality and preventing harassment of gay students by establish-

ing a Task Force to address the issues... The Task Force, which was scheduled to have its first meeting this week, has three missions ... They are to develop and recommend educational programs, to come up with procedures that would guarantee that gay and lesbian students would be free from harassment, and to develop avenues of dialogue."

As the *Final Report of the Special Task Force on Homosexuality and Homophobia* (May 17, 1993) indicated, Chancellor Peterson instituted the Committee on February 24, 1993. The Task Force members included Dr. William Toth, School of Theology and Chair; Father Paul Bochicchio, Director of Campus Ministry; Ms. Michelline David, Student Government Association (later replaced by Don Osmanski, also of the S.G.A.); Dr. Richard Hunter, Faculty Senate; Ms. Karen Merguerian, Faculty Senate; Ms. Sue Kurtyka, President of the Seton Hall Parish Council; and Mr. Jonathan Samarro of Wilde! The committee met four times during the Spring, 1993 Semester before issuing its final report.

The final report of the Task Force is a short four page, double-spaced document that provides a number of recommendations aimed at rejecting "acts of discrimination based on an individual's sexual orientation at Seton Hall University" (p. 1). The limited focus of the Task Force's recommendation reflects the fact that the Task Force was specifically charged by the Chancellor with formulating an appropriate University response to acts of homophobia on campus and not with the specific issue of whether any gay rights group should be officially recognized on campus.

It is regrettable that the opportunity was missed for a voice other than Chancellor Peterson's to reaffirm the Catholic identity of the university. As it turned out, it appears to many that the Chancellor "takes the heat" with the implication that the decision to deny official recognition to Wilde! reflects yet another example of heavy-handed, repressive clerical leadership that lacks any significant support in the university and scholarly community.



As reported by Anthony Morano in the April 29, 1993 issue of *The Setonian*, the university's newly elected Student Senate could not have been too impressed with either the idea or functioning of Chancellor Peterson's Task Force. As its very first order of business, it passed a revised organizational constitution for Wilde! Jonathan Samarro claimed that "all the complaints that Father Peterson made about the original constitution were changed exactly in the new one." The revised constitution, it was reported, 1) "recognizes the Catholic Church's stance on homosexuality" and refuses to "sponsor activities contrary to Church teaching or advocate a sexually active homosexual/bisexual lifestyle," 2) promises "not to present its views as those of the University" and "to include a disclaimer on all its literature making clear that the organization is not representative of the University's view," and 3) agrees not to sponsor any programs without the approval of the Administration, Campus Ministry, and Counseling Services."

Lisa Cantwell's May 6, 1993 notice in the paper indicated that Chancellor Peterson would meet today with Wilde! leaders to discuss its proposed revised constitution. Jonathan Samarro declared that "if the chancellor denies Wilde! official university status, the group will hold a protest and invite the media. He also said the issue would be pursued by the American Civil Liberties Union and would be handled by the Student Government Association Executive Board in September."

The September 2, 1993 issue contained an article by Jerry Carino, Associate Editor, that indicated that Chancellor Peterson had rejected the revised organizational constitution of Wilde! on two grounds: 1) that "any group that would make acceptable an active homosexual lifestyle would not be in keeping with the University mission statement," and 2) "because the Special Task Force he assigned to deal with the subjects of homosexuality and homophobia on campus had succeeded in carrying out the education which Wilde! had emphasized." At a very practical level, the article contained some other very important news: "with Samarro graduating and Bogan and Navetta transferring, the future of the group was uncertain. . ."

The Chancellor, according to a September 30, 1993 story by Lynnea Pruzinsky, then formally presented his rationale to the Student Senate, noting the institutionalization of the activities and programs outlined in the *Final Report* (May 17, 1993). One of these involved my-

self as a speaker at a "University Forum on Homophobia," held on November 10, 1993. As the article informs the readership, "members of the Senate, who were invited to question Peterson, did not ask any further questions about Wilde!"

UNIVERSITY FORUM ON HOMOPHOBIA

I was asked to make one of four presentations at the forum which took place on November 10, 1993. The other three speakers were Dr. Judy Glassgold, visiting Professor of the Rutgers University Graduate School for Applied and Professional Psychology; Economic Historian Jeff Escoffier, Ph.D., Editor of *Outlook*, and Patricia Natali, Director of the Department of Human Concerns of the Archdiocese of Newark. Glassgold and Escoffier declared their active homosexuality during their talks about homophobia. Natali is a Ph.D. candidate writing her thesis on liberation theology.

