

Paweł Bortkiewicz

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8851-4254>

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland

A review of *Lawendowa mafia. Z papieżami i biskupami przeciwko homoklikom w Kościele* [*The Lavender Mafia. With the Popes and Bishops Against Homosexual Clans in the Church*] by Dariusz Oko; Wydawnictwo AA, Kraków 2020, pp. 288

The term “Lavender mafia” was coined to suggest a particular liking of homosexual circles for a luxurious life, in particular forexpensive cosmetics. The author of the moniker is Andrew Greeley, an American priest and sociologist.

The issue of the so-called “Lavender mafia” concerns the Catholic Church, including the Church in Poland. Father Dariusz Oko, a professor from the Pontifical University of John Paul II, recalls the words of Bishop Mirosław Milewski who thus warns against silence and a lack of reaction: “...so we, the bishops, the Church in Poland, must do as much as possible to change [the situation], or else one Sunday morning we will wake up, go to the church and see empty pews, just like in Ireland.”

In his book, Father Dariusz Oko unmasks evil in the name of the truth and holiness of the Church. The words of St. Gregory the Great, which he quotes in the book, are crucial: “A spiritual guide must be careful not to be driven by a desire to please people. Rather, he must zealously nurture his inner life while managing external affairs. He must not seek the applause of the subjects but the truth.” As Father Oko remarks, writing such a book requires both honesty and courage. It has been a calling and a special task for him. He wrote it so

as to defend persons who were hurt within the Church: very often devout clerics, superiors at seminaries and lay people.

The book comprises a few articles that have already been published in various periodicals, which is punctiliously noted. There are three introductions, each of intrinsic value. The introduction by Fr. Marek Dziewiecki emphasizes the need to purify the Church. It is in some measure autobiographical: a testimony of a renowned spiritual director who organizes spiritual retreats. His experience helps him explore the topic of homosexuality in the Church: he sees its presence in dioceses, religious orders, various Church institutions, and last but not least at the Vatican. Fr. Dziewiecki shows the need to unmask the evil, but also emphasizes that “healing of the Church is possible when individual priests and laypeople who decide to follow Christ, more and more strongly defend Christ’s flock against wolves dressed up as shepherds.”

The second introduction by Fr. Robert Skrzypczak is suggestively entitled “To Look the Beast in the Eye.” This text refers to the Synod on marriage and family life held in 2014. It was then that cardinal Robert Sarah took up the issue of “the beast of the Apocalypse” which he identified with the network of the homosexual lobby within the Church. Fr. Skrzypczak firmly states that “evil and sin cannot be understated. We must understand that this is the Catholic Church, the Church of Christ and not His opponents who destroy Her.” The need to understand the identity of the Church is also present in the last introductory text, “Being Faithful to Christ”, by Paweł Lisicki. It is also based on the author’s personal experience from his stay in Vienna, Austria in 1996 when Archbishop Hans Herman Groër was accused of abusing a young cleric. Paweł Lisicki poses a fundamental question: “How come, it is the Church that has been controlled to such an extent by homosexuals?” and adds a second, even more substantial question: “If the Church has been internally paralysed, what is the ultimate goal of this?” The answer is both simple and dramatic: “What they mean is to destroy the Church as the witness to the truth.”

The text “On the Necessity to Curb ‘Homosexual Clans’ in the Church” by Fr. Oko, opens the main section of the book. It shows the scope of the problem, which is confirmed by present hierarchs of the Church: Pope Francis, Benedict XVI and Cardinal Oscar Maradiaga.

Fr. Oko remarks on his own efforts, doubtlessly groundbreaking, to denounce the sin of homosexual heresy in the past. He also points out the distinctive character of the Polish Church and theological milieu (marked by openness, deep identity and searching for the knowledge and experience of other local

Churches) of which he is an outstanding representative. The fact that Fr. Oko undertakes the issue of homosexual heresy attests to the heritage of his milieu and proves his commitment, moral sensitivity and courage.

Fr. Oko tries to explain the growing number of homosexuals among the clergy. He observes that such a great number of homosexual persons “in seminaries (in all countries) arises from the fact that seminaries were a place of refuge and shelter for men who had discovered their homosexual tendencies and were of religious background” (p. 85). The author demonstrates the degradation of certain individuals and the whole milieu. To illustrate his point, he gives telling examples: Cardinal Theodor McCarrick, Archbishop Rembert Weakland OSB, Fr. Battista Ricca who worked in the nunciature in Uruguay and Archbishop Józef Wesołowski, the former nuncio at the Dominican Republic.

Moral debasement is undoubtedly the most significant symptom of the fragmentation and destruction of the human identity, in this case the priestly identity. Moreover, in the case of clergymen it is an evil that harms the Church. As Fr. Oko observes, for homosexual priests this implies a process of increasing spiritual and moral deterioration.

The Author rightly observes that this process of self-destruction entails destruction of the Church as a community. He enumerates three groups that are victims of the iniquity: clergymen with similar homosexual inclinations, clergymen without such inclinations who are molested or blackmailed, and lay people who suffer huge spiritual losses because of the sin of their gay shepherds.

