

**I am grateful to Joe for passing along this article.**

**If celibacy is such a jewel why won't the pope let us look at it?**

by Eugene Cullen Kennedy

Determined to put down any threat to his already tottering autocracy, Tsar Nicholas allowed his troops to shoot into the crowds who were gathering before his palace seeking to tell him of his people's widespread grievances. Is this the precedent for deploying Vatican sharpshooters on the roof of St. Peter's to pick off anybody, from low level Catholics to high ranking Cardinals, who tells the Pope that celibacy may not be the "brilliant jewel" he thinks it is.

Bullets began chipping the marble close to Austria's Cardinal Schonbrun after he said that a frank discussion of celibacy was a necessary part of the response to the sex abuse scandal. Roman journalist Sando Magister used buckshot to describe Schonbrun as the head of an "off-kilter" Church who by such a statement about celibacy is just reacting to "the pressure of public opinion." Magister's shot, cheap by any measure, signals the curial worker bees to swarm through the Vatican hive to buzz supportive remarks, also cheap by any measure, supporting celibacy as, well, a brilliant jewel, just like the Pope says. The Pope topped off the Year of the Priest by telling 10,000 good priests at the Vatican (the papal equivalent of what the first Mayor Daley of Chicago called a "ruly crowd" at City Council meetings) that celibacy is, well, a jewel and it is not going to be pried out of its setting. It would be "a scandal," he said, only in "a world where God is not there."

If that's clear to everybody -- or to anybody -- we still wonder why celibacy that was not brought down from the mountain by Moses or preached by Jesus, is defended as if it really were the crown jewel of Christendom?

James Carroll recently offered a brilliant analysis of celibacy's relationship to the power driven clerical culture. Vatican sharpshooters are not defending celibacy but the clerical culture that could not exist without it. Clerical culture is high class male bonding that is often referred to as a celebration of fraternity. There is truth in that, of course, but clerical culture has more than an incidental similarity to a college fraternity that promotes good times, secrecy, exclusivity and privileges not granted to others. More importantly it promotes the fulfillment of ambition and an endowment with power. Men who make Skull and Bones at Yale often end up running the country. Men who embrace Roman clerical culture often end up running the Church.

There was a period in which clerical culture was a fun-filled place for healthy priests who were given enormous support by it and by the larger Catholic culture in which it was set. That culture enabled men to accept celibacy because its tone was set by the healthy priests who belonged to it. That culture shifted after Vatican II, as did the host Catholic culture around it. Even then, as studies

of the priesthood done for the American bishops 40 years ago showed, most priests adjusted to celibacy rather than found it fulfilling in itself. They were like bachelors or favorite uncles, as they described themselves, who needed the extra boost that privileges that celibacy earned for them.

Celibacy is vigorously defended because any questioning of it is a threat to the power center clerical culture that controls the Church at this time. Modify celibacy and this culture would collapse quickly. Allow women priests and the same culture would be under a siege that it knows that it cannot withstand. If celibacy is so self-evidently wonderful, we may ask, why are Church officials, from the Pope down, so defensive about it? If it is such a brilliant jewel, why won't they let us take a closer look at it? If it is filled with light, why do they keep it in the dark? Didn't Jesus warn us to be careful of those who prefer the darkness to the light?

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**Douglas W. Kmiec is the U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Malta. He writes here for *America* magazine and points out that his expressed views are personal.**

### **MY FATHER'S DREAM**

My father dreamed—even when he was not asleep. Scarcely a world problem went unresolved in my father's dreams, and there was scarcely a powerful political figure or captain of industry whom my father did not readily let in on his dreams through ample, handwritten messages.

These dreams, as my father dreamed them, created jobs, reduced global warming, delivered health care to the poor and the elderly and made substantial headway on a cure for cancer—all before lunch. Sadly, it turns out the cancer cure still needs work. But until that illness ravaged his physical strength, my father communicated his dreams freely, expecting neither credit nor recognition. In fact, few of his dreams were even acknowledged.

Neither Bill Clinton nor the Bushes nor George Steinbrenner ever referred to my father's counsel. My father greatly admired the philanthropic and disaster relief work of Bill Clinton as an ex-president. But married to Mom for 60 years, he was troubled and saddened by President Clinton's "fooling around," as Dad put it. Nevertheless, as far as the world knew, President Clinton decided to give greater honor to his marital vows all on his own, even without Dad's note to him urging fidelity and circumspection. Was it Walter Mitty braggadocio for Dad to take personal satisfaction in watching the president "straighten out his act"? Maybe to some, but Dad's advice was seldom just a repetition of the prevailing headline. From the beginning, Dad thought the president deserved a private conversation with his pastor, not public impeachment. Dad reached this conclusion long before much of the nation—and later the special prosecutor himself—had second thoughts about what many now see as a mistaken use of prosecutorial authority.