In retrospect, at least, it is clear that my latent function at the forum was to provide some "balance" to the proceedings. However, my manifest and specific sociological assignment was to provide reflections on the issue of homophobia in American society that could, by implication, shed some light on the situation of homophobia at Seton Hall University.

The distinctive sociological approach taken in both my lecture and in this essay combines both the "debunking" perspective of one of my early mentors in sociology, Peter L. Berger, as well as my own developing ideas in the area of the relationship of values to the sociological research enterprise. It is my stated hope that my analysis of a specific case, i.e., a particular controversy at Seton Hall University, can be useful to faithful Catholic leaders in handling similar controversies at the institutions of Catholic higher education in which they administer.

VALUES AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL QUEST FOR OBJECTIVITY

As I have argued elsewhere (Varacalli, 1992a; 1992b; 1993c), the sociological quest for objectivity necessarily entails the attempt to take into account precisely how the values of the individual researcher impact on all aspects of the research process. There are, at least, five such areas of impact: 1) *motivation or, perhaps, ideological agenda*, 2) choice of *research topic or social problem*, 3) concep-

tual apparatus employed, 4) *interpretation of data*, and 5) *proposed social policy solutions*. My approach consciously attempts to provide a third way between the prevailing two dominant camps within sociology, i.e., *positivism* and *post-modernism*. While agreeing with the former that objectivity in social research is the goal of the scholar, *qua sociologist*, my approach demurs from the positivist claim that the sociological enterprise can ever be “value free.” While agreeing with the latter that values intimately affect research, my approach denies the post-modern claim that objectivity in social research is not only an elusive goal but actually represents the attempt of the guardians of the status quo to suppress the utopian impulse. My position assumes not only that there is a “truth out there” that may be temporally and spatially conditioned, but also that there is an objective moral order that can be grasped through the exercise of a reason that, albeit conditioned by culture, can ultimately transcend any ideological moorings. Again, the quest for objectivity in research must take into account the influence of cultural values.

A somewhat analogous argument about how values affect reporting in America’s mass media has been proposed by both representatives of conservative thought (Rusher, 1988) and of the radical left (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). Both ends of the political spectrum argue that news reporting is not objective but is saturated by uncritically accepted mainstream liberal values, (which in the case of the radical left are seen as essentially defending the existing social system). The relevance of this for our present purpose is to suggest not only that the actual difference between social scientific analysis and professional journalism may be less than supposed but that a critical focus on how homophobia is dealt with by the news media is a legitimate issue. One could, indeed, apply my analysis of how values affect sociology and journalism to all forms of rational thinking, from that of the professional social activist to that of the average citizen. Such an exercise, however, would take this essay too far away from its focus on the machinations employed by those who consciously desire to secularize Catholic higher education.

In his influential *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (1963), Peter L. Berger makes the argument that sociology is intrinsically a “debunking” discipline. By this he meant that it is a principal task of the sociologist to challenge, by systematically investigating through the use of reason and empirical evidence, certain cognitive claims about social existence that many individuals in any society accept “at face value,” as “taken-for-granted,” or as “common sense.” It is important to point out that the debunking sociologist in question should not be assuming that what is apparently taken to be the case will automatically be falsified. The goal of the sociologist is to ascertain to what degree and under what conditions what is defined as real is actually true (or false).



“My position assumes not only that there is a “truth out there” that may be temporally and spatially conditioned, but also that there is an objective moral order that can be grasped through the exercise of a reason that, albeit conditioned by culture, can ultimately transcend any ideological moorings.”



SOME BASIC SOCIOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

The “apparent” claim made by the “pro-homosexual” forces at Seton Hall University that aspire to be eventually accepted at “face value” and to the status of “taken-for-grantedness,” “common-sense” and “what everybody knows” is that homophobia exists today as a serious issue in American society-at-large and, derivatively, at the university. By combining my concern for the impact of values

on the sociological research process (and, more generally, on all forms of rational discourse) with Peter Berger’s more general debunking motif, I hope to provide some very basic questions that would be essential in any even-handed attempt to analyze not only the charges about homophobia made by homosexual activists and their sympathizers but also those purported “scientific” studies that allegedly document them. My expressed hope is that the following list of questions with their “debunking” implications may be of use to Catholic administrators and personnel in responding intellectually, honestly, humanely, and faithfully to such charges. That the homosexual community has made great strides in their agenda for Catholic higher education can be no better illustrated than through reference to the debacle that took place at Georgetown University (Dannemeyer, 1989: 181-182), as

a gay organization was given official university status after a prolonged confrontation.