While showing the individual and community dimensions of the destruction, Fr. Oko reveals its important element: the consent of certain Church institutions which enables the march of homosexual ideology to continue. Moreover, “almost complete impunity of the criminals entails multiplying the wrongdoing caused to the victims and the Church” (p. 125).

By revealing the enormity of the evil and devastation, as well as the passivity and co-responsibility of certain people and Church institutions, the Author seems to paint a rather bleak picture. However, he does not sink into despair. On the contrary, he highlights the possibility and necessity for defence. His words are a powerful appeal that springs from the need for the credibility of the Church. Otherwise “the Church will destroy her authority herself, as many will begin to ask why listen to the Church at all, if she is going to yield to the world anyway, sooner or later succumb to the atheistic sexual revolution” (p. 132). Fr. Oko continues, “the Church owes self-purification to herself, her own good, as well as adult victims of homosexual clergymen, victims who are often still

devoid of proper care and abandoned (just like children and youth, victims of – so often homosexual – ephebophiles and pedophiles, had been left stranded).”

Father Oko, a discerning philosopher and theologian, unveils sources of hope, emphasizes the power of the truth and grace as well as perseverance that marks the arduous struggles of saints, the power of prayer and his own effort to live a Christian life. He is aware that this endeavour is resisted by the homosexual lobby. However, on the basis of theological sources of hope, one may move to a more practical level. Thus, Fr. Oko stresses the need to rely on truth and truth only, striving for the good. He reveals the obstruction of various information channels within the Church. He underscores the value of conversion, and yet realistically states that sometimes it is extremely difficult, or even, at times, “with man this is impossible”. Therefore, he recommends prayer and calls to defend those who are – or may be – potential victims. He thus concludes: “Opposing homosexual mafia in the Church bravely and consistently derives [...] from the duty of one’s conscience to admonish those who sin gravely and hurt heartlessly” (p. 159).

The second chapter of the book is called “With the Pope Against Heresy”. After showing the huge extent of the phenomenon, illustrated with blatant examples of scandals caused by certain hierarchs, Fr. Oko emphasizes the impunity of their actions and the fear that paralyzes their environment. He also analyzes the mechanism of forming homosexual milieus. He shows flaws in seminary formation, desire for “making it big” in the Church as well as the conspiracy of silence. He then discusses the struggles which Benedict XVI had to deal with, while handling the problem (p. 179). The achievements of his pontificate, in this respect, are briefly presented: the distinction between temporary homosexual inclinations and deeply rooted inclinations (a division which is more correct than the traditional one made between active and passive homosexuality); underscoring that homosexuality is incompatible with priestly vocation, and that a person’s temporary homosexual inclinations must be dealt with before they enter a seminary or novitiate; the importance of freeing the Church from any forms of homosexuality. Fr. Oko rightly points out that men with homosexual inclinations who have already been ordained will keep their ordination valid and are called to obey all God’s commandments and Church regulations. As the author remarks, the precisely defined rules mentioned above, have met with disapproval in various Church circles.

Fr. Oko also shows the Polish struggles regarding the issue. They all fall within one basic norm which is the love of the Church and Her truth. It is in the

name of this truth that Fr. Oko says: “We are all called to become saints in the Church of Jesus Christ thanks to grace and our effort, no matter where we are in the Church and as far as our personal development is concerned. One must only >>rise up and go<< (Cf J 14:31)” (p. 209).

Chapter 3 – “Partial Victory of the Truth” – presents reactions to Fr. Oko’s article “With the Pope Against Homosexual Heresy”. Various Church milieus together with unchallengeable authorities have approved of this text. It has been cited and published in Italy, the Czech Republic and Slovakia as well as in Germany. It has very good reviews from eminent representatives of the Church and academics. Against this background Fr. Oko analyzes Polish reactions to the text; public criticism expressed by certain circles.

Sharp criticism that goes beyond the rules of polemics makes it possible to discern the essence and importance of the issue under dispute. Thus, Fr. Oko presents the history of the Vatican’s *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders* of 2005. He also refers to the document by the Congregation for Catholic Education: *Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood*. Thereby, those who claim that men with homosexual tendencies can be ordained or admitted to seminaries, seem to lack the elementary knowledge of the issue or consciously oppose the teaching of the Magisterium. Therefore, it is highly important to explain precisely the conclusions of Vatican documents (which are hardly known) in a situation where one can hear voices which betray ambiguity or ignorance.

Chapter 4 – “Mass Media as the Key Space for Preaching and Defending Christian Personalism” – is not so much an interpretation of theoretical principles as the analysis of a case connected with Michał Wilkowski’s article “Ksiądz Oko pod lupą” [*Father Oko Under Scrutiny*] which appeared in 2015 in “Gazeta Wyborcza”. The article was an endorsement of another text – Fr. Krzysztof Charamsa’s “Teologia i przemoc” [*Theology and Violence*] which had been published in “Tygodnik Powszechny”. At that time Fr. Krzysztof Charamsa was an important official of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, second secretary to the International Theological Commission, and a lecturer at two pontifical universities. One could conclude from both articles that he provides a competent and authoritative critique of Fr. Oko’s actions and views. And yet, these two texts are an example of manipulation that aims at misinforming the reader regarding the teachings of the Church. This is not only an example

of polemics, but also a glaring example of manipulation by an alleged media authority who made a laughing stock of himself.

