



<http://www.CatholicCitizens.org>

The Battle for the Soul of the Archdiocese of San Francisco

Tuesday, April 11, 2006

By Valerie Schmalz - IgnatiusInsight.com.

SAN FRANCISCO, March 30, 2006 _ A firestorm of defiance over Church teaching on homosexuality has been ignited following the appointment of George Niederauer as archbishop of San Francisco and a Vatican directive telling San Francisco Catholic Charities to halt gay adoption. Two Catholic institutions are in open dissent on homosexuality: Catholic Charities, which continues to assert its right to place children with homosexual parents, and the Jesuit University of San Francisco, which has a decades-long history of nurturing homosexual ideology and expressions. Meanwhile, at least two pastors in San Francisco-area parishes not dominated by homosexuals gave sermons last week supporting adoption by homosexuals.

Niederauer's appointment offered hope to some advocating Church acceptance of homosexuality. At the same time, faithful Catholics have been watching closely and carefully, taking to heart comments from some within the Archdiocese of San Francisco that they will be "pleasantly surprised" by how Niederauer governs this See. As one San Franciscan said: "We're waiting to see what team he is on." "It's a time for courage," said Father Joseph Fessio, S.J., editor-in-chief of Ignatius Press and provost of Ave Maria University in Naples, Florida. "And for leaders who will speak the truth in love despite the fierce resistance of the uncomprehending or the hostile. Archbishop Niederauer will need the prayers and support of his flock."

Niederauer himself has barely been in San Francisco. He was installed February 15th, spent a week on a bishops' retreat, and was to return March 29th from more than a week in Rome. He was there attending the elevation to cardinal of his predecessor, high school and seminary friend William Levada, the prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith. "Give the guy time to settle into the saddle," Niederauer spokesman Maurice Healy said March 28th in response to an inquiry from IgnatiusInsight.com. "As he said at the news conference (announcing Niederauer's appointment in December) and after-he's got a steep learning curve. He needs to talk with people and learn everything about the archdiocese. That's where he is - pretty much in learning mode," Healy said.

Here's what has happened in the two months surrounding Niederauer's February 15 installation:

Two talks attacking Church teaching on homosexuality were held at local parishes in San Francisco, including one on February 12 at the parish of the chancellor of the archdiocese entitled "Queer Perspectives". Both featured openly homosexual theologians and Scripture scholars from Jesuit universities. The second talk, given on March 26, included a Santa Clara University lesbian Scripture scholar describing her sexual relationship as a matter of "grace" that gave "glory to God." The talks were paid for by the Jesuit Foundation, which is funded by the Jesuit community of USF.

The executive director of Catholic Charities defended placement of children for adoption in homosexual households despite a March 9th e-mail from the new prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith saying such placements must stop. Brian Cahill, executive director of Catholic Charities in San Francisco, also said the archdiocesan spokesman did not speak for the archbishop in saying no more homosexual adoptions would occur.

Several self-described "practicing Catholics" on the governing legislative body of the city, the Board of Supervisors, joined in a unanimous resolution condemning the Vatican for meddling in city affairs and urging Catholic Charities to defy a Vatican directive barring homosexual adoptions. The mayor of San Francisco, Gavin Newsom, decided not to attend the elevation of the former archbishop as cardinal because of Levada's directive regarding homosexual adoption.

Janet Reilly, the host of the August 2005 going away dinner for now-Cardinal Levada (and the wife of the president of CYO Catholic Charities), posted a March 21 statement on her campaign website supporting homosexual adoption placements by Catholic Charities. Reilly is running for the state assembly. Reilly previously opposed a bishop-backed November ballot initiative to require parental notification of a minor's intent to procure an abortion.

The pastor of the flagship Jesuit parish, St. Ignatius, delivered a sermon Wednesday, March 22, at the 8:00 a.m. Mass and again at the 9:30 a.m. Mass (the parish's "family Mass") on Sunday, March 26, saying the Vatican teaching against adoption by homosexuals is not infallible and does not need to be obeyed. Father Charles Gagan, S.J., described the Magisterium teaching as "mean-spirited." His comments were greeted with applause at the Sunday Mass. Gagan had not returned a call for comment from IgnatiusInsight.com at deadline. According to a Mass goer in attendance, Father John L. Greene, a pastor at St. Monica's parish, recently gave a similar sermon. Fr. Greene reportedly stated that gay adoption should be allowed by Catholic Charities. Fr. Greene refused to comment to IgnatiusInsight.com.