QUESTION ONE: MOTIVATION/IDEOLOGICAL AGENDA

What is the motivation or, perhaps, the ideological agenda behind those activists and those academic studies which claim that widespread homophobia exists at both Seton Hall University and within the society-at-large? Is it out of fear that homosexuals are being physically assaulted or might even be murdered? Or is it a response to the perception of the blatantly unequal treatment of homosexuals? On campus this would mean such things as discrimination in terms of faculty grading, admission to the university and to specific courses, the granting of financial aid, and in the allocation of student housing. In the society-at-large this would mean such things as discrimination in employment and a denial of basic civil liberties. Or is it a reaction to the perceived increasing verbal abuse launched against homosexuals on the part of a significant percentage of university faculty, staff, and students and, in the society, of the general citizenry? Or is it a reaction to the belief that officially recognizing a homosexual organization on campus is absolutely vital to the “pro-homosexual” cause given a dearth of such organs in the general society? Or is the motivation to try to gain the sympathy of the average college student and American in order to eventually further the agenda of normalizing homosexual activity? Or, is the motivation to purposely exaggerate the effects of “homophobia” in order to extend the scope of the “sexual harassment industry,” as discussed by Gretchen Morgenson (1991), which would further strengthen the economic, political, and status interests of assorted social activists and therapists?

Or, finally, is the motivation to try to force the Catholic Church - as of now the last great roadblock for the sexual modernists - to change its teaching on homosexuality?

QUESTION TWO: CHOOSING A SOCIAL PROBLEM OR A RESEARCH TOPIC

An interesting question is why, in the first place, did the Seton Hall University Chancellor and his Task Force decide to sponsor an academic forum in response to the charges levied by the supporters of “Wilde!”? Did they really think that any significant amount of homo-

phobic behavior exists on the campus? Is discrimination against homosexuals, in a relative sense, a great problem? For instance, is discrimination against homosexuals at Seton Hall greater than, say, that against the black underclass of Newark, New Jersey that borders one end of the campus? Are all prejudices equal and deserving of equal attention? (Gates, 1993). Even more to the point, why academically address, within the university, the issue of possible widespread homophobia and not the issue of the widespread ignorance of the fundamentals of the Catholic faith on the part of the Catholic component of the student body? Or, for that matter, why not convene a university-wide forum on the degree to which Seton Hall University is faithfully carrying out the vision set forth in *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (1990)? Is it because the administration considers the homosexual community to be more immediately relevant as a force to be contended with than is John Paul II, Cardinal Ratzinger, and the weight of Magisterially defined Catholic tradition and law?

Regarding the larger society, why is the claim of homophobia taken more seriously than that, say, of anti-Catholicism? Is it that the homosexual community is well-organized, disproportionately upper middle-class (with a concomitant amount of wealth, status, and power) and well-represented in the society-defining public sphere institutions of government, education, the mass media, and the arts? Conversely put, is it the case that it is open season for Catholic bashing given, first, the widespread dissent, disorganization, and apathy that presently characterizes the internal state of affairs of the Catholic Church in the United States and, second, the hostility afforded Catholicism on the part, primarily, of a modern-day secular gnostic class and, to a much lesser degree, of the remnants of a once dominant Protestant mentality?

QUESTION THREE: CHOOSING SOME CONCEPTUAL APPARATUS

The choice of the theoretical lens used by both the social scientist (or professional journalist, social activist, etc.) is also influenced by the philosophical framework of the individual in question. The issue of homophobia in American society can be studied by applying frameworks as fundamentally different as “functionalist” and “power/conflict” perspectives. The former argues that any society is primarily held together by some consensually agreed upon set of values. Historically and up until the present, heterosexuality has been a key American value. Homosexuality, from such a perspective, would

therefore be considered off the norm or “abnormal,” and, as such, an instance of societal “deviance.” Note should be taken that such a functionalist argument is not the same as a natural law perspective, the latter rooting the idea of pathology as a violation of an objective moral order structured into both the individual and social existence itself.

