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Comment and Analysis: Fr. Paul Shanley vs. Cardinal Medeiros

By John J. Gruetzok

BOSTON — Shortly after having assumed leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Boston, Humberto Cardinal Medeiros called Fr. Paul Shanley into his office. Shanley had been appointed by Cardinal Cushing, Medeiros' predecessor, as a "Minister to Alienated Youth" and spent the years working first as a street priest, then a drug rehabilitation counselor, and finally, a minister to sexual minorities. He related the history of his work under Cushing to Medeiros and then explained, "As I see it, the problem in the sixties was first with street people, then with drugs. In the seventies I see a time of sexual confusion." The Cardinal rose and put his arm around Shanley, "Go with my blessing. They won't like you, but then they won't like me because I'm Portuguese."

Last weekend, Shanley was again called into the Cardinal's office, this time to be sent away with less affection. The Cardinal informed Shanley that he had received three letters of complaint about the most recent educational tape Shanley had made. The tape, *Homosexuality. It's Debatable*, contained a debate between Shanley and Richard Lovelace, a conservative theologian on the subject of homosexuality. "I've made a series of tapes like this, and this was one of the most mild," Shanley explained. "After each tape the Cardinal would appoint a theological commission to see the results, but they could not find anything heretical in them." The Cardinal apparently found something objectionable in this tape, even though he admitted to Shanley that he had never listened to it, since at the end of the discussion he announced, "Well, in any case, whether you said it or didn't the time has come for you to stop this running around the country and find a parish to work in." "That sounds like a punishment to me," replied Shanley. "No it's not a punishment," insisted the Cardinal. "You're running around the country and I don't even know where you are." After which the Cardinal told Shanley about his own plans to run down to Mexico to see the Pope.

More seriously, the Cardinal may have been referring to Shanley's trip to Wichita to oppose the anti-gay referendum there. The Cardinal received a complaint about Shanley's presence from his colleague, Bishop Maloney of Wichita, after which Shanley was called in by the Cardinal and asked to resign from his position on the Young Adult Ministry Board.

Before Shanley was sent off to look for a new job, he and the Cardinal discussed other related topics. The Cardinal informed Shanley of his desire to have Fr. Charles Curran removed from the faculty of Catholic University because of Curran's "heresy." Curran, you see, has taken the stance that one can morally dissent in certain cases from the official hierarchical teaching of the Roman Church. *GCN* asked Curran why the Cardinal might have it out for him. "I have heard rumors to that effect," he responded. "I can't say for sure . . . perhaps for my stand on birth control and homosexuality." Asked to explicate his teaching on the morality of homosexuality, he answered, "I hold to what I call the 'theory of compromise.' It means that sexuality has meaning in terms of maleness and femaleness, but that anyone who without guilt or fault is an irreversible homosexual can engage in a homosexual relationship that is striving for permanency and be moral. I do not think that homosexual relationships are the ideal for everybody, but I'm only speaking of what I call the irreversible homosexual."

For this type of radical thinking, Curran is in hot water, and Shanley has been sent packing. Before being sent off to the Personnel Office to look for a parish that would have him, Shanley asked the Cardinal how the needs of Catholic Gays would be met. The Cardinal responded that gay people have no need for special ministry because they are welcome in the Church. Shanley objected that they would not be welcome if people knew that they were homosexual. "They have no business flaunting their homosexuality," declared the Cardinal.

On his way from the Cardinal's office to the Personnel Office, Shanley encountered a priest who he had been in seminary with, but had not seen for 18 years. He informed his confrere that the Cardinal had just ended his ministry. The other priest responded, "What were you doing? You were working with the fags, weren't you - if you'll excuse the expression." "No, I won't excuse the expression," answered Shanley as he turned and walked away.

Hopefully Shanley will find better job security in the future. The archdiocese has denied in the past that he even was appointed to have a ministry to sexual minorities, even though the Cardinal told a person interested in talking to him about the question of homo-

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Church Agency Offers Guides for Homosexuality, Abortion Debates

NEW YORK CITY — Guidelines for ecumenical debate on homosexuality and abortion have been approved by an agency of the National Council of Churches.

The Commission on Faith and Order includes 36 representatives of "mainline" Protestant, evangelical Protestant, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

According to Dr. Jorge Lara-Braud, executive director of the commission, "We have watched with dismay the growing division of Christians on the questions of homosexuality and abortion and have formulated these guidelines out of an ecumenical sensitivity which aspires to a more reasonable handling of opposing views on homosexuality and abortion."

Although the guidelines do not take any position on the two issues, they "are offered in the hope that Christian unity may grow and be maintained" during debate on the issues.

The commission states that it supports the right of churches to influence public policy, declaring that "political activity, which seeks to bring the social order into line with ethical convictions, based on religious commitment, does not violate the separation of church and state."

The guidelines point out, however, that "when extensive theological and moral differences preclude consensus on issues of public policy, it is unwise for individual Christians and denominations to advocate the closing of debate through restrictive laws."

The guidelines also assert that the "determination and protection of civil rights are of utmost importance. Individual Christians and denominations must call the state to account when the rights of citizens are denied or violated."

The guidelines state that "stereotyped notions and caricatures of people and positions must be avoided," and that all Christians "have a responsibility to see that all sides of a controversial issue are heard fairly and fully in ecumenical debate." That debate, the guidelines stress, must involve clergy, laity, women and men, young and old, church leaders and seminary faculties and students.

The Commission on Faith and Order also states that questions to be raised on debates on abortion and homosexuality should cover a number of issues. The Commission says those questions should include: What considerations should be taken into account in deciding that an "immoral action" should also be illegal? Is our understanding of human nature too much a function of scientific definitions? What sources are appropriate and adequate in determining that a given behavior or attitude is "unnatural"? How can we correct the long tradition that masculinity is normative for human nature?

People interested in obtaining a copy of the document may contact the Commission on Faith and Order, National Council of Churches, 475 Riverside Dr., New York City 10027.

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