The Church, Marriage, and Homosexuality

The Catholic Church teaches that marriage was created by God to be solely between a man and woman, and is an essential institution of society intended to bring both husband and wife and their children to God through his plan of creation. The Church also teaches that homosexual acts distort God's plan for creation. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that 'homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.' They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved" (par. 2357).

While persons inclined to homosexuality are called to perfection through grace, the practice of homosexuality and the expression of its inclinations in any way is never in congruence with God's plan, the Church teaches. The 2003 document, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons*, issued by the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith and approved by Pope John Paul II, states:

There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family. Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law. Homosexual acts "close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

This has always been the teaching of the Church, the document continues: Sacred Scripture condemns homosexual acts "as a serious depravity... (cf. Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:10; 1 Tim 1:10). This judgment of Scripture does not of course permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered". This same moral judgment is found in many Christian writers of the first centuries and is unanimously accepted by Catholic Tradition.

Seana Sugrue, associate professor of politics at Ave Maria University in Ann Arbor, Michigan, notes that the Church opposes same sex marriage and homosexual adoption because homosexuality goes against the God-created nature of humans and because they undermine two of the fundamental institutions of society-marriage and family. Already no-fault divorce and artificial contraception have damaged children's expectation to be raised in a loving, stable home that is open to life, Sugrue said. Same sex marriage and gay adoption take that degeneration in the fabric of society to another level. "It's devastating on many levels," Sugrue told IgnatiusInsight.com. "It starts with the kids. But the ramifications go beyond family life. It ends up destroying traditional religion because children are increasingly not reared in traditional structures. It weakens everything from business to democracy. It's very, very destructive."

The 2003 CDF document states that placing a child in a homosexual household is damaging to the child because of what is inherently lacking in homosexual relationships, not matter how well-intentioned the homosexual parents. "As experience has shown, the absence of sexual complementarity in these unions creates obstacles in the normal development of children who would be placed in the care of such persons," the document states. "They would be deprived of the experience of either fatherhood or motherhood. Allowing children to be adopted by persons living in such unions would actually mean doing violence to these children, in the sense that their condition of dependency would be used to place them in an environment that is not conducive to their full human development. This is gravely immoral."

Homosexual Advocates Hopeful About Niederauer

These official teachings, however, have been ignored or even attacked by some within the Church. "I was probably as nervous as the next person when Cardinal Ratzinger was elected as Pope Benedict XVI," said Rev. Cameron Ayers, S.J., pastor of St. Agnes Church, at a gay-lesbian forum sponsored by the University of San Francisco on March 26, 2006. But, in the question and answer format following the formal talks, Ayers said, "His choices of bishops in the United States have been some of the finest choices we've had in a generation. The choice of Randolph Calvo to be sent to Reno, Nevada, the choice of George Niederauer for this diocese, and the choice of Larry Silva of Oakland to be sent to Honolulu" are encouraging.

Ayers said dialoguing with Niederauer - who has "had a lot of experience listening and dialoguing with persons in the gay and lesbian community," during years at a homosexual-dominated West Hollywood parish - is one way to start getting the Church to change its teaching on homosexuality. "I still think the day that the first bishop gets up in the pulpit and comes 'out' will be a day that will go down in Catholic history and will be spoken of for generations to come," Ayers said.

Even the San Francisco board of supervisors appears to believe the new archbishop shares their point of view. A virulently anti-Catholic resolution against the proposed ban on gay adoptions by Catholic Charities pointedly targeted the Vatican and Levada but notably avoided mentioning Niederauer. Father Richard John Neuhaus' essay "The Truce of 2005?" in the February 2006 issue of First Things outlines faithful Catholics' concerns about the new pope and some of his appointments. In the essay, Neuhaus describes Niederauer as having a reputation in Salt Lake City as "gay friendly" and notes, "The announcement of his appointment to San Francisco was met with great public rejoicing by Dignity, New Ways Ministry, and other gay advocacy groups."

But Neuhaus found hope in Niederauer's May 17th statement about gay adoption and Catholic Charities. "We fully accept and faithfully teach what the Catholic Church teaches on marriage and family life," Niederauer said. "That's an encouraging reassurance that the archdiocese is intent on representing and observing Catholic faith and practice without compromise," Neuhaus recently told IgnatiusInsight.com. "One has to hope and pray and offer every encouragement for the leadership of Archbishop Niederauer in an extremely important See of the Catholic Church of the United States."