Many other sociologists, especially those formed in the mid-1960’s onwards, would interpret homosexuality from a power/conflict perspective which fundamentally denies that morality is consensually derived; rather it is the outcome of which group can impose its social definitions of reality over the society at large. From such a perspective, homosexuality can only be “labeled” as deviant by some ruling elite. Even further removed from natural law thinking, morality or “right” is seen simply as reflecting “might.” The report, *Homophobia on Campus* (1992), distributed by Professor Philip Kayal certainly shares this perspective. As the document flatly asserts, “Homophobia and heterosexism are manifestations of a larger system of oppression. Other manifestations of this system include sexism, classism, racism, anti-Semitism, disability oppression and ageism” (p. 3).

Part of the general secularization of Catholic higher education since Vatican II has included the abandonment of the attempt to incorporate a natural law perspective in the social sciences. Such an attempt would counter the various forms of secular social science, almost all of which derogate the moral through their contextualist and reductionist biases (Haynor and Varacalli, 1993). Only recently, in 1991, has a group of Catholic scholars attempted to resurrect the idea of Catholic social science through the formation of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists (Krason and Varacalli, 1992; Varacalli, 1993a, 1993b).

Made relevant to the campus controversy, the question centers around Seton Hall University’s self-understanding. Does the university represent a consensually held understanding of itself as a Catholic institution in which active homosexuality and its promotion are necessarily seen as wrong? Or does the university define itself so broadly and so inclusively that “anything goes,” or more realistically, as a naked arena fostering an interest group mentality in which whatever group organizes most efficiently and shouts the loudest wins the game of “king of the hill?”

Another key issue involving the value-laden nature of any conceptual framework entails the basic issue of definition, in this case, over the very meaning of “homophobia.” Obviously, homosexual activists have it in their interest to define the term so broadly as to refer to any sentiment or behavior that disapproves of the active homosexual lifestyle. An orthodox Catholic definition, to the contrary, would define the term in a more limited manner. Father John Harvey (1987, 1989), for instance, has defined it as any “unreasonable fear” or insane reaction to homosexuality. As Father Harvey clearly states, “In all cases the genuine Christian condemns the intolerant, violent, murderous attitude toward the homosexual person. But it does not hesitate to condemn homosexual acts, nor does it shun its duty of protecting persons, especially youth, from being victimized by homosexual activists or a homosexual culture” (1989: 126). Congressman William Dannemeyer makes a similar distinction and plea to America’s Judaic-Christian community: “We must hold out the hand of fellowship to homosexuals, but we cannot compromise in our condemnation of homosexual acts” (1989: 117). From a Catholic frame, homophobic behavior, like assault and verbal abuse against homosexuals, is condemned in no uncertain terms. On the other hand, and in terms of religious status, chaste homosexuals are to be treated indistinguishably from chaste heterosexual Catholics while any active homosexual behavior is considered immoral and an unnatural and disordered act. The Church, as it is often said, loves the sinner but never condones the sin. When making their decisions about such controversial issues, University leaders will hopefully be conscious about the importance of theoretical frameworks and of the politics of language in any form of argumentation.

QUESTION FOUR: THE INTERPRETATION OF DATA

There are, indeed, some *a priori* theoretical grounds for expecting *some sort* of increase in homophobic behavior on the part of *some* sectors of the American population. As will be suggested, however, sociologically speaking, these are not the most powerful sectors of American society. All claims made by pro-homosexual forces arguing that the “data” indicate blatant and widespread discrimination against homosexuals must take this social fact into consideration. “Homophobia,” at least to a considerable degree, is not only purposely blown out of proper proportion but also can be considered a “yuppie sin.”

Homosexuals as a minority group, approximately 2% to 3% of the population (not the purposely inflated 10%), are presently “coming out of the closet” attempting to gain society-wide recognition as a legitimate “alternative life-style” and, even as some conservatives fear, as a candidate for an affirmative action categorization. Societal reaction to this attempt varies, although, in general, the “gay movement” has been very successful in institutionalizing its agenda over the past couple of decades (Hale, 1987). I will provide four ideal-typical responses.

