

June of last year when the minister of the interior, Boris Gryzlov, acting in consort with high-ranking officials from the Prosecutor General's Office, the Interior Ministry's own "security" department, and the FSB (the post-Soviet "Federal Security Service," which, with relatively few changes of personnel, has replaced the once-notorious KGB of Yuri Andropov and others), staged raids on no fewer than 40 offices, apartments, suburban *dachas*, and banks owned, occupied, or frequented by officers of Moscow's Criminal Police and the so-called Ministry for Extraordinary Situations, which Boris Yeltsin had established to aid persons in distress and the victims of natural catastrophes. The astonishing thing about these raids was less the lackluster results—the arrests of six Criminal Police officers and of a lieutenant general of the MChS—than the carefully planned publicity accorded to the event by the Ministry of the Interior, which, for once, tipped off selected journalists in advance. As the newspaper *Kommersant* commented in an ironic headline: "The internal affairs [the ministry's official Russian title is "Ministry of Internal Affairs"] have come out into the open."

That the raids were above all an elaborate publicity stunt was obvious from the start. The authorities, a Muscovite explained to me, "had to enlist the cooperation of the press to try to persuade the public that they are really serious in their determination to clean up the police forces in this country." A few weeks before in St. Petersburg, strenuous efforts had been needed to maintain an "exemplary" semblance of order during the tercentennial "summit" celebrations organized in late May by the city's most famous "son," Vladimir Putin. Thousands of *byesprizorny* (vagrant and homeless) street urchins were accordingly rounded up in advance and quietly transported to a small tent colony some distance beyond the city limits. In effect, it was a concentration camp for juvenile delinquents. In addition—to the intense annoyance of offended Petersburgers, outraged to be regarded as incapable of handling their own security affairs—thousands of officers and agents from Moscow's Criminal Police were dispatched to the former imperial capital to impose a draconian "order" on a virtually fenced-in city.

The truly Gogolian magnitude of what is, in effect, an exceedingly complex politico-juridical and security problem was dramatically illustrated in July of last year

when Moscow's prosecutor, Mikhail Avdyukov, was "kicked upstairs" to join the staff of the Russian Federation's prosecutor general, Vladimir Ustinov, on the grounds that the Moscow office had covered up or fabricated evidence in no fewer than 9,000 cases, including 43 murders!

In the long run, the success or failure of Vladimir Putin's economic policies is likely to depend on his ability to instill a spirit of what is now being called "patriotic capitalism" into businessmen unscrupulously interested in enriching themselves by the many methods available. It will continue to be impossible for the Russian state to build up properly paid police and military forces if well-to-do citizens, particularly businessmen, go on finding subtle ways of not paying the taxes the federal government needs to fund such essential services. As Georgi Satarov, probably Russia's foremost specialist in matters of administrative graft, has pointed out, the amount that ordinary citizens pay out annually in bribes—about \$3 billion—is roughly half of what they pay in income taxes, while the sums that astute businessmen pay out in bribes to keep their enterprises running smoothly (about \$33 billion) was, in the year 2002, almost half of what the federal government was able to collect in revenues.

Is it surprising that a politician who has to grapple with such monumental problems should occasionally lose his calm? What has amazed many Russians and often made his jittery interpreters tremble in their polished shoes, however, has been the crude vulgarity, a kind of mixed jailbird and army-barracks slang, that Vladimir Putin has occasionally employed when harassed by journalists about the most intractable, the most insoluble, the most nightmarish of his problems: the present and future of the Caucasian province of Chechnya. Four years ago, in Moscow, he lost his temper, called the Chechen rebels "bandits," and declared: "We'll kill them all in the toilets!" Later, during a press conference in Brussels, at the end of a meeting with leaders of the European Union, he lashed out at a correspondent from *Le Monde* who had dared to ask him why so many innocent civilians were being killed in Chechnya: "Come on over and have a look, and we'll arrange to have you all circumcised!" In July of last year, after a Moscow pop concert had been unexpectedly rocked into bloody chaos and confusion by Chechen suicide bombers, Putin declared that he and his men would dig out such vermin

"from their cracked and fissured cellars, and exterminate them."

Even George W. Bush, in announcing (like Putin) that his forces would weed out the terrorists from every one of "their dark nooks and crannies," never went quite that far. Not yet, at any rate.

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Letter to the Bishop

by Joe Ecclesia

The Fornicators' Mass



Your Excellency:

Recently, I read in our diocesan newspaper of the "gay and lesbian Mass" offered at St. Peter's Church in Charlotte. According to the article, this Mass was a means of comforting those who have been ostracized by the Church and of ensuring a welcome for homosexuals that would incorporate Church teachings and pastoral concerns. Although I am not sure what this latter statement means, I assume that this is the place where someone in authority mentions that heavy breathing and entwined limbs outside of marriage and professional wrestling matches are big no-nos.

Although I must confess that I found it necessary to conceal the large front-page headline from the eyes of my 12-year-old—my son is still rather revolted by this idea of sex between men, though I am certain, with the assistance of the Church, government, and educational system, he'll come round one of these days—I read the article with avid interest. How wonderful that we have become such an inclusive Church, adding sodomites to the adulterers, thieves, and other sinners who weekly attend Mass and enjoy the Sacraments—excepting Confession, of course—in our *novus ordo seclorum*.

