

MISERABLE CATHOLICS

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

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It is not uncommon for people to join an organization when they are young, and grow to like it immensely. But people change, and oftentimes organizations do not, or at least they don't change dramatically. So we understand it when people change and no longer feel at home with the organization they once admired. It happens. We expect, quite rationally, that such persons will exit and find a new home. What is not understandable is why some people elect to stay, knowing they will be miserable.

They stay for lots of reasons. Some stay because they have a hard time dealing with change. Others stay because they are masochists: they get a perverse sense of happiness convincing themselves that they are modern-day martyrs, ready to take a bullet for the cause. Still others are just mean-spirited: they won't be happy until they shove their agenda down the throats of those who don't agree with them. But all of them stay because they believe they are right and the rest of their colleagues are wrong. So they work from the inside to turn the organization inside-out.

This describes, unfortunately, the way many who identify themselves as Catholic feel about their religion; sadly, this includes some nuns and priests. This was driven home to me recently after a radical atheist organization took out a vicious full-page ad in the *New York Times* ripping Catholicism, and professed Catholics agreed with it. The ad, "Quit the Catholic Church," was paid for by the Freedom From Religion Foundation; it ran on March 9.

The ad blamed the Catholic Church for promoting "acute misery, poverty, needless suffering, unwanted pregnancies,

overpopulation, social evils and deaths.” It accused the bishops of “launching a ruthless political inquisition” against women, and said “preying priests” and corruption extend “all the way to the top.” It had a special message for Catholic women: “Apparently, you’re like the battered women who, after being beaten down every Sunday, feels she has no place to go.”

Many of the comments about the ad that were posted on the websites of liberal Catholic media outlets agreed with the ad. *America*, *Commonweal* and the *National Catholic Reporter* ran several statements of support. Some wondered why anyone would object. For example, Gerelyn at *Commonweal* questioned, “Is there something in the ad that is untrue?” Similarly, Dale Sith at the *National Catholic Reporter* said, “By the way, there was nothing in the Freedom From Religion’s *Times* ad that wasn’t true.”

Some who could not bring themselves to condemn the ad teach at Catholic colleges. Tom Beaudoin teaches theology to graduate students at Fordham. He was blown away by the ad and recorded his sage observations in the blog section of *America*. “Whatever one thinks of this ad, it seems to mark a particular moment in the unfolding history of the Catholic Church in the United States.” Notice he didn’t choose a side (actually, he did). More important, he didn’t say that by accepting such a defamatory ad this marks a new low for the *New York Times*.

Beaudoin believes we deserve it. Why else would he write, “What is happening with religion in general and Catholicism in particular that would make such a moment possible?” I have a clue for him—radical secularism. But, of course, that is not what he means. What he means to say is, “What has Catholicism done to elicit such a response?” Blaming the victim was never put more crudely. He concludes by saying the ad is “a conversation starter.” Nice to know he wants to converse with the professed enemies of Catholicism. I want to defeat them.

Not to be outdone we have the *Commonweal* contribution of Father Robert P. Imbelli. He also teaches theology at a Jesuit institution, this one being Boston College. He was delighted that the *Times* ran the cartoon that accompanied the ad. The cartoon, which featured what appears to be Cardinal Dolan, shows the New York archbishop screaming at a woman "Over Something This Small" (it shows a picture of the pill with the inscription, "Birth Control"). Father Imbelli opined, "Happily the punchy cartoon was spared the censor's ax." He had nothing to say about the propriety of the hate speech directed at his religion.

These are not isolate examples, for if they were they would hardly be worth mentioning; *Commonweal* and the *Reporter* regularly feature self-hating Catholics. I once told Alan Dershowitz that we Catholics would give Jews a run for the money when it comes to which group has more of the self-hating types. He laughed but refused to take me up on it.

Over the years, *America* and *Commonweal* have published some brilliant articles that challenge the accepted wisdom in Catholic circles. That is why it is distressing to note some of the commentary they are featuring these days. To be specific, it is a sad day when Catholic media outlets offer a home to those who are so unhappy with Catholicism that they mistake blatant bigotry for mere disagreement. It is bad enough that some find enjoyment wallowing in misery; it is worse when others are exposed to their maladies.