The first response, located at one end of the continuum, is one of direct and unequivocal approval. This response is overrepresented in many powerful high socio-economic sectors of American life, among college professors, government bureaucrats, and those in the mass media and the arts. One indicator of the political “support” given by these sectors to the homosexual community is the atypical way in which the infectious disease, AIDS, is being handled (e.g., underplaying the risks of casual transmission, supporting the AIDS patient’s “right to privacy” over procedures that would protect the public such as mandatory testing and contact tracing, fostering pansexuality in sex education courses in public schools, etc.) (Antonio, 1987). Such support, contrary to the natural law, not only threatens American civilization but, ironically, is well on its way to completely destroying the homosexual subculture itself (Dannemeyer, 1989; Harvey, 1987). Speaking of the situation in higher education in the U.S., Jerry Z. Muller is quite blunt: “With a rapidity attributable in large part to a total lack of articulate resistance, homosexual ideology has achieved an unquestioned and uncontested legitimacy in American academic life” (1993: 24).

Next comes the “it’s not my cup of tea, but if it’s O.K. with you, it doesn’t bother me” reaction. This response is strong among the moderately progressive element of the American middle class, the sector that, as the philosopher Allan Bloom (1987) and the sociologist John Cudihy (1978) have argued, has accepted, respectively, the philosophy of moral relativism and that of offering “no offense.”

Next comes the typical re-

sponse of that segment of the American middle and working classes that is still in tune with the historic Judaic-Christian heritage. The reaction here is that homosexual acts are both immoral and unnatural and should not be granted societal legitimation. However, this camp follows, homosexuals should not have to fear for their lives or be subject to various forms of physical or verbal abuse. As the 1976 Pastoral of the NCCB, has put it, “Homosexuals, like everyone else, should not suffer from prejudice against their basic human rights. They have a right to respect, friendship, and justice” (quoted in Harvey, 1989: 126). Similarly, as the even more definitive Doctrinal Congregation’s Letter to Bishops, “The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,” states:

It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech and action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church’s pastors wherever it occurs ... But the proper reaction to crimes committed against homosexual persons should not be to claim that the homosexual condition is not disordered. When such a claim is made and when homosexual activity is consequently condoned or when civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the Church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase” (Ratzinger, 1986: 380-381).



Joseph Varacalli

Therefore, a highly selective form of legal and just discrimination is acknowledged by the Church as necessary to protect society’s legitimate self-interests. As Monsignor William B. Smith states, “not only is it licit to limit objectively disordered conduct, it can be obligatory to do so for the common good” (1993: 60). Such cases might include barring active homosexuals from participation in the armed forces or guaranteeing the right of homeowners not to be forced to rent to active homosexual couples or granting the right of parents to protect their children from teachers who are active homosexuals and who unabashedly promote homosexual activity (in some cases, as

Dannemeyer [1989: 17] points out, going so far as to actually instruct young people how to perform homosexual activity). As Cardinal Ratzinger, in the Doctrinal Congregation's Letter, "Responding to Legislative Proposals on Discrimination Against Homosexuals," has noted:

Recently, Legislation has been proposed in various places which would make discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation illegal. In some cities, municipal authorities have made public housing, otherwise reserved for families, available to homosexual (and unmarried heterosexual) couples. Such initiatives, even when they seem more directed toward support of basic civil rights than condonement of homosexual activity or a homosexual lifestyle, may in fact have a negative impact on the family and society (Ratzinger, 1992: 175).



This Judaic-Christian sector of American society may soon start to witness the addition of defections from the aforementioned second category, as some parents, with typically liberal attitudes, nonetheless have to frankly confront the consequences of normalizing homosexual activity, especially as it impacts on their own children. A "neo-conservative" has been defined by one wit as a "liberal mugged by reality." There are not an inconsiderable number of contemporary liberals in American society ripe, if initially for no other than utilitarian reasons, for a conversion to political neo-conservatism (and, perhaps, eventually someday, to various forms of religious neo-orthodoxy).

The final reaction, overrepresented in the lower socio-economic class and among the most religiously conservative or fundamentalist religions, consists of those who find it impossible to countenance homosexuals and their behavior in any shape, way, or form. Discrimination against homosexuals tends to be sanctioned across the board with a desire for this anti-homosexual sentiment to be codified likewise in law, stopping short only of condoning and legalizing physical violence and

other forms of serious abuse. This group is clearly the least powerful nationally, although it may be disproportionately stronger in certain localized areas.

