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REVIEWS



Karol Górski<sup>1</sup>

## Review of the Book by Marco Marzano *The Caste of the Unsullied. Priests, Love, Sex*

Marco Marzano, 2022, *The Caste of the Unsullied. Priests, Love, Sex*, transl. K. Żaboklicki, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, pp. 272.

The book by Marco Marzano, an Italian sociologist who deals with religion and the Catholic Church, is published in terms of the trend of publications containing the memoirs of former priests and seminarians (as an example, there are two volumes by Robert Samborski: *Sakrament obłudy. Wspomnienia z seminarium* and *Kościół nie ma. Wspomnienia po seminarium* or Frederick Martel's *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy*). The work includes narratives concerning the sexual lives of priests and seminarians: the sexual lives that took place behind the walls of the seminary, as well as after leaving it, when the process of finding oneself in the social role of a priest took place. The author emphasises that the book constitutes a form of opposition against the hypocrisy of the clergy – it is intended to reveal what is carefully hidden from the faithful, what does not get into the public sphere, but forms the backstage of life in the seminary and the clergy house. Therefore, it constitutes a sociology of unmasking, revealing the actual lifestyles of a significant number of priests, as well as the institutional patterns of clerical socialisation and relationships within the clergy community. Unlike many journalistic positions, Marzano's publication is distinguished by conducting lengthy field research and a group of interviewees comprising dozens of former and current priests. How can the effects of this research be assessed?

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<sup>1</sup> University of Warsaw, karol\_gorski@gazeta.pl.

Because of the way it is written, it seems to be located between scientific literature and social reportage. The language is firm and vivid, excerpts from the interviewees' narratives are often recalled – the reader is swept away by the told stories, delves into them, absorbs personal confessions and piquant details. Extensive portions of the referenced interviews are very rarely analysed – it is a “collective confession”, the content of which in itself is meant to carry the answers to the research questions posed by the author. The confessions are so captivating and poignant, the author might say, that there is no need for additional analytical encapsulation. However, such practice may come as a surprise to more academically-inclined readers expecting a more thorough treatment of the interviewees' narratives.

The author declares the use of the Goffmanian category of a total institution and Michel Foucault's concept of pastoral power. However, the former category appears much more frequently. The description of a seminary as a total institution is not new; discussions on the issue have already appeared in the Polish media (formulated, for example, by the former monk and philosophy professor Tadeusz Bartoś). The seminary channels sexuality – not always effectively as evidenced by affairs between clergymen – which later erupts with redoubled force when ordained priests enter into further sexual relationships (with men and women). After reading Marzano's work, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the seminary does not establish any superego, guarding virtue, but instils mutual loyalty, forms an organisational culture that builds the cohesiveness of the social category of priests. However, this loyalty is not absolute and unwavering, as evidenced by the willingness of interviewees to share their personal (sometimes traumatic) stories with the author and cases of resigning from the priesthood. The impact of the total institution is therefore problematic, although the description of a seminary's functioning makes it possible to understand the meanderings of priests' sexual lives as they leave the seminary walls and settle into parishes.

The reviewed work also constitutes a study of the perfidy of churchmen – their perversity, their deliberate exploitation of the symbolic capital associated with the position of a priest; this capital allows for further sexual conquests. The practised profession becomes a sexual magnet – paradoxically making it easier rather than more difficult to break the principles of celibacy. There is a certain aporia in the functioning of the church institution: sometimes the church threatens sanctions and removes from its ranks clerics and priests who break celibacy, sometimes it scrupulously conceals and lets go of their sexual misconducts. Interestingly, according to the Italian sociologist, it is heterosexual, not homosexual infidelities that are stigmatised more strongly and they actually pose a threat for the church. That is because, the Church's social structures are supposed to be filled with homosexuals, which, another paradox, works in favour of the functioning of the institution of the Catholic Church, protects its stability and reputation (p. 175). Stigmatising homosexuality, as emphasised by

Marzano, makes it possible to discipline not only the faithful, but also the homosexual priests themselves, who know completely well that they should hide their orientation and their views concerning homosexual relations. This is the latent function of the discourse on (homo)sexuality actively reproduced by the Church's agendas.

In my opinion, this is the most interesting element of the reviewed publication, but the category of total institution does not exhaust the topic. In order to develop it, concepts would be needed that put a stronger emphasis on interpersonal relations, on hidden alliances, on a culture of collusion and silence, on lying as a form of social action, and on tabooing certain social facts and practices. Single references to Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser as well as Orwell's *1984* cannot explore the topic. Perhaps introducing micro-sociological and anthropological categories, and following them consistently, would better illuminate the described culture, bringing out its nuances and dimensions.

I believe that treating also other themes in a more analytical manner, sharpening them and encapsulating them with literature would have increased the book's scientific value. I mean, for example, the aspect of psychosexual immaturity of church people. Marzano emphasises that a significant proportion of clerics are individuals unprepared for independent life, having problems in establishing social contacts, with little ontological security. This is supposed to result from family relationships – mainly disturbed contact with mothers. This psychoanalytic trail begs to be developed further, for instance to evoke the work of Sigmund Freud or Melanie Klein (for whom the figure of the mother was significant). Not going into details may give fuel to those who proclaim that pathologies of the family structure are responsible for developing a homosexual orientation.

It is also significant that the author often highlights the similarities of findings and conclusions made by other authors writing concerning the sexual lives of priests or the organisational culture of the church. What I miss is a clear indication and emphasis on what makes Marzano's publication different from other academic works, what goes beyond the research undertaken so far – underlining in which points does the book open up new threads and plots. In the current situation, the reviewed work solidifies a certain image rather than sharpening and expanding it. It recapitulates but does not create a new quality. However, one of the advantages of the revised book is that it is able to present the results of social research in a form that is digestible for people outside the academic field. Like Martel's *In the Closet of the Vatican: Power, Homosexuality, Hypocrisy*, it reveals the dark secrets of the sexual lives of priests, although it constitutes only a starting point for reflecting on the moral condition of this group and the structures of power and solidarity inside the Catholic Church. Such publications are able to have an impact on the public opinion, shining a light on the institutional mechanisms that produce a caste of seemingly impeccable people.