Church Teaching Under Fire In Catholic Charities' Same-Sex Adoptions

There's little doubt that a daunting test of the new archbishop will be the issue of homosexual adoptions facilitated by Catholic Charities. Niederauer returned to San Francisco Wednesday, March 29, and now faces a black and white situation. Directives from the prefect and his predecessor say no more homosexual adoptions can occur. Since 2000, five children of 136 were placed with homosexuals by Catholic Charities. State and city laws and regulations may require that homosexuals be considered when adoption placements are made by any agency operating in San Francisco or California.

Cahill has said that Catholic Charities will continue to place children with homosexuals. Archdiocesan spokesman Healy said there will be no more gay adoptions, clarifying a statement by Niederauer issued a couple of days before he left for Levada's elevation in Rome. Niederauer's statement, given to IgnatiusInsight.com on March 17, is as follows: "We fully accept and faithfully teach what the Catholic Church teaches on marriage and family life. In light of these convictions, we currently are reviewing our adoption programs to determine concretely how we can continue to best serve children who are so much in need of a home. We realize that there are people in our community, some working side by side with us to serve the needy in society, who do not share our beliefs, and we recognize and respect that fact." At Catholic Charities itself, there appears to be a culture of strong advocacy for homosexual parenthood. Cahill's second in command, Glenn Motola, is a gay adoptive father although he adopted his child through another agency.

Dissenting Institutions, Queer Perspectives

The second Catholic institution that nurtures dissent from Church teaching on homosexuality is the Jesuit University of San Francisco. The February 12 and March 26 LGBTQ Caucus talks, billed as "dialogues," were sponsored and funded by organizations of the University of San Francisco, a Jesuit institution. The March 26 event was to feature USF President Stephen Privett as moderator but he was invited to Levada's elevation in Rome on March 24 and could not attend. A telephone call and e-mail to Privett had not been answered by deadline. In the past, Privett has likened coming out as a homosexual to living the Beatitudes. In his homily at the 2003 Baccalaureate Mass, according to an article in San Francisco Faith, Privett said, "A student talked about the difficulties he faced in coming to grips with his own homosexual orientation. He feared the rejection of family members and the ridicule of friends. He had to be as he was created to be by a loving God. He came out. It is not easy for him. Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness."

At the St. Agnes forum March 26, USF assistant professor of theology Vincent Pizzuto said homosexuals should come "out" to their parish community. "One of the basic goals of dialogue is the humanization of the other. For us to be 'out' to the Church. To risk disclosure in your own communities is a form of dialogue. Letting people know that you are their eucharistic ministers, their priests and their deacons, or their Sunday school teachers."

At the same talk, self-described "Catholic lesbian" Catherine Murphy, Santa Clara University New Testament and gender studies scholar, advocated gay adoption and Church acceptance of the practice of homosexuality. "I yearn for the day when my fellow Catholics and Christians can judge my love, not by the sex of my partner, but by the quality and fruits of the love itself, for surely these do not only testify to the source of love but give glory to God as well," Murphy told the group of about 100 gathered inside St. Agnes church. "On this at least (homosexuality) the teaching authority of the Church is given no credence by so many gay men and lesbians because it does not demonstrate its own credibility. To the contrary, its teachings on homosexuality are so disengaged from reality as to render them utterly ridiculous," said Pizzuto.

The February 12th talk was titled "Is It Ethical to Be Catholic? Queer Perspectives - Community in Conversation with Fr. James Allison" and was held at Most Holy Redeemer, the parish of the chancellor of the archdiocese, the Rev. Stephen Meriwether. The March 26 event was titled "Alienated Catholics: Establishing the Groundwork for Dialogue." It included the Jesuit pastor of St. Agnes Church as one of the three speakers. Ayers began his talk by criticizing a Church that required his father to get an annulment of his first marriage as a condition of entry to the Church. "The church is the people of God - it's you and me. It's the lesbian mom who brings her daughter to be baptized at St. Agnes...it's the young gay man who is afraid to inquire about entering the seminary because he's not worthy according to Vatican documents. He's as much a part of the Church as Cardinal Levada is. Baptism has made us all equal," said Ayers. Asked about his comments and hosting of the presentation, Ayers told IgnatiusInsight.com, "You know, I don't wish to speak to you."