With needed qualifications, the first and second categories and the third and fourth categories, respectively, are in an uneasy alliance with each other and stand on different sides of the barricades in what Carlin (1993), Hunter (1991), Dannemeyer (1989) and Varacalli (1987) have referred to as America's current "culture wars." It is clear that, at the present moment, the first two categories are more influential - indeed, are winning the war - in American society with, as such, positive political ramifications for the pro-homosexual cause. Homosexuals are strong in American society where "it counts," from the Clinton administration on down. Egregious examples of homophobic acts occur less in cosmopolitan areas where homosexuals congregate and when such acts do occur, they are dealt with swiftly. Broad definitions of homophobia are now accepted as part of "politically correct thinking." Laws treating homosexual couples as the functional equivalent of heterosexual marriages exist in some of America's major urban areas. Open and active homosexuals tend to migrate into those geographic areas and into those professions where they are, minimally, less discriminated against to those, maximally, in which preferential treatment is afforded; the latter an example of the age-tested maxim that "people take care of their own" and that "networking makes a difference."

Regarding the situation at Seton Hall University, the questions asked under the previous section, "Motivation/ Ideological Agenda" are relevant. Are homosexuals being murdered on campus? Attacked physically? Verbally abused? Discriminated against in admissions, grades, financial aid, student housing? Should the fact that a Seton Hall University student expresses disagreement with the homosexual act qualify as an example of "homophobia" that the administration should be concerned with? Were the "rights" of homosexual students violated by the refusal of the Administration to officially recognize a group in a university that has forthrightly expressed its positive allegiance to the Catholic heritage, correctly understood, and where entrance into the Seton Hall University community is a purely voluntary act? Does, for that matter, the Archdiocese of Newark have the "right" to be itself, i.e., to be "Catholic?"

QUESTION FIVE: SOCIAL POLICY

Just as there is an interdependent relationship between theology/philosophy and sociological analysis, so is there one between sociological analysis and possible social policy implications. Put another way, just as sociology is semi-autonomous from theology/philosophy, social policy is semi-autonomous from sociology. While there exists a certain latitude in social policy - Catholics refer here to the virtue of prudence - social policy cannot stand in a completely arbitrary fashion to the social scientific analysis from which it draws.

Rationally speaking, social policy regarding “homophobia” depends on the nature and scope of the phenomenon as depicted by sociological/social scientific research. It is fair to say that no humane civil society wants homosexuals denied life or the right to basic fundamental guarantees to live not only a decent material existence, but one devoid of harassment. Beyond this minimalist proposition, the debate begins based on divergent analyses of social life rooted in what is most likely irreconcilable theological/philosophical differences.

The situation at Seton Hall University regarding its policy on “homophobia” is less complex only if the administration and its sponsor, the Archdiocese of Newark, is unquestioning in its acceptance of the Catholic tradition as given coherence by Magisterial teaching. Assuming a positive answer, social policy is simply to implement clearly and without equivocation what the Church teaches about homosexuality and homophobia. This can be done through any number of mediums: a required core course on “The Catholic Perspective on Human Sexuality” centered around *Humanae Vitae*, university lectures, statements made in catalogues and other public relations material of the University, the establishment of a “Courage” Chapter, and homilies during mass. If, on the other hand, the University sees itself as a rudderless multiversity “meeting the needs of all on their own terms,” then Seton Hall University can expect to mirror for the indefinite future what Thomas Hobbes has referred to as “a state of war of all against all,” a condition that the general society is progressively moving toward.

Two other social policy issues at the campus level should be briefly mentioned. The first deals with the effect of stressing an orthodox Catholic identity on enrollment in the University. There is little doubt that such a policy would lose students in the short run. In the longer run, the effect is debatable. Enrollments might very well rise as parents and students alike come to realize that

Seton Hall University has something unique to offer in a society in which it is apparently becoming clearer that all roads lead either to Rome or to secularism.

The second issue is addressed by Professor Jo Renee Formicola, Chair of the Political Science Department at Seton Hall University, in an interview with Maria M. Perotin, appearing in the student newspaper, *The Setonian* (February 11, 1993). Formicola is quoted as follows: “Religious institutions cannot have it both ways. They cannot conveniently choose to be Catholic, fundamentalist, or orthodox. At this point, they must either be willing to sacrifice federal monies totally when their religious principles are compromised, or they must be willing to accommodate their immutable beliefs to national laws or compelling state interests” (p. 4). If true, the orthodox Catholic response is clearly to reject federal funding. However, no less than a former federal Deputy Assistant for Higher Education Programs, Kenneth D. Whitehead, in his *Catholic Colleges and Federal Funding* (1988), clearly disputes the argument of Professor Formicola. Whitehead claims that such an erroneous argument is consciously made in order to intimidate Catholic administrators into regretfully diluting Catholic identity on campus and to promote the agenda of those who actually desire to internally secularize Catholic higher education.