Polemics against liberal and left-wing journalists makes it possible for Fr. Oko to reveal the negative impact of certain media (including those that declare themselves Catholic) and to highlight the possibility of defending the truth and good in the media. Fr. Oko, who has often participated in television debates (both in the media critical of the Church and those that defend Her name) shares his experience in a competent and authoritative manner. At the same time, he formulates specific rules regarding the presentation of Catholic precepts in the media. It is worth mentioning that these rules are not part of social engineering but spring from the Gospel and methods which Christ himself used. Thus, they are deeply theological in nature.

The last chapter of the book presents the publication by Gerard J.M van den Aardweg “Die Wissenschaft sagt NEIN. Der Betrug der Homo-‘Ehe” [*Science Says NO: The Gay “Marriage” Deception*]. This book by one of the best and most effective critics of homosexual ideology, helps Fr. Oko to present critically one of the most outrageous postulates of homosexual milieus to make civil unions legal and recognize them as equal to marriage. Even though this issue does not concern the problems discussed above, one may notice that the promotion of homosexual unions takes place also in the Church. Thus, one may treat it as the growing impact of a homosexual lobby within the Church.

Instead of a Conclusion Fr. Oko includes Bishop Robert C. Morlino’s letter to the faithful concerning the present sexual abuse crisis in the Church. The letter is deeply moving, dramatic or even shocking when Bishop Morlino states “If you’ll permit me, what the Church needs now is more hatred!” He explains immediately: “As I have said previously, St. Thomas Aquinas said that hatred of wickedness actually belongs to the virtue of charity” (p. 332). The style of this letter aligns with the style of the whole book by Fr. Oko of which Fr. Robert Skrzypczak writes: “the book is shocking and full of anger. And yet this is the only attitude that a responsible father and authentic priest can take.”

The book differs from the usual rigors of strictly academic monographs. It is a compilation of thematically related articles, which necessarily entails repetition of certain threads. The value of the book lies in its authenticity, personal testimony and evangelical courage. The author, a well-known and respected philosopher, theologian and critic of gender ideology, is perceived by certain milieus in a one-dimensional manner. He is identified with gender ideology which – in the eyes of his critics – equals an uncritical attitude

towards the Church. That is why the book may surprise Fr. Oko's critics and opponents as it deals with pathologies inside the Catholic Church. This makes him credible as a man who does not treat the Church as a corporation. Rather, he proves the words of John Paul II, "man is the way of the Church", to be true and wise. Fr. Oko not only defends man in the Church and the Church as a community of men, but expresses his deep love towards the Church, "the holy Church of sinners." Thus, the book by Fr. Oko is a testimony of a witness who is reliable, competent and capable of proving his views with well-documented knowledge.

However, it is quite natural for a publication on sensitive issues to meet with polemics or criticism. As far as I am concerned, the words by Fr. Dziewiecki regarding the scope of homosexuality in seminaries seem to me a debatable issue. I may oppose them with my own testimony as a former head teacher and seminary superior. These are subjective judgements often impossible to "measure". However, I would suggest balancing such conclusions. One must remember that the Church includes the story of Theodor McCarrick but also the one of Cardinal George Pell, those who have scandalized the Mystical Body of Christ but also the community of known and unknown priests, nuns and monks who each day devotedly realize their calling to chastity.

The book by Fr. Oko has a characteristic subtitle: "With the Pope and Bishops Against Homosexual Clans in the Church." This significantly determines the Author's perspective – his aim is not to disgrace the Church, not to fight Her. Rather, he endeavours to cooperate in the work of cleansing Her face and renewing Her identity. Contrary to many articles and publications intended to undermine the credibility of the Church, Fr. Oko's book springs from his love for the Church.

Fr. Oko refers to Peter Damiani's "Liber Gomorrhianus", a text edited in 1049 urging the Church to deal with the issue. "Oh, how ashamed I am to speak of this," says Damiani in the beginning of his letter. "The sodomite plague like cancer destroys men of the Church," he continues.

With his passionately written work which is full of arguments, Damiani tried to draw the attention of Leo IX and later Alexander II. In vain. Leo IX, a true reformer at the Holy See, radically opposed simony and nicolaitanism. He thanked Damiani in a special letter emphasizing that the Church must indeed fight debauchery. However, referring to Damiani's request, he stated that sodomite actions must be punished more mildly as "we act in a more humane way."

One must hope that nowadays, the Church will take action according to the principle: “We must obey God rather than men.’ Peter and the apostles replied.” (Acts 5:29). This principle is what motivates Fr. Dariusz Oko.