

# CAN CATHOLICS BE ANTI-CATHOLIC?

Not too long ago, when we registered a complaint with someone for making an anti-Catholic remark, he defended himself by saying that he had run the remark in question by some of his Catholic friends and they weren't offended. Swell, we told him, but that didn't matter—what mattered is that we were offended. Nonetheless, he was on to something: how can we explain the differing responses?

When faced with such a question, it seems plain that there are two possible answers: either we overreacted or this guy's Catholic friends under-reacted. People overreact when they're too thin skinned, when every little crack about something that's held dear is seen as a major offense. But that's not the way the Catholic League positions itself. On the contrary, we let a lot of things go that others might not. So we are left with explaining why some Catholics fail to react when their religion comes under attack.

Some Catholics have become so immune to Catholic-bashing that they have come to accept it as normal. This is dangerous because it suggests that these Catholics are unprepared to defend their religion, and this unwittingly gives succor to our adversaries. There are other Catholics who know that the Church is under attack but still don't want to do anything about it. Essentially, they're afraid. Afraid of drawing too much attention to the problem, afraid of being accused of being hypersensitive, and so on. They also contribute to the problem through their inaction. But worse still are those Catholics who actually delight in seeing their Church get bashed.

Is it possible for Catholics to be anti-Catholic? Definitely. Jews have a term to describe those Jews who are anti-

Jewish—they're called "self-hating" Jews (Karl Marx comes quickly to mind and so, too, does the late radical lawyer, William Kunstler). Well, folks, there are "self-hating" Catholics, too. And on that count, I can think of quite a few who would qualify.

"Self-hating" Catholics come in two basic varieties. Some are practicing Catholics who have come to hate much of what Catholicism stands for, and others have long since given up practicing their faith; the latter group goes by the self-designated label, "lapsed" Catholic, or "recovering" Catholic.

An example of the former type would include those who might object to seeing most of the sacraments mocked in a particularly vicious fashion, but would not object to seeing certain teachings being trashed. Usually, these teachings concern matters of sexuality: contraception, abortion, celibacy, women priests, etc. Therefore, when a play like *Late Nite Catechism* is performed (a play that ridicules pre-Vatican II teachings, customs and traditions), it is music to the ear of these disaffected Catholics.

"Lapsed" or "recovering" Catholics are really not Catholics at all, and that is why they should be regarded as former Catholics. There is no such phenomenon among Jews because to be a Jew is a function of ethnicity (as well as religion) and, as such, is not affected by a non-believing status. Hence, there can be no "lapsed" or "recovering" Jews, just "self-hating" ones.

In any event, here's an example of an anti-Catholic Catholic. In the pages of the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR) there recently appeared a letter by a woman who took issue with the title of an article called, "Time to rework politics of Catholic leaders." Her complaint was that the piece should have been entitled, "Time to wrestle leadership from the Ku Klux Cardinals." She explained her hatred by attacking the Church's teachings on sexuality, or what she labeled as the

“Vatican-via-the-clergy means of control, their [the Cardinals’] right to invade our most personal and intimate lives.”

Now if a non-Catholic were to identify Cardinals with the Klan, he would promptly be labeled a bigot. So should this woman (the fact that an editor at NCR selected this letter for print raises another set of questions). Moreover, from reading the letter, we know that what was said was not said in jest; it was said in a serious way and it was meant to wound. Inclusion in a group does not offer immunity from making bigoted remarks against that group, and that is why it is entirely possible for Catholics to be branded anti-Catholic. To cite one example, it is well-known that Phil Donahue and Bryant Gumbel went to Catholic schools, but it is also known that both of these men had a field-day slamming Catholicism while hosting their shows on TV. The mind boggles at the thought that somehow they should be given a free pass to bash our religion simply because their roots are Catholic. After all, what’s the difference between them and a Jimmy Swaggart?

In the end, tolerance for Catholic-bashing is a function of how deeply committed Catholics are to Catholicism as it exists, and not as it might exist under the reign of some reformist pope. “Lapsed” and “recovering” Catholics may not agree, but then again who really cares what they think?