CONCLUSION

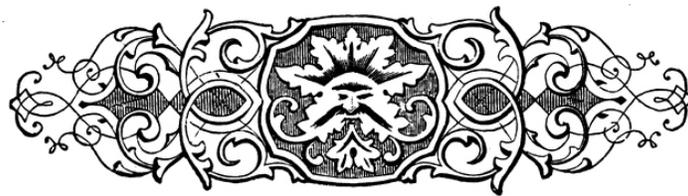
It’s not easy to be authentically Catholic, anytime or any place (although it’s considerably more difficult at this juncture in time and space). Or at least this is the case, if it’s true as I’ve argued elsewhere (Varacalli, 1994, forthcoming), that Catholicism posits a “moderate dualism” that harmonizes such dyadic opposites as grace and nature, spirituality and materialism, faith and reason, mysticism and intellect, doctrine and experience, authority and autonomy, prayer and social action, justice and mercy, and universalism and particularism. Catholicism, in short, represents a delicate balancing act that tends to be pushed in one direction or another depending on the nature of the dominant cultural bias of the society in which it is embedded.

At present, the “Americanist” leadership of the Catholic Church of the United States is allowing the institution to follow the path of least resistance which means uncritically emphasizing, without sufficient constraint, nature, materialism, reason, intellect, experience,

autonomy, social action, mercy, and particularism over their respective dyadic opposites, thus tending to collapse the supernatural other-worldly focus of the faith into a purely this-worldly one. Pope Leo XIII was right on the mark - contemporary revisionists notwithstanding - when he issued his famous turn-of-the twentieth century condemnation regarding the “heresy of Americanism.” The Pope’s reflections are even more true in today’s post-Vatican II era.

The tepid response of many Catholic leaders today to the exaggerated and fabricated charges of homophobia (and racism, sexism, ageism, nativism, and other forms of “politically correct” discrimination) with

in the institutions that they lead can best be understood by reference to the selective and distorted understanding of the faith propounded by those who too easily conform to the spirit of the age. The only possible solution leading to a resurrected and confident-yet-cautious Catholic Church in the United States is to teach the historic and developing faith whole and without adulteration. Individuals like Father Michael Scanlan and Dr. Timothy O’Donnell, inspired no doubt by the Holy Spirit, have started the counter-revolution in Catholic higher education at, respectively, the Franciscan University of Steubenville and Christendom College. It’s time for Seton Hall University to jump into the fray in the attempt “to re-establish Catholic Higher Education in Christ.”



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Antonio, Gene. *The AIDS Cover-up?: The Real and Alarming Facts About AIDS* (Ignatius, 1987).
- Berger, Peter L. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (Doubleday, 1963).
- Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind* (Simon and Shuster, 1987).
- Cantwell, Lisa. “Senate to Meet with Chancellor” *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 23, March 4, 1993).
- Cantwell, Lisa. “Wilde! to Meet with Chancellor Today,” *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 30, May 6, 1993).
- Carino, Jerry. “Despite Second Rejection, Wilde! Members Persevere,” *The Setonian* (Volume 70, Number 3, September 2, 1993).
- Carlin, David. “Abortion, Gay Rights, and the Social Contract,” *America* (Volume 168, Number 7, February 27, 1993).
- Cuddihy, John. *No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste* (Seabury Press, 1978).
- Dannemeyer, William. *Shadow in the Land: Homosexuality in America* (Ignatius, 1989).
- Final Report of the Special Task Force on Homosexual and Homophobia to the Chancellor of Seton Hall University* (May 17, 1993).
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. “Backlash?,” *The New Yorker*, (May 17, 1993). Hale, John P. “Gay Rights: Where It Stands and What’s to Come,” *Fidelity*, (November, 1987).
- Harvey, John F., OSFS. *The Homosexual Person* (Ignatius, 1987). Harvey, John F., OSFS. “AIDS, Morality, and Public Policy” in *Homosexuality, the Questions: Scriptural, Church, and Psychiatric Answers* (Daughters of St. Paul, 1989).
- Haynor, Anthony L. and Joseph A. Varacalli. “Sociology’s Fall From Grace: The Six Deadly Sins of a Discipline at the Crossroads,” *Quarterly Journal of Ideology* (Volume 16, Numbers 1-2, Spring-Summer, 1993).
- Herman, Edward S. and Noam Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (Pantheon Books, 1988).
- Homophobia on Campus, unpublished document presented at a conference held at Slippery Rock University, February 6, 1992 and modified slightly by Philip M. Kayal to accommodate the Seton Hall University controversy.
- Hunter, James. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (Basic Books, 1991).
- Kayal, Philip. “Letter to the Editor,” “Professor Reframes Wilde! Issue, Questions Double Standard of Morality, Rejects Proposed Task Force,” *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 20, February 11, 1993).

