

NOTHING COVERT ABOUT ANTI-CATHOLICISM

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I regard the prejudice against your Church as the deepest bias in the history of the American people." This comment was made by historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. to Msgr. John Tracy Ellis. It was first published in 1956 in a book written by Ellis.

Little has changed since that time to make Schlesinger's remark dated. If anything, the virus of anti-Catholicism has deepened; not in terms of anti-Catholicism against individuals (where there has been unmistakable progress), but in terms of bigotry aimed at the Church and her teachings. Indeed, what is disturbing about anti-Catholicism these days is how visceral and open it is.

New York Guardian Angel and radio/TV talk-show host Curtis Sliwa is right to say that students at Columbia University can't mention the Cherokee Jeep without being charged with slighting Native Americans. But they can roar with laughter when a filthy joke is told about priests. Nothing shameful about that. This explains why the offending student actually enhanced his hero status when he refused to apologize. His basic point was there is nothing wrong with anti-Catholicism.

Bigotry against many groups is still commonplace in our society, but in most cases it's been driven underground. It most certainly is not respectable. But when it comes to expressions of anti-Catholicism, there is nothing covert about it: it's the one in-your-face type of bigotry that is extant. Here's the proof.

The Columbia University student who made the anti-Catholic joke not only did not apologize, he offered more in the way of

anti-Catholic commentary when questioned. For example, he blasted the Church for the Inquisition. Forget the fact that in two years, 1937 and 1938, half a million political prisoners (or 20,000 a month) were shot in Stalin's Russia, while at the height of the Spanish Inquisition an average of 10 heretics a month were condemned: what matters is that the Columbia student justified his bigotry on the grounds that we Catholics deserve to get bashed.

Phil Donahue agrees with the student. Towards the end of the segment I did with Phil and the Columbia student, Andy Hao, Phil went on a tirade against the Catholic Church. His comments had absolutely nothing to do with the subject, but they revealed a great deal about his deep-seated contempt for Catholicism. This is what he said: "I think the Catholic Church has been getting away for 2,000 years with the notion that everything it does is divinely inspired. Not true. It's a human institution. It's as subject to error as any other human institution."

In other words, it's time we Catholics got our comeuppance. Phil literally went on to say that the Church "shouldn't be treated with such deference and reverence." My reply was to say, "The theological differences that you may have can be argued in a civil way. But you can't use that to justify bigotry." I am totally convinced that my point went flying right over his head, so visceral is his hatred of the Church.

When confronted with arguments that justify bigotry, it's sometimes wise to give the bigot a dose of his own medicine. Andy Hao is Asian. I asked him, quite directly, if he would be offended if during the half-time festivities of a Columbia ping-pong game, someone said to the Asian players on the Columbia team, "All gooks go home." Guess what? This is when Andy's sense of humor collapsed. He thinks it's humorous to bash my religion but takes great umbrage at any assault on his ancestry.

Not for one moment can it be imagined that Phil Donahue, or any other TV talk-show host, would discuss a public act of bigotry—vented at a non-Catholic group—and side with the bigot. If gays are bashed, the gay bashers are the bad guys. If Jews are bashed, the Jew bashers are the bad guys. If Catholics are bashed, the bad guys are the Catholics.

Sociologically, this is not difficult to understand. Many on the left ascribe to a form of Marxism which views the world as comprised of superordinates and subordinates. The former are the victimizers and the latter are the victims. Superordinates include those who are wealthy; white; male; Christian; and heterosexual. Subordinates include those who don't share the attributes of the superordinates.

This vision of society holds that once a group or institution has been assigned a victimizer status (such as the Catholic Church), bigotry against it can always be justified. The reverse is also true: once declared a member of the victim class, virtually all acts of bigotry against a superordinate can be justified. In short, there are good guys and there are bad guys. We're the bad guys.

So these are the rules of the game. Because we know the fix is on, we refuse to respect them. Indeed, we delight in breaking the rules and are deliberately subversive of them. That's the Catholic League way, and we trust it's your way as well. And they call us conservative?