Dad wrote the Bushes a lot. Because ambassadors must avoid commenting in a personal essay about continuing military commitments, I will let you draw your own inferences about what Dad had to say. These were one-way conversations.

Putting to one side whether Dad should get footnote credit for much of recent world history, I found his life to be an invaluable lesson in political participation. Especially salutary was his firm belief that in our democracy it is up to the regular guy—not just David Brooks or Mark Shields or even Glenn Beck or Bill O'Reilly—to demonstrate an appreciation for freedom of speech.

Dad did not dream only politically, either. With the skin-flinty corporate owners of the Cubs keeping Chicago out of World Series since well before his birth, my father seldom hesitated to let George Steinbrenner know how his checkbook was “ruining the game” of baseball. Steinbrenner didn't take the hint—if one can call a letter in all caps, pressed hard on school notebook paper a hint.

Most famous personages would ignore my father's dreams. Sometimes the lack of response would perturb him. After Mom passed away five years ago, Dad felt even more intensely the loneliness and separation shared by millions of the elderly who had followed the sun, far from their children and grandchildren, in Buffalo, Philly, Detroit, St. Louis and other rustbelt cities. Life for young families today is two-income busy, and any time left to share dreams with seniors is but a truncated add-on to Disneyworld or Busch Gardens or Christmas visits sandwiched into the lines of holiday travel.

Dad did discover, however, a way to open the minds of others to his dreams. By sending \$5 or \$10 to a growing list of charities, he shared widely not only his dreams, but his poetry, songs and inspirational prayers. In return, gratitude, for the money at least, would flow in abundance to his numbered mailbox at the trailer park where he lived. Bulk mail would overtax the “mail lady,” for whom my father made dutiful expressions of empathy. Mother Nature appeared to follow Dad's lead, matching his philanthropy for disaster victims with an increased frequency of earthquakes, tsunamis and airport-closing volcanoes.

Often my father cleaned out his closets—removing baseball caps, shirts and years of accumulated Father's Day stuff he was too nice to say didn't fit. Driving into his neighborhood, one would encounter many poor children and their parents wearing his Ralph Lauren shirts with their tattered jeans, not to mention a disproportionate number of Notre Dame and Cubs' fans, to judge by the caps.

My father was a lifelong Democrat, the workingman's party, and he thought highly of President Obama's experience as a community organizer. “Tell the president,” Dad would insist (as if Barack and I ate breakfast together every morning), “that he needs to direct every dime he can to jobs.”

My father understood intimately the dignity of work and the indignity of foreclosure. Vivid in his memory was the sight of his own mother pleading with the sheriff, during a notorious Chicago thunderstorm, not to toss the family's furniture and the six Kmiec children into the street. That was after the crash of 1929. In a brief autobiography inspired by Tom Brokaw's book, *The Greatest*

*Generation*, my father described how his “mother was crying so hard,” he couldn’t “differentiate her tears from the driving rain and her sobs from the relentless thunder.”

Until the financial collapse of September 2008, many smugly assumed that nothing like the Great Depression could happen again. We know better now, though the present economic pain has been more unevenly felt than it was in the 1930s, when 10 million were put out of work.

In a similar way, this generation’s experience with military matters is more ambivalent in light of the attacks on Sept. 11 and the tragically executed Iraq war. An all-volunteer force immunizes many from the costs of war, and that may plague us with an insufficient strategic assessment. By contrast, my father’s generation faced military service as an “enlist or be drafted” proposition. After he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces, the B-17 Flying Fortress bomber made real Dad’s heroic dreams as he played his part in the unambiguous good of stopping the Holocaust. The military also gave him three squares at a time when he was just plain hungry.

It is less clear that fighting the shadowy, highly mobile, not easily understood Al Qaeda conveys a comparably noble feeling. It should, so long as it shares with my father’s military service the need for vigilance against the common enemies of all good dreams—ethnic or racial hatred, poverty and the pernicious misuse of religion to slaughter the innocent in the name of God.

The name Kmiec is of Polish origin, and the small farming village from which my father’s father emigrated is not far from Oswiecim (Auschwitz). My father knew what a genuine war crime looked like, whether perpetrated near his ancestral home or in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania by 19 men in possession of commandeered jets and lacking respect for the sanctity of human life.