- Krason, Stephen M. And Joseph A. Varacalli. "The Society of Catholic Social Scientists: Calling and Invitation," *Social Justice Review* (Volume 84, Numbers 1-2, January-February).
- Morano, Anthony. "Senate Passes Revised Wilde! Constitution," *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 29, April 29, 1993).
- Morgenson, Gretchen. "May I Have the Pleasure-," *National Review* (November 18, 1991).
- Muller, Jerry Z. "Coming Out Ahead: The Homosexual Moment in the Academy," *First Things* (August/September, 1993).
- Perotin, Maria M. "Students Propose Gay Rights Group," *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 8, October 15, 1992).
- Perotin, Maria M. "Student Senate 'Wilde' About Gay Rights Group," *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 10, October 29, 1992).
- Perotin, Maria M. "School Rejects Wilde!," *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 17, January 21, 1993).
- Perotin, Maria M. "Prof Addresses Gays and Catholic Church," *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 20, February 11, 1993).
- Perotin, Maria M. "Senate Forms Strategy for Wilde!," *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 20, February 11, 1993).
- Perotin, Maria M. "Chancellor Discusses Wilde! With Senators," *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 24, March 11, 1993).
- Pruzinsky, Lynnea. "Chancellor Explains Wilde! Decision to Student Senate," *The Setonian*, (Volume 70, Number 7, September 30, 1993).
- Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. Doctrinal Congregation's Letter to Bishops, "The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," *Origins* (Volume 16, Number 22, November 13, 1986).
- Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. Doctrinal Congregation's Letter, "Responding to Legislative Proposals on Discrimination Against Homosexuals," *Origins* (Volume 22, Number 10, August 6, 1992).
- Rusher, William A. *The Coming Battle for the Media* (William Morrow, 1988).
- Samarro, Jonathan. "Letter to the Editor," "Homophobic Campus Should Open Eyes and Allow Gay Group," *The Setonian* (Volume 69, Number 6, October 1, 1992).
- Smith, Monsignor William B. "Questions Answered: Discrimination?," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (February, 1993).
- Varacalli, Joseph A. "The State of the American Catholic Laity: Propositions and Proposals," *Faith and Reason* (Volume 13, Number 2, June, 1987).
- Varacalli, Joseph A. "Secular Sociology's War Against Familiaris Consortio and the Traditional Family: Whither Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Sociology?" in *The Church and the Universal Catechism*, edited by Rev. Anthony J. Mastroeni (Steubenville, Ohio: Franciscan University Press, 1992a).
- Varacalli, Joseph A. "Whose Justice and Justice for What Purpose?: A Catholic Neo-Orthodox Critique," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* (Volume 6, Number 2, Winter, 1992b).
- Varacalli, Joseph A. "Sociology, Catholicism, and Andrew Greeley," *Lay Witness* (Volume 13, Number 9, June 1992c).
- Varacalli, Joseph A. "The Society of Catholic Social Scientists: An Idea Whose Time Has Come," *Lay Witness* (Volume 14, Number 10, July/August, 1993a).
- Varacalli, Joseph A. "Secular Social Science Can't Save Souls or Society," *Our Sunday Visitor* (Volume 82, Number 33, December 12, 1993b).
- Varacalli, Joseph A. "Multiculturalism, Catholicism, and American Civilization," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (forth coming, March, 1994).
- Whitehead, Kenneth D. *Catholic Colleges and Federal Funding* (Ignatius Press, 1988).