Both talks were sponsored by the USF LGBTQ Caucus, which describes itself as composed of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, and allied straight USF faculty, staff, graduate students, and alumni/ae. The Jesuit Foundation, funded by the USF Jesuit community, underwrote both events. Asked about his parish's participation, Most Holy Redeemer pastor and archdiocesan chancellor Meriwether told IgnatiusInsight.com, "You'd have to speak to USF. We weren't in charge of the presentation, nor did we see it beforehand." Meriwether told IgnatiusInsight.com on March 28th that he did see the advance flyers and did not have a problem with them. Asked what he believes, including whether he believes homosexuals should practice celibacy rather than engage in homosexual relationships, Meriwether said repeatedly, "I believe what the church teaches."

According to event publicity, the Most Holy Redeemer event was funded by the USF Jesuit Foundation "to engage USF, the Catholic public, and civic and religious leaders in dialog, research and advocacy around gay and lesbian rights." Most Holy Redeemer participates each year in the Gay Pride Parade, an often profane and obscene celebration of homosexuality "because the parish sees it as an outreach to a disaffected portion of the Catholic community," Meriwether said.

James Allison began his talk by saying he converted to Catholicism because he had a crush on a straight Catholic man. Allison, who describes himself as an itinerant Dominican based in London, told his audience that Pope Benedict XVI is sympathetic to homosexuality. His privileging of monogamous heterosexual marriage as an especially blessed form of love in his recent encyclical should not, I think, be read as a blow against same-sex love. It leaves room for us and I suggest that we read it as an invitation for us to work out what the rich elements and gifts of same-sex love can be. How we are to set about creating a Catholic culture of same-sex love. It's up to us!" Allison said.

Political Catholics

Navigating a safe passage for the Catholic Church in San Francisco will be a particularly thorny job for the archbishop. Within San Francisco city government, all elected officials publicly disagree with the Church on matters of abortion and homosexuality. Mayor Gavin Newsom calls himself a "practicing Catholic" who disagrees with the Church on same sex marriage, abortion, artificial contraception, divorce and embryonic stem cell research. Newsom was an honored guest at the going away dinner for Levada in August, and traditionally attends the annual Catholic Charities fundraiser dinner. This despite a history of pro-gay and pro-abortion activism, including his speech to a pro-abortion rally designed to stop the first Walk for Life West Coast on January 22, 2005, his issuance of marriage licenses to same sex couples, and his work lobbying to bring a state embryonic stem cell and cloning center to San Francisco.

Board of Supervisors members include Sean Elsbernd and Michaela Alioto-Pier, heterosexual and married, who both say they attend church regularly. Both voted for the resolution condemning Levada and the Vatican on homosexual adoption. Tom Ammiano, a homosexual and a former schoolteacher, rose to prominence advocating gay

rights after the slaying of Harvey Milk by a fellow supervisor. As a school board member, Supervisor Ammiano spearheaded the implementation of a sexual education curriculum in city schools that presents homosexuality and its permutations as equal to heterosexuality. Calling himself a "gay Catholic" as well as a father and a grandfather, Ammiano is a father by virtue of sperm donation to a lesbian couple.

Running for the state Assembly is the aforementioned Janet Reilly. Reilly is running on a pro-abortion platform that included a link to a pro-abortion site that attacked an initiative to require parental notification of a minor's intent to procure an abortion. The measure, which failed in the November 2005 election, was backed by the California Catholic Conference. Reilly is now using her campaign website to support gay adoptions by Catholic Charities. In a March 21 post, Reilly said: "For me, the choice is clear - we should put our children first by continuing the long time practices of Catholic Charities of placing children with any stable and loving household. To do otherwise, would be to discriminate against gay and lesbian Americans and it would also punish our children, many of whom are languishing in the foster care system."

What Next in San Francisco?

Thus, for George Niederauer, the new archbishop of San Francisco, and for San Franciscans, a challenge awaits. As he recounted at a news conference after his appointment was announced, his predecessor and high school buddy, William Levada had two words of advice for him: "Take courage." At that news conference in December, Niederauer said he saw his role as bishop as "priest, prophet and shepherd."

Asked by reporters how he would reconcile the "conservative" positions of the Church with this "liberal" city, Niederauer said: "I want to get past labels. I think the ministry of Christ, the ministry of Christ in his Church is to meet men, women and children everywhere...to each the Good News which is the Good News for right, left and center."