

JUSTIFYING ANTI-CATHOLIC BIGOTRY

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Scenario: a group of so-called enlightened thinkers assemble to play a word association game. When they hear the term “bigotry,” they respond by saying things like “anti-Semitism,” “racism,” and “sexism.” It would never occur to them to say “anti-Catholicism.” But why?

It’s too easy to say that Jews, blacks and women have done a better job than Catholics in educating the public to the particular strain of bigotry that affects their group. This is certainly true enough, but it is not an adequate answer. What must be said is that anti-Catholicism is simply not seen for what it is—a type of bigotry. And that’s because those who harbor this prejudice think we Catholics are only getting our just deserts. Consider the following.

- I recently appeared on the Paula Zahn show, “The Edge,” to discuss blasphemous art and obscene song lyrics. The other guest, an entertainment writer by the name Tom O’Neil, all of a sudden went on a rampage blasting the Church for persecuting homosexuals.
- On a recent edition of “Hannity and Colmes,” I debated civil rights lawyer Michael Gross on the subject of anti-Catholic art. He argued that ex-Catholics who contribute to anti-Catholic art are expressing their hostility to what the Church did in the past. He cited Galileo.
- When I debated Renee Cox, the artist of “Yo Mama’s Last Supper” fame, she justified her decision to insert herself as a stand-in for Christ—in the nude, no less—as a payback for the Church’s participation in the slave trade.

- The producer of a new anti-Catholic movie recently told reporters that the Church deserved to be treated in a less than generous way because of what it did during the Inquisition.

These are not isolated examples. I hear stuff like this all the time. To which I say: be careful going down this road because no one is safe.

Ever hear of Jewish slumlords that ripped off blacks? Ever hear of blacks that persecuted Asians? Ever hear of Native Americans that participated in savagery? Ever hear of a tribal group that didn't massacre their brothers at one time or another? Ever hear of a part of the world that didn't at one time practice slavery? And so on.

There is not a demographic group in the entire world—of any race, nationality, ethnic stock, clan, tribe or religion—that comes to the table with its hands clean. The same is true of institutions. Yes, the Catholic Church has its share of dirty laundry, but name for me one institution that has been around for even one one-hundredth as long that isn't also soiled? And remember this: it is not the teachings of the institutional Church that leads Catholics to sin. It is their rejection.

Why, then, are Catholics who are alive today considered fair game to attack, simply because some of their forefathers were beasts? What about the children of non-Catholic beasts? Shouldn't we give them a smack, too?

There is no logic to any of this. And the proponents of this line of thinking know there isn't. I know this because none of them has ever been able to answer me when I go down the list of crimes that other groups and institutions are commonly known to have committed. That's why I don't want to hear another word about the Crusades.

I refuse to be a punching bag for those bigots who want to attack my religion because of some past incidents of

injustice—real or imagined—committed in the name of Catholicism. It is high time we stopped being on the defensive every time this rhetorical game is played and started dishing it back to the bigots in spades. To do any less is to acquiesce in our own suffering. There's a name for this kind of malady and it's called masochism. And I'm no masochist.

My critics think I should try a less confrontational approach. I say give me a ring when you get my results. Besides, taking a tough line doesn't necessarily mean that people stop talking to each other. I asked for a meeting Ted Turner because I think it's just possible I might be able to convince him that his comments regarding Catholics are deeply offensive. But I didn't ask for a meeting before I got him to apologize. That's the Catholic League way.

Grant it, there is never cause for reckless speech or conduct. But that still leaves a lot of room for settling the score in a responsible manner. We can either step up to the plate and meet our adversaries head-on or just keep ducking every time they fire. It will come as no surprise to anyone that we at the Catholic League don't like ducking.

Remember, despite all its faults, the Catholic Church has a track record of generosity and selflessness that no institution can match. And it has a spiritual message to deliver that demands a fair hearing. That's enough reason for me to stay in this fight. And believe me, I sleep easier each night knowing that it's good enough for you, too. Which is why we'll prevail.