

ANTI-CATHOLICISM IN AMERICAN CULTURE

"Anti-Catholicism arrived in America with the Pilgrims in 1620. While it is a prejudice that has existed in every decade of the American experience, anti-Catholicism is in many ways stronger now than it has ever been. It is a powerful force in art, business, academics, entertainment, politics, commentary and news reporting. It is not only America's most persistent prejudice but also its most accepted. It remains the last refuge of legitimate bigotry, understood as not only correct in its assumptions, but also normative to enlightened thought."

That straightforward statement is from the introduction to *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture*, published by Our Sunday Visitor (Our Sunday Visitor, 200 Noll Plaza, Hunting, IN 46804. 1-800-348-2440. Hardcover, \$19.95). Edited by Robert P. Lockwood, former president and publisher of Our Sunday Visitor and new member of the staff of the Catholic League, the book contains the full text of the Center for Media and Public Affairs latest analysis of media coverage of the Catholic Church. Also included are essays on anti-Catholicism from, among others, Lockwood, Russell Shaw, and a vital chapter by Catholic League president Bill Donohue on combating anti-Catholicism in media.

The study by The Center for Media and Public Affairs was jointly sponsored by Our Sunday Visitor and the Catholic League. Written by Linda S. Lichter, S. Robert Lichter and Dan Amundson, this represents an updating of CMPA's groundbreaking 1991 study, *Media Coverage of the Catholic Church*.

The new study confirms that anti-Catholicism remains a potent force in American journalism. Among its findings on media coverage of the Catholic Church in the 1990s, the CMPA study

reports:

- One-sided reports on the role of women in the Church were the leading source of controversial coverage of the Catholic Church.
- Three out of four sources criticized the alleged treatment by the Church of women, with fully 90 percent of sources on television news critical of the Church on this issue.
- Criminal charges against Catholic clerics accounted for one out of 12 discussions about the Catholic Church. Seven out of 10 sources criticized the Church for its handling of these charges.
- Nine out of 10 sources criticized the Church's ecumenical efforts, with particular emphasis on Catholic-Jewish relations.
- Debate was more balanced on Church-State issues and sexual morality, but there were significant differences among media outlets. Television news paid the most attention to sexual issues and was highly critical of the Church in this area.
- In comparison to the 1991 study, which surveyed Catholic Church coverage in media going back to 1963, the CMPA found that coverage of the Catholic Church in media had declined by over 50 percent from the 1960s to the 1990s. Criminal allegations against clergy dominated 1990s coverage. Debate over issues of power within the Church grew in the 1990s, while coverage of internal Church issues on doctrine and sexual morality declined.

Overall, the CMPA study found that media calls for reform of Church authority structures rose to all-time highs and that Church teachings and practices received less support in the media in the 1990s than in any previous decade.

Anti-Catholicism in American Culture presents powerful

statistical proof on the persistence of bigotry toward the Catholic Church in America as seen in the news media. It also includes solid presentations on the history of anti-Catholicism in the United States and in American journalism, as well as its contemporary strength in both media and society. Shaw provides an analysis of how the media allies itself with internal dissent from the Church, as well as an intriguing look at how the Church has dealt with media relations.

Anti-Catholic in American Culture is a must-read for anyone interested in the phenomenon of the oldest – and also the most current – religious bigotry in the United States.