

Anti-Catholicism Nation's Worst Prejudice

In a major survey conducted for the National Conference, it was found that the worst negative stereotype of any group in America was held by non-Catholics against Catholics. The organization, previously known as the National Conference of Christians and Jews, reported that 55% of non-Catholics believe that Catholics "want to impose their own ideas of morality on the larger society." No other group had a majority of those outside its group harbor a negative stereotype of it. The other groups in the survey were Asian-Americans, Latina-Americans, African-Americans, Jews and Muslims.

The survey also found that 38% of non-Catholics believe that Catholics are "narrow minded because they are too much controlled by their church." It was not for nothing that the report commented "Certainly the seeds of anti-Catholic sentiment exist in popular thinking and should not be dismissed lightly."

Interestingly, one of the report's conclusions was that "On the whole, the study found that Americas [sic] ethnic, racial and religious groups express greater respect for each other in the West than they do in the rest of the nation." It said the least tolerant region was the South. Yet when it comes to measuring anti-Catholicism, the South was the least prejudiced and the West was the most prejudiced.

Though the report did not explain why anti-Catholicism flourishes more in the West than in any other part of the country, it hardly seems coincidental that the greatest proportion of non-believing Americans is in the West. It would certainly appear that anti-Catholicism rages most with those who are agnostics and atheists. These data call into question the popular mythology which sees Westerners as the most

enlightened free thinkers in the nation.

Directors of multicultural programs should be made aware of this study. Together with the Catholic League's *1994 Report on Anti-Catholicism*, it makes a strong case for incorporating a segment on anti-Catholicism into every diversity program in the country. Those who want a copy of the National Conference's report, *Taking America's Pulse*, should contact the organization at 71 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York, 10003, or call the National Conference at 800-352- 6225.