

CULTURAL TOXINS

There are times when it would be great to be a fly on the wall, listening to how an unseemly discussion unfolds. I felt this way recently when I learned that Mother Teresa was being denied the opportunity of being honored with her colors shining brightly atop the Empire State Building. It would have been quite a moment hearing all the reasons why they decided to stick it to Catholics.

What gave rise to this decision is not something hard to fathom. Quite simply, our culture is polluted with anti-Catholic toxins, fumes so poisonous they disable rational thought. Surely no fair-minded person would ever deny a tribute to this saintly nun. But in the current environment, where Catholic bashing is in vogue, irrationality—if not mean spiritedness—rules.

Contributing to this sick milieu are many forces, chief among them being the media. And as both this issue of *Catalyst*, and the previous one, amply show, leading the charge is the *New York Times*.

I read the *Times* Monday through Friday, and usually access online articles on weekends. It is extremely well written and the research is also top notch. Its selection of articles meriting coverage, and those meriting none at all, is another matter. Lately, however, another problem has arisen, and that is the tendency to allow editorial commentary to creep into news stories.

It will surprise no one to learn that we have been just as relentless as the *Times* has in writing about the pope and the scandal, albeit from different perspectives. There are occasions, however, when our differences have less to do with a matter of perspective than a matter of journalistic integrity. Here is a perfect example. On May 3, there was a

good article on the Shroud of Turin and the attention it is has garnered lately. It was marred, unfortunately, by the way it opened. Elisabetta Povoledo began by saying, "The Roman Catholic Church is weathering another sex scandal, but it is impossible to tell here, where the faint image of a bearded man on a yellowing linen sheet..." She couldn't even write the story about the Shroud without dragging the scandal into it. That says something. About her, that is.

Columnists and editorial writers critical of the Church have gone out of their way to assure Catholics that they really like them—it's just the Church they loathe. This was deftly handled by *Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof in an article he wrote explaining the difference between the good Catholic Church (e.g., men and women who do God's work) and the bad Catholic Church (the bishops). Similarly, the *National Catholic Reporter* chimed in with an editorial on how the scandal is really a "hierarchy crisis," one that "is not fundamentally about sex."

The Left, of course, views everything through the lens of power. Marxists at heart, they discount the effect of cultural norms and values, interpreting behavior in purely structural terms. That is why they are quick to assail the Church hierarchy: it also serves the function of taking blame off of everyone but the bishops. Conveniently, then, there is no need to address the link between homosexuality and molestation, or the role that delinquent psychologists have played in promoting therapy. It's much easier, and appealing, to blame the bishops.

Then there are those in the media who drop their poison pills under the guise of entertainment. Joy Behar, for instance, cannot let go of ripping the Catholic Church. Sometimes humorous, she is driven by anything but humor. Besides mouthing invectives on "The View," she now lets loose with inflammatory remarks on her own show. Evidently, her audience can't get enough.

A newcomer to the Catholic-bashing circuit is the Huffington Post. While the leftist website has never been a fan of Catholicism, only recently has it devoted an entire section to religion. Readers can find there some of the most concentrated, hate-filled essays found anywhere on the web, topping, even, the vitriol found at the "On Faith" blog site of *Newsweek/Washington Post*.

Word has it that Hollywood has entered the fray by considering a new movie about the scandal. Several journalists, including prominent ones from the *Boston Globe* (who broke the 2002 story on the archdiocese there), are slated to cooperate. Why anyone would want to see a movie about a subject this dark is not known, but then again Hollywood is not always motivated by money. Ideology matters greatly.

Comedy Central is thinking about doing an animated series on Jesus, and if it does, Christians know what they're in for. It's not simply the matter that the executives there are cowards—they have a long record of never offending Muslims for fear of being beheaded—it's also because they love to attack Christianity. And they get cover. They get cover from serious media outlets like the *New York Times*: by hammering away at Catholicism, the *Times* plays rabbit for Comedy Central.

So there are many entries in this season's free-for-all against the Church. To be sure, the damage being done to our culture is real. Not only is it creating an environment where even Mother Teresa is being denied her due, it is making it all but impossible for the Catholic voice to be heard. That's a net loss for everyone.