I regret the need to report this, but I must. In the March issue we published “Homosexual Marriage, Parenting, and Adoption,” written by Gilles Bernheim, Chief Rabbi of France. Or so we thought. It turns out that Rabbi Bernheim plagiarized some portions. In Part II of the essay, “The Negation of Sexual Difference,” he lifts sentences and paragraphs from a 2010 interview with Béatrice Bourges, president of the Collective for Children and an opponent of same-sex marriage and adoption.

Even more egregious, big chunks of Bernheim’s exposition of the biblical vision of male–female complementarity come from Fr. Joseph-Marie Verlinde’s recent book, L’idéologie du gender: Comme identité reçue ou choisie? Verlinde carefully cites his sources (including John Paul II). Not only does Bernheim plagiarize Verlinde, he also gets rid of the attributions, transforming the quotations into his own voice.

It seems he has bad academic habits. His 2011 book, Quarante méditations juives, includes passages plagiarized from an interview with Jean-François Lyotard published in 1996. When first accused, Bernheim insisted that it was Lyotard who had plagiarized his student chaplain lectures from the 1980s, only later to admit fault.
Bernheim also cultivated the impression that he had passed the *agrégation*, a competitive exam at the pinnacle of French academic training, when in fact he had not. The French take their academic honors very seriously, and as a friend familiar with the French scene explained, to pretend that one is *agrégé* is the rough equivalent of falsely claiming to have received battlefield honors.

The first thing to say is that this affair can’t be interpreted as an example of progressives hunting down dissenters. Bernheim took a strong stand on a controversial issue, but it wasn’t his opposition to gay marriage that precipitated the scandal. It was his dishonesty. These transgressions of basic academic integrity were uncovered by Jean-Noël Darde, a plagiarism watchdog, not a gay activist.

**The second thing to say concerns plagiarism.** One of the perversions of our era is to make a god of intellectual property. Most commentators described Bernheim as “stealing” words and sentences. This is wrongheaded. Plagiarism is a sin against truth, not property. It’s first and foremost a kind of lying, not a kind of stealing. He violated our trust by speaking in a voice that was not his own, which is why in this and other cases of plagiarism the writer loses intellectual and moral authority broadly.

A third thing to say concerns the man. In my years of teaching, I had to deal with plagiarism many times. Now and then a cynical young person tried to get by with the minimum of work. But most of the students who plagiarized did so because they were desperate or scared, or both. I could tell because it was so obvious, and thus pathetic and pitiable. And indeed, when I confronted students I found that there was almost always a great deal of pathos in the background: psychological crises, terrible fears of failing, a consuming sense of hopelessness in the face of the assigned material.

Bernheim’s plagiarism seems to be of this sort. Now that I’ve reviewed some of the details, I can’t believe he believed he could get away with it. (I am, in fact, somewhat embarrassed that I didn’t grow suspicious when the French rabbi sounded so much like John Paul II when talking about sexual complementarity and transcendence.) Please join me in praying for Rabbi Bernheim. From my reading of the evidence in this affair (what’s so hard about citing someone?), it seems he certainly needs it.

The final thing to say is that I’m sorry. The essay’s arguments aren’t any less true for having
been plagiarized. But we allowed the magazine to be a vehicle for falsehood. The lie was in the byline. “Homosexual Marriage, Parenting, and Adoption” was not in any proper sense by Gilles Bernheim. I apologize to you for publishing an essay that betrayed your trust in the integrity of First Things.

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http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2013/05/rabbi-gilles-bernheimrsquos-plagiarism