


Cardinal Spellman's Dark Legacy

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Two Sundays ago the rector at St. Patrick's Cathedral, Monsignor Eugene Clark, gave a homily that inspired the kind of **PRIEST BLASTS GAYS** headlines that New York's tabloids thrive on. Standing in for the embattled Cardinal Egan, Clark blamed the sex abuse scandal on gays, railed against homosexuality as a "disorder" and said it was a "grave mistake" to allow gays into the priesthood.

It may have been another trial balloon as the Vatican desperately attempts to change the subject and scapegoat gays. Or it may simply have been further ineptitude on increasingly feeble Cardinal Egan's part, putting the wrong person at the pulpit while he scampered away to the Bronx amid the crisis. The New York archdiocese later distanced itself from?though didn't refute?Clark's comments, and a discombobulated Egan offered a bizarre nonresponse when asked in Rome about homosexuals in the priesthood: "I would just say this. The most important thing is to clean up the truth. And the truth is I have never said anything." (Egan seems just a bit too desperate not to be on the record saying "anything" about homosexuality, perhaps fearful that his position might be pointed to, for whatever reason, in the future.)

Whatever Clark's rant was meant to convey, it represents a dangerous path for the Catholic Church to embark upon, one that will only embolden media-savvy gay activists?and a press corps much less loyal to the church than in years past?to begin exposing the many twisted, personal sexual hypocrisies that envelop the increasingly tainted, lying bishops and cardinals who are running the church.

Clark's deceptions included equating homosexuality with pedophilia, the ugly lie we've been hearing from the Vatican and the American cardinals, both before and during the sex abuse summit. But 76-year-old Clark also engaged in a larger, less-defined but more powerful deception. In putting forth the idea that homosexuality is a "disorder," and that it

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is a "grave mistake" to ordain gay priests, he implied that only the lowly priests?the alleged child abusers among them?are afflicted with the so-called "disorder." He wouldn't, after all, accuse any bishops or cardinals themselves of having the "disorder," nor would he say that it was a "grave mistake" to have ordained them, would he?

Yet, among the several skeletons in gay-basher Clark's closet is that he in fact dutifully worked as secretary for one of the most notorious, powerful and sexually voracious homosexuals in the American Catholic Church's history: the politically connected Francis Cardinal Spellman, known as "Franny" to assorted Broadway chorus boys and others, who was New York's cardinal from 1939 until his death in 1967.

The archconservative Spellman was the epitome of the self-loathing, closeted, evil queen, working with his good friend, the closeted gay McCarthy henchman Roy Cohn, to undermine liberalism in America during the 1950s' communist and homosexual witch hunts. The church has squelched Spellman's not-so-secret gay life quite successfully, most notably by pressuring The New York Times to don the drag of the censor back in the 1980s. The Times today may be out front exposing every little nasty detail in the Catholic Church's abuse scandal?a testament to both the more open discussion of such issues today and the church's waning power in New York?but not even 20 years ago the Times was covering up Spellman's sexual secrets many years after his death, clearly fearful of the church's revenge if the paper didn't fall in line. (During Spellman's reign and long afterward, all of New York's newspapers in fact cowered before the Catholic Church. On Spellman's orders New York's department stores?owned largely by Catholics?pulled ads from the then-liberal New York Post in the 1950s after publisher Dorothy Schiff wrote commentary critical of his right-wing positions; Schiff was forced to back down on her positions.)

In the original bound galleys of former Wall Street Journal reporter John Cooney's Spellman biography, *The American Pope*?published in 1984 by Times Books, which was then owned by the New York Times Co.?Spellman's gay life was recounted in four pages that included interviews with several notable individuals who knew Spellman as a closeted homosexual. Among Cooney's interview subjects was C.A. Tripp, the noted researcher affiliated with Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey of the Institute for Sex Research, who shared information that he had on Spellman regarding the prelate's homosexuality. In a telephone interview with Tripp last week, he told me that his information came from a Broadway dancer in the show *One Touch of Venus* who had a relationship with Spellman back in the 1940s; the prelate would have his limousine pick up the dancer several nights a week and bring him back to his place. When the dancer once asked Spellman how he could get away with this, Tripp says Spellman answered, "Who would believe that?" The anecdote is also recounted in John Loughery's history of gay life in the 20th century, *The Other Side of Silence*.

