

10-3-07 - Code Blue

Catholic World News, By Diogenes

Now here's a pretty example of communication theory in action. It concerns a pederast priest named Nicolas Aguilar Rivera, whom a Mexican cardinal, also named Rivera, sent north to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Rivera the Cardinal insists he gave Cardinal Mahony a coded warning. Mahony denies it. An excerpt from the news story:

Cardinal Roger Mahony has denied that his Mexico City counterpart warned him that a priest who transferred to Los Angeles and racked up 19 felony child molestation charges had been suspected of sexual abuse before his arrival.

In a deposition made public Monday, Mahony refutes statements made by Mexico City Cardinal Norberto Rivera that he had warned Mahony through code words in a letter introducing the Mexican priest to Los Angeles Archdiocese officials in 1988.

The original letter from Rivera to Mahony said the priest -- Nicolas Aguilar Rivera -- wanted to move to Los Angeles for "family and health reasons," which Cardinal Rivera maintained in documents were code words used among the clergy to refer to sexual problems.

In his deposition, Mahony denies knowing such words were code for priests who could sexually abuse children. One is almost tempted to feel a twinge of sympathy for Mahony here, were he not as nimble as his counterpart in assigning to his words *ex post facto* the meanings that best suit his purposes of the moment. In this case Cardinal Mahony is sitting pretty, since there's no "key" to the cipher that might turn up to embarrass him. Still, were it ever the case that a priest did, in actual fact, want to move to LA for family and health reasons (by which I mean: family and health reasons) how would his bishop send the message *en clair*?

Not that the receptor bishop has any particular guarantee the sender is playing straight with him. Take the case of Boston's Father Paul Shanley, already in 1990 the most notorious sexual misfit in the Archdiocese of Boston. Yet in that year Auxiliary Bishop Robert Banks slime-lined him out to the Diocese of San Bernardino with a letter declaring him to be "on medical leave" and stating "I can assure you that Father Shanley has no problem that would be a concern to your diocese." Shanley is currently serving twelve to fifteen years in prison -- for family and health reasons.

In another California diocese, also battling in the courts over claims of sex abuse cover-ups, a key player -- the diocesan vicar general -- walked out of a deposition at a moment when the questioning had become particularly well-targeted and shifted himself (or allowed himself to be shifted) into a "residential treatment facility" in Canada. The diocese in question has posted a clarification which quite deliberately does not clarify the nature of the vicar general's ailment, but instead refers us to a statement crafted by the VG's lawyer in which it is said that his treatment is "related to" an acute anxiety disorder. Doubters are labeled "irresponsible."

These doubters may very well be mistaken in this case. But it's hard to call them irresponsible. After all, who taught them the code?