My father died a few weeks ago in home hospice care in Florida. To both his sons at his side the Father’s Day lesson is inescapable: As we check our voice mails, BlackBerries and inboxes, let us not be too busy to notice all those who, like my father, freely give of their dreams. By the Cross and Resurrection, Christ offers us a vision of unconditional love. The dreams of men are frequently their Christ-like offers of love. We can’t lose in taking them up. Why? Listen to my father’s voice, now fallen silent but forever clearly heard by the family and friends who took the time to share his dreams: “because we have faith, courage and enthusiasm.”

With those qualities, Dad, we are confident your dreams of eternity are being fulfilled.

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**Daniel O’Rourke Dan is a married Catholic priest who lives in Cassadaga, NY. His newspaper column appears on in the Observer, Dunkirk, NY on the second and fourth Thursday each month.**

## **Greed Is Killing Us**

Gordon Gekko is a fictional character in Oliver Stone's film "Wall Street." In that film Michael Douglas won an Oscar for the role, in which Gekko notoriously proclaimed the Wall Street mantra, "Greed is good." The Gekko character is loosely based on the market manipulator Ivan Boesky and the (in)famous corporate raider Carl Icahn.

Wall Street may have thought that greed is good, but it isn't. In the old catechism greed is one of the seven Cardinal Sins. It ranks right up there with anger, lust, pride and a few other nasty human traits. Religions, history and spirituality tell us that greed is immoral, that greed is evil. The old, out-of-fashion Biblical word is sin -- a deadly sin, and as current events are showing it is causing much death and destruction.

The Oxford English Dictionary (not the Baltimore Catechism) defines greed as an "intense and selfish desire for food, wealth, or power." Another dictionary calls it "an overwhelming desire to have more of something such as money than is actually needed." That selfish, overwhelming desire is precisely what has caused the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico -- and many of the debilitating crises that now engulf our nation and world.

Victor Davis Hanson, a historian at the Hoover Institution, wrote an article a few years ago entitled "America's Nervous Breakdown - Should It Continue, a World Breakdown May Follow." Well, it has continued; now the world too is having its breakdown -- and greed has caused it.

It was greed for more and more profits that motivated British Petroleum to cut corners and compromise safety in the recent horrendous disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. Greed was at the bottom of Wall Street's decisions on derivatives: to trade them, to bundle them, to sell them internationally and thereby jeopardize the American and European economies. Greed motivated both Bernie Madoff and those who lusted for unrealistic financial returns in his damnable Ponzi scheme.

Greed is also a common cause for the growing number of embezzlements in local governments and parish churches. Moreover, the motivation for much embezzlement is to pay off gambling debts. Indeed, addiction to gambling itself is another species of greed: an intense desire for easy and excessive wealth. And society supports this illusion. Many states encourage lotteries to bolster floundering budgets, and casinos pile up across the nation like chips on a roulette table.

But another aspect of greed in our society is much more troubling. In this case greed is not only huge; it is colossal. The Military Industrial Complex, of which President Dwight Eisenhower warned us in his farewell address to the nation, feeds this greed. It is the association between the government, the military and industry. The relationship includes research, construction of weapons and equipment, and funding for military training and bases. Enormous sums of taxpayer money are involved -- especially in the manufacturing of highly

technical weapon systems. Billions of dollars tie government to the military and to industry. Eisenhower was President; he had been a General in the military and knew this game and the corrupt playing field all too well.

The Military Industrial Complex prompts the Pentagon to lobby for, and Congress to fund weapon systems that are hideously expensive, frequently overpriced, and often as in the case of the F-22 Stealth Bomber, obsolete and no longer needed. An overwhelming desire for billions in profit keeps this vicious cycle rolling along.

In some ways greed sometimes motivates war itself. War demands more, bigger and more expensive weapons. Manufacturing these weapons nets billions for industry. These pressures are subtle, but they are real.

The tentacles of greed, however, also reach deep into non-military structures of the nation. Consider Ethanol and agribusiness subsidies, pressures on corporations and money managers to show larger returns to stockholders, high energy prices (think Enron and its accountant Arthur Andersen). Greed is all around us. It has helped shape our society and Frankenstein-like it is destroying us.

What Henry Ward Beecher, the prominent preacher, social reformer and abolitionist, wrote after the Civil War is still relevant not only for individuals but for nations. Despite the masculine and exclusive language of his age, we should ponder his words. "No man" [or nation] "can tell whether he is rich or poor by turning to his ledger. It is the heart that makes a man" [or nation] "rich. He is rich or poor according to what he is, not according to what he has."

Greed might have shaped us, but it has turned on us and is killing us. As a nation we need a broader, less selfish vision. We need far-sighted policies motivated not by greed but by concern in order to protect the common good.

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**As always, your comments are appreciated. Please send them to [tony@tonyercolano.com](mailto:tony@tonyercolano.com)**