Msgr. Richard Allen, who received a standing ovation for his homily, called gays and lesbians "heroes." His remarks made me wonder if I had taken the right

path by marrying and raising a family. Should I have tried walking on the other side of the street, so to speak, so that I might also be a hero? That evening long ago in Boston's Combat Zone, when I refused the advances of that poor skinny fellow with the blond beard and damp lips: Was it then that my life took a wrong turn, costing me my opportunity to rise to the heights of heroism? Possibly, yet I just cannot seem to raise an interest in that direction. It's a question of defective genes on my part, no doubt, but what's a poor fellow to do?

But this is all by-the-by, Your Excellency. My purpose in this letter is to ask you to consider offering a diocesan-wide Fornicators' Mass. Several people in our parish are "living in sin" — how splendidly quaint that sounds! — and I am certain that it takes great courage for them to do so. It seems to me that they, too, deserve recognition as heroes. Having their own special Mass would surely help these people feel less ostracized and more a part of the Church. Since other parishes from around the diocese must also have adulterers and fornicators participating in the Mass and partaking of the Eucharist, I feel certain that this service would be well attended.

Such a Mass might provide a place for reconciliation and for wide recognition of heroism in today's Church. In the case of adultery, for example, we might invite both the injured spouse and the lover as well as any children involved on either side. This way, everyone could stand up and be courageous together. We could also explain, as the diocesan news article mentioned, that the justifications for these relationships, just like those of our homosexual brothers and sisters, are based on the insights of current human sciences — meaning, I suppose, those Masters, Johnson, and Kinsey "sciences" which teach us that humans are intended to hop onto one other with the frequency of rabbits.

During the Mass, we could release balloons bearing love lines from the Song of Solomon. To create a proper mood, we might also consider blending a few songs from the 60's — "Let's Spend the Night Together," "Help Me Make It Through the Night," and so on — into the Mass. Most of my fellow Catholics (who are, as you know, docile as sheep in regard to Church music) would sing lustily (and lustfully) along with these songs. (Perhaps we could even sing "Domenique." Your Excellency surely remembers Sr.

Luc-Gabrielle, the "singing nun" who made that little ditty a hit tune in the late 60's. Sister left the convent, declared herself a lesbian, and, in 1985, ended up a suicide by barbiturates. Was she also a hero?)

We would need banners, of course; I was thinking that we could find some adorned with Valentine's Day hearts. Indeed, perhaps the feast day of Saint Valentine would be the ideal day for the Fornicators' Mass. We might also consider issuing a pendant bearing a scarlet "A" to participants, thereby transforming what once was a mark of shame into a badge of honor.

Somewhere in the homily, the priest might be inspired, as apparently the priests who address our homosexual brothers and sisters are, to tell his listeners that all the baptized have the right to the Church and Her Sacraments and that the Church has an obligation to welcome them with joy and thanksgiving for their many talents. No one need bring up the old idea of sin; the very mention of *mea culpa*, *mea culpa*, *mea maxima culpa* would put a damper on the whole liturgy, which is why our gay homosexuals never bring up the subject. (Here I am using *gay* in its antiquated and adjectival sense, Your Excellency, to mean happy or celebratory.)

Such a Mass, particularly if we keep the music lively and the homily upbeat, will undoubtedly prove popular and may even lead to the establishment of other theme Masses. As a former swiller of anything alcoholic — I did draw the line at aftershave lotion — I can tell you with some authority that there would be great interest in a Drunkards' Mass. Unlike homosexuals, alcoholics are only heroic after they have abandoned their vice; but I'm sure we can slip this difference past everyone without causing a ruckus. The diocese could offer a Thieves' Mass for certain local businessmen, a Gossips' Mass for almost everyone, and a Millstone Around the Neck Mass for some of our Faith Formation teachers. In the latter Mass, let me suggest that you go out of your way to reassure our teachers that Christ's admonition to those who deceive or mislead the young — that it would be better if they were thrown into the sea with a stone about their necks — was just another example of His offbeat humor.)

I invite you to consider these proposals, Your Excellency. Keeping you in my prayers,

Joe Ecclesia

Letter From Mexico

by V. Groginsky

Portrait of a Failed Society



To paraphrase one observer of Albanians, "Mexico is not a society with corruption; Mexico is a corrupt society." Mexico has been undergoing a social crisis since the end of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional's 71-year monopoly on political power. Gone is the state's patronage of competing interests, populism that succeeded by co-opting all opponents. The coffers have run dry, and a culture that has long been raised to take, not make — to steal, not deal — is finding itself ill adapted to the modern world.

Recently, Mexican news editorials cried "racism!" lambasting Californians for daring to elect a governor who protects their interests. "*Mexicans built that country*," claimed one commentator on a leading nightly news program. "We fed your cattle, harvested your crops, washed your dishes. *You owe your wealth to us*."

He failed to mention the illegal immigrants who have bankrupted California's social services, the jobs they have taken away from Americans, the billions of dollars repatriated annually to Mexico, and the extensive crime inflicted on Americans.

The Mexican nation suffers a pathological contradiction in self-perception, a reverse Napoleonic complex of sorts. They perceive themselves as grander than the statistics tell — in culture, geostrategic position, and socioeconomic and infrastructure development. This overinflated self-image masks an inferiority complex, used to justify noncompliance with internationally accepted norms of behavior or contractual obligations. Mexicans claim exemption from conventional obligations and standards: "Hey, this isn't the United States: *This is Mexico*. If you don't like how we do things here, *go home*." Too often wont to fault their successful international competitors, Mexican have a willful lack of innovation and integrity that lies at the root of the failures they attribute to others.

Globalism has forced Mexican society to confront its inadequacies, which has helped undermine traditional Mexican values and customs. One Mexican psychiatrist opined that "this has caused