

Can There Be Bigotry Without Bigots?

On Sunday, September 25, Catholic League president Dr. William A. Donohue delivered the keynote address at the Red Mass Luncheon. The event, which took place at the New York Hilton, was preceded by the Red Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral; Cardinal O'Connor was the celebrant. The Red Mass is the annual Mass that recognizes the work of Catholic lawyers. Dr. Donohue's talk, "Catholic-Bashing in the Nineties," appears below in an edited version. The event was sponsored by the Guild of Catholic Lawyers.

In my role as president of the Catholic League, I have many opportunities to discuss anti-Catholicism. Though there are many views on the subject, there are some common denominators, as well. Almost everyone I know admits that there is such a phenomenon as anti-Catholicism. However, not a few ascribe to the idea that many of those who are anti-Catholic don't mean to be anti-Catholic. In other words, the argument goes, there are many people who don't see themselves as bigoted even though they give voice to anti-Catholic statements. This raises an interesting question, "Can there be bigotry without bigots?" It is a question I tried to answer during my remarks to the Guild of Catholic Lawyers following the Red Mass on September 25th.

I confess to being skeptical about the proposition that there can be bigotry without bigots. To be sure, there are people who, out of sheer ignorance, entertain ideas about race, religion and ethnicity that are pure poppycock. But ignorance does not explain the persistence, if not the growth of, anti-Catholicism among the well-educated elites in the media, academia and the publishing world. There is something else at work when the cultural elite target the Catholic Church to

vent their anger, and that something else is called bigotry. It follows that those who engage in such practices are bigots. They may be mistaken, confused or misinformed, but they are bigots nonetheless.

Those who demur must explain why it is that one rarely hears about anti-black or anti-Jewish sentiment that isn't the product of bigots. The terms racist and anti-Semite roll off the lips because we have been culturally sensitized to believing that racists and anti-Semites exist. We would find it difficult to understand how there could be bigotry against blacks and Jews without there being regularly identifiable bigots. So how is it that we are prepared to entertain the fantastic notion that anti-Catholicism is not the work of bigots?

When Mary Ann Glendon, a Harvard Law professor, is chastised by her superiors for mailing pro-life letters to pastors on Harvard letter-head – even though no one at Harvard has ever been criticized for making the most egregiously political appeals on the university's stationery – are we to believe that bigots had nothing to do with this? When college students have to endure tirades against the Catholic Church, in classes that have nothing to do with the subject, are we to accept this as the work of something other than that of bigots? When a reporter interviews me for over an hour and never once asks a question that is anything other than hostile toward the Catholic Church, am I to conclude that he isn't a bigot? If protesters march naked in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral and conduct themselves like animals, is it possible that they aren't bigots?

Many other examples could be cited, but the point is the same. Where bigotry exists, so, too, do bigots. No one, especially not the literati, likes to think of himself as a bigot. Archie Bunker is their idea of a bigot and they're too sophisticated to be like him. But being urbane isn't a disqualifier from the category of bigots. It simply means that some bigots are more

polished than others.

It's funny, we have affirmative action programs and sensitivity training workshops to combat just about every form of bigotry, save anti-Catholicism. That this might itself be explained as the result of bigotry seems never to be acknowledged, much less understood. Take the case of the school newspaper at William Paterson College, the New Jersey institution that the Catholic League charged with anti-Catholicism (see the September *Catalyst*).

This past September, the school newspaper ran a story that was highly critical of the Catholic League's protest over the bigoted remarks made by one of William Paterson's professors. Yet the cover story of the newspaper was a report on students who filed a complaint against a professor for making allegedly homophobic comments in class. The comments of this professor paled in significance to the remarks made against Pope John Paul II, but no matter, the newspaper was totally committed to routing out that type of bigotry, all the while exculpating the anti-Catholic bigot who uttered vulgarities about the pope. That apparently no one on the editorial staff saw the irony in this is quite a commentary.

Bigotry of any type is offensive. Working against it is noble, but having the ability, or should I say the will, to recognize it is even more important. The sad fact is that those who think of themselves as enlightened, progressive and without a trace of bigotry, are also the most likely to need a workshop or two on the evils of anti-Catholicism. Just as admitting that one is an alcoholic is the first step toward treatment, admitting that one harbors a bias against Catholics and/or the Catholic Church is the first step toward freedom from bigotry. Doing so requires courage, but that, unfortunately, is not a property that the deep thinkers are known to possess in large number.