

ANTI-CATHOLICISM ON THE SLY

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The in-your-face type of anti-Catholicism is, by definition, easy to spot. Not so that which surfaces on the sly. Take, for example, some recent items that were brought to my attention.

- An article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette mentions that a new club, the Chapel of Blues Club, was formerly a Catholic Church. The author then proceeds to take some slight jabs at Catholicism. What went unmentioned was the fact the building hasn't been a Catholic church for nearly a century. More recently, it was a warehouse and before that it was an Episcopalian church. Yet there were no cute stabs at the Anglican religion. Just Catholicism.

- St. John the Divine, the huge Episcopal cathedral in New York, was the scene of a horrific fire that destroyed part of the church in December. Michael Kramer, a Jewish writer for the Daily News, took readers on a walk down memory lane reminiscing how a Catholic priest friend of his from El Salvador once came to New York and visited both St. John the Divine and St. Patrick's Cathedral. "The reception at St. Patrick's was not good. At St. John, I was welcomed. I found comfort there." This gratuitous remark, made in a gratuitously-written article, was highlighted by the editors: it appeared as a sidebar to a picture of the cathedral. Now it's a safe bet to say that no one in New York will ever see an article written by a Protestant that favorably compares a Jewish rabbi's experience in a New York Catholic church to his welcome in a New York synagogue.

- There was a scene in the NBC miniseries, "Uprising," regarding the Warsaw Ghetto uprising that depicts a priest on Easter Sunday closing the church's windows and proceeding with the service after detecting smoke from the ghetto's burning

buildings and bodies. The show's author, Jon Avnet, was quoted as saying that his account is historically accurate. When we asked him to supply us with the evidence that this cold-hearted priest did what he was accused of, Avnet never replied.

- A story and photo article in New York Magazine about unusual dogs in New York City showed a full-page photo of a dog dressed in a nun's habit wearing a big cross around his neck. It's a sure bet that the dog wasn't running around New York with that oversized cross but both the owner and the photographer made sure it made the cut. No dog has been found in New York dressed as a rabbi wearing a huge Star of David around his neck.

- Frances Kissling of Catholics for a Free Choice recently attacked Catholic bishops with an ad campaign in the nation's capital that blamed them for AIDS (Kissling believes the fairy tale that says condoms solve everything). Only one newspaper in the nation, Newsday, ran an article on Kissling's campaign. The author, Carol Eisenberg, ran a story recently on Mary Ramerman's make-believe ordination in Rochester, New York (see the last issue of Catalyst). Which begs the question: what explains Eisenberg's fascination with Catholic dissidents and anti-Catholic bigots? We won't hold our breath for a favorable piece on Jews for Jesus.

- Randy Cohen in the New York Times recently wrote a piece on the online bookstore, Amazon.com, that discussed how the company deals with issues of censorship. Out of nowhere, Cohen mentioned that Amazon.com still carries Roman Catholic books even though the Church does not allow women priests. I wrote to Cohen noting his selective indignation: "I've never seen an Orthodox Jewish women rabbi—have you?" He hasn't replied.

- The Village Voice had a piece on the "Best of NYC." One of its items was the "Best Place to Spill Beer on the Pope." This is what the newspaper calls its coverage of Catholics.

· In the John Travolta movie, "Domestic Disturbance," there is a violent scene in a prostitute's room that shows a large crucifix on the wall and a statue of Our Blessed Mother. Several Catholic League members wondered whether Hollywood would ever feature a Star of David in such a context.

So what's the point of all these examples? None was necessary and all were done intentionally. And all have an effect, even on unsuspecting persons. The central problem with the examples cited above is that they soften the society up for more full-fledged attacks on Catholicism. Invidious on their face, it is the cumulative effect of these instances that is the real cause for concern.

Admittedly, we do not track other forms of bigotry the way we track anti-Catholicism. But if there were the same kind of anti-Semitic or anti-black types of gratuitous attacks, we'd be hearing about it from the ADL and the NAACP. The reason we're giving notice to these hits is precisely because it doesn't take a knockout punch to level an institution. Enough jabs may do the job just as well.