"In New York's clerical circles, Spellman's sex life was a source of profound embarrassment and shame to many priests," Cooney had written in the original manuscript of his book. When Mitchell Levitas, who was then the editor of *The New York Times Book Review*, received the manuscript for review, he realized it was a book that would make big news; he sent the book over to Arthur Gelb, who was then the managing editor of *The New York Times*. Gelb assigned reporter Ed McDowell to the story. McDowell interviewed Cooney, and went about interviewing others who were relevant to

McDowell interviewed Cooney, and went about interviewing others who were relevant to the story, including church officials.

The archdiocese, however, went ballistic when presented with the information, and became determined to keep it from being published. Chief among those orchestrating the cleansing of Spellman's past sex life was none other than the current gay-basher Monsignor Clark, who, in an interview with the Times, called the assertions "preposterous," commenting that "if you had any idea of [Spellman's] New England background" you'd realize these were "foolish" charges. (I guess there are no homosexuals north of Connecticut, right?) The church sent John Moore, the retired U.S. ambassador to Ireland and a close friend and confidant of several church officials, to appeal to Sidney Gruson, then vice chairman of the New York Times Co. "The Times was going to report that Cardinal Spellman was a homosexual," Moore later told journalist Eric Nadler, who wrote a piece for Forum about the ugly little coverup, "and I was determined to stop it." Moore told Nadler that this was the "third or fourth" time he had appealed to the Times regarding a sensitive church matter. "They've always done the right thing," he said.

As Cooney describes it, he was soon told by his editors at Times Books that his sourcing wasn't good enough, and that the four pages would have to be cut. He could keep a paragraph that alluded to the "rumors," but he would have to state that the rumors had been strongly contested by many people—even though, in his research, that had not truly been the case. The discussion of Spellman's homosexuality in the book was reduced to mere speculation, which was branded as irrelevant:

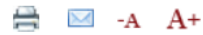
For years rumors abounded about Cardinal Spellman being a homosexual. As a result, many felt—and continue to feel—that Spellman the public moralist may well have been a contradiction of the man of the flesh. Others within the Church and outside have steadfastly dismissed such claims. Finally, to make an absolute statement about Spellman's sexual activities is to invite an irresolvable debate and to deflect attention from his words and deeds.

The dutiful Times then had another former U.S. ambassador to Ireland and friend of the Church, William V. Shannon, review *The American Pope* for the Book Review. Shannon's review was scathing, attacking Cooney for even bringing the subject up at all: "Prurient interest in the sex lives of public figures serves no useful purpose."

A Jesuit priest wrote a letter to the Book Review, published a few weeks later: "Cardinal Spellman's sex life does not matter, but [his] homosexuality does... It matters to thousands of people whose jobs, relationships and whose very lives are threatened because of their sexuality, all the while being forced to view and eat the hypocrisy of their church. And it enrages people that church men and women can retain their jobs, hiding behind their clerical and religious statutes while their own people suffer persecution, disease and discrimination."

Sadly, the Jesuit's words still ring true today, almost 20 years later. While Spellman has been long dead, his legacy of hypocrisy lives on: there are closeted homosexuals?often condemning "sexual immorality" publicly while having gay sex privately?throughout the uppermost echelons of the church today. The gay movement in the past 15 years has taken on the Hollywood closet and the Washington political closet, both with dramatic success?and both those institutions have p.r. operations far more sophisticated than the Vatican's antiquated machine, which can't even seem to get the aging cardinals to attend a press conference. The media these days also has a much greater appetite for exposing sexual hypocrisy, and is no longer cowed by the Catholic Church. Going down this treacherous road of increased gay-bashing and scapegoating, the Vatican perhaps doesn't realize what it may be unleashing upon itself. If I were a closeted bishop or cardinal in America, I would be very afraid.

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