

# JUSTIFYING ANTI-CATHOLICISM

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Anti-Zionists often say they are not opposed to Jews, just the Israeli state. Some are telling the truth, but others are lying. Similarly, hyper-critics of Catholicism often say they are anti-clerical, but not anti-Catholic. Yes, that is true for some, but not universally so. In both cases, even among those who are not lying, it is an easy slide into the bigoted camp: one animus often bleeds into the other.

Few anti-Catholics will admit to their bigotry. When pressed on it, they typically exercise the default option and maintain that they are just anti-clerical. Two recent examples of this phenomenon are illustrative of how deceitful this position is.

I recently wrote to the president of Colorado State University about an anti-Catholic incident on campus. The student senate voted to implement a “diversity bill” to grant senate seats to select demographic groups on campus: adult learning, veterans, the disabled, LGBT students, women’s groups, as well as various racial and ethnic groups. A Jewish male student offered an amendment to include Jewish, Muslim, and Catholic students; he was supported by a Catholic woman. The amendment failed.

The Catholic student protested and was quickly attacked. “I haven’t ever experienced hate like this, ever,” is how she put it. Those who justified the exclusion of Catholics said, “the Catholic Church does not need to be represented because you are the ‘oppressors’ of the LGBTQ communities and others.”

This makes my point exactly: Catholics on campus were excluded from the “diversity bill” because the institution to which they are affiliated is allegedly guilty of oppression. Those who were truly anti-clerical, but not anti-Catholic, would not punish Catholic students for the alleged sins of their

religion's clerics.

On Easter Sunday, six animal rights protesters from a group called Collectively Free invaded St. Patrick's Cathedral during the noon Mass. They interrupted the service, using the Mass as an exercise in "direct action." One had a camera strapped to his chest—parishioners thought it was a bomb—and others held signs. They shouted at the faithful, using a bullhorn to amplify their message. They were protesting ham. That's right—they said too many Catholics eat ham at Easter.

After I issued a news release on this incident, I eblasted it to our members, listing the email address of the co-founder; she was at the event. One of our members, Eddie Guanajuato, Director of Music at Cardinal Ritter High School in Indianapolis, asked her, "Why didn't you visit a Mosque and disrupt their service?" She replied, "Why not Muslims? That is such a racist comment."

Leaving aside the obvious—Muslims are not a race—it is striking how offended she was at Eddie's question. In her mind, it is bigoted just to hypothetically ask about invading a Muslim house of worship, but it is not bigoted to actually invade a Catholic church. In other words, we Catholics deserve it, and that's because of the teachings of the Catholic Church. Once again, anti-clericalism is masking anti-Catholicism.

The late Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua was fond of reminding us that lay Catholics make up close to 100 percent of the Catholic Church. It is too bad that so many of them have deluded themselves into thinking that most of today's professed anti-clerics are not anti-Catholic. In fact, their venom is aimed directly at the laity, as well as at the hierarchy.

There is a related problem at work here. Many lay Catholics refuse to interpret attacks on their Church as attacks on

them. They reason that as long as they are not discriminated against at work, and their kids are free from discrimination at school, all is well. According to this logic, the most vicious portrayals of Catholicism can surface in the arts and in the movies, and on radio and TV, and none of it matters. But it would if they took their religion seriously.

Mother Angelica took her religion seriously. Indeed, she knew that much of what passes as anti-clericalism was really anti-Catholicism. She also knew that those who stuck a dagger in the heart of her religion were piercing hers as well. She did not live a dual life: She knew that those who hated the Catholic Church had no use for those who loved it.

One of the reasons why the Catholic laity, especially young Catholics, tolerate intolerance against their religion is because they are not taught about the rich contributions of Catholicism to Western civilization. In fact, these days they are more likely to hear how awful their religion is. Take Villanova, for instance.

Villanova has a great tradition, but there are some on the campus who are exploiting its good name to make political points. Beginning in the fall, it will feature a new course, "Racism and the Catholic Church." Students will learn how the Church has failed "to bring blacks and whites together," and how it instead "operated as an instrument not of racial unity and justice but racial segregation and white supremacy."

Those who promote this collective self-hatred know exactly what they are doing. So don't think that justifying anti-Catholicism is always the work of those outside our ranks.