

PAPAL TRIP TO HOLY LAND REIGNITES DEBATE ON PIUS XII

Pope John Paul II's historic trip to the Holy Land received very fair coverage by the media. While there were several columnists and TV and radio pundits who made patently unfair comments, most news reports were not tainted with bias. What the trip did, however, was reignite the debate on what Pope Pius XII did during the Holocaust.

One of the most unfair statements on the event came from the online magazine, *Slate*. A writer for the magazine, Jack Shafer, even went so far as to justify anti-Catholicism just days prior to the pope's visit. "If anti-Catholic bigotry exists in America," he said, "it might have something to do with the Catholic Church's past conduct. Just this weekend, His Holiness John Paul II conceded as much when he finally got around to apologizing to the world for 2000 years of Catholic wickedness."

The *New Republic* and the *Nation* also used the papal statement on reconciliation as a club to beat up on the Church. Leon Wieseltier said he could not accept the pope's apology and Katha Pollitt concluded that the papal "apology" was a sign of "how weak" the Church has become. In virtually all the critical commentary on the trip, it was the pope's refusal to condemn Pius XII that disturbed the pundits most of all.

Not given the coverage it deserved were the remarks of the pope at the Holocaust Memorial. Addressing Nazism, the Holy Father asked, "How could man have such utter contempt for man?" He answered, "Because he had reached the point of contempt for God. Only a godless ideology could plan and carry out the extermination of a whole people."

The papal trip to the Holy Land provided the Catholic League

with ample opportunity to defend both Pope John Paul II and Pius XII. In this regard, the media proved to be extremely fair, allowing William Donohue, Robert Lockwood and Patrick Scully a chance to balance some of the more negative commentary.

There is much in this issue on Pope Pius XII. What angered the league about the “60 Minutes” interview with John Cornwell was not simply the angle that program took, but the fact that it came on the day before the Holy Father set foot in the Holy Land.

QUOTABLE

NBC’s “Today Show” (3/21/00)

DR. DONOHUE: ...I think the Catholics have to own up to the fact that they didn’t do enough during the Holocaust. There is a grand collective act of contrition. On the other hand, you know, Catholics are not a punching bag. And there are some people who want to keep upping the ante. It’s like it’s never enough.

“HARDBALL with Chris Matthews” (3-21-00)

DR. DONOHUE: Let’s get a couple of things straight about Pius XII. He wrote an encyclical in 1937 for his predecessor which condemned Nazism long before a lot of people in the Jewish community were doing so, certainly in the Protestant community and in the Catholic community.

In 1941, he was commended by the New York Times as the lone voice breaking out of the silence in Europe for condemning what was going on. The New York Times again, on Christmas Day

of 1942, did the same thing.

When the war was over in 1945, here's a pope who was congratulated by virtually every single Jewish organization throughout the world. He was given all kinds of money from the World Jewish Congress. We know that in his own backyard in Italy, something like 85 percent of all the Jews survived as a direct consequence of what he did. Who do you think opened up the convents? Who opened up the monasteries? There were Jewish women who gave birth inside these monasteries.

EPILOGUE: HOUSE CHAPLAIN

On March 23, House Speaker Dennis Hastert named Father Daniel P. Coughlin the new House Chaplain. Father Coughlin is Vicar for Priests of the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Our official response was as follows:

"The Catholic League is pleased to note that the House Chaplain selection process has come to an end. Over the past few months, we issued 14 new releases on this subject and granted scores of interviews to the media. We raised many serious questions about the treatment of Father Timothy O'Brien in the selection process and were dismayed by the way the Republicans handled this matter. But we have no interest in fighting this fight any longer and we commend House Speaker Dennis Hastert for bringing this chapter to an end.

"All along we have said that our only interest has been in assuring that the selection process be given strict scrutiny by Republicans and Democrats alike. We have never had any interest in the outcome, only the process. With this said, the Catholic League commends Rev. Wright for stepping aside and

Father Coughlin for his appointment as the first Catholic to ever hold the post of House Chaplain."

Throughout this four-month ordeal, the Catholic League stood squarely behind Father O'Brien. We are proud we did so. When he tells the whole story, there will be few who wish they hadn't taken our side from the get-go.

THE IRRELIGIOUS LEFT

William A. Donohue

The fact that the term Irreligious Left sounds strange, but Religious Right does not, is a function of media bias. No one uses the former term while the latter is part of every pundit's vocabulary. Yet in reality there is more reason to use the former than the latter. A recent Gallup poll on anti-Catholicism bears this out quite well.

When Rev. Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority in 1979, it was his goal to provide a political wake-up call to evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants. Ten years later, with the backing of Rev. Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed started the Christian Coalition, a group that piggy-backed on Falwell's idea by launching a grass-roots movement in communities throughout the nation. The Moral Majority is now dead and the Christian Coalition is in the recovery room, but no matter, both organizations succeeded in galvanizing their allies in a way that no one denies.

The rap on both groups has been that they are the Religious Right, a group of mean-spirited intolerant persons who are often seen as anti-Catholic.

The recent flap dealing with Bob Jones University and the House Chaplain issue offered more reasons to brand these Protestants as bigots.

I have been quoted, quite accurately, as saying that there is a problem with anti-Catholicism in this camp and that attempts to pretend it doesn't exist is dishonest as well as injurious. But it is also true that I have never doubted for one moment that the biggest problem with anti-Catholicism comes not from the Religious Right, but from those who believe in nothing. Now the Gallup organization has offered data that supports this observation.

In a poll conducted March 17-19, it was shown that 27% of Americans say they have a negative perception of the Catholic religion. After looking at the data, Gallup expert Frank Newport observed that "although about one-quarter of Americans have an unfavorable opinion of the Catholic religion, there is little evidence that supports the hypothesis that this anti-Catholicism is disproportionately located among conservative Protestants." He concludes that "those who are most personally irreligious are most negative towards Catholics."

The following data are illuminating:

Among those who say that religion is not very important in their daily life, 44% have an unfavorable view of Catholics.

Among those who are not members of church or synagogue, 39% have an unfavorable view of American Catholics.

Among those who never attend church, 54% have an unfavorable view of Catholics.

Among those who think that religion is largely old-fashioned and out of date, 45% say they have an unfavorable opinion of Catholics' religion.

As a sociologist who has examined similar data in the past, I

am convinced that there are at least two distinct groups within this “unchurched” segment of the population: the apathetic and the angry.

The apathetic group consists mostly of non-joiners. These are men and women who never attend civic functions, never serve on school boards, never volunteer for anything, and seldom, if ever, go to church or to the voting booth. They *might* attend a block party, but if they do, they will do nothing to help.

While some may say they are harmless, Tocqueville saw them as a problem. They were a problem for a democracy because they allowed the state to do the work that should ideally be done in local communities by voluntary organizations. But whatever one might say about them, they are not the ones who don't like Catholics. That award goes to the angry.

Unlike the apathetic, the angry often get involved in activist associations. They do so either to satisfy their own narcissistic appetites or to wreck havoc with the status quo; they are not given to altruism, though they speak endlessly about it.

These well-to-do people direct their anger at the social order, America, Western Civilization and nature. Most of all, they are angry at God. They constitute a disproportionate segment of the cultural elite, working in publishing, higher education, Hollywood, non-profit organizations and the like.

This slice of the “unchurched” population fancy themselves as tolerant, but they are anything but. Indeed, they are among the most intolerant people on earth, venting much of their anger at Catholicism. It is they who are the Irreligious Left.

So while some in the evangelical and fundamentalist ranks may prove to be a disagreeable lot for Catholics, they are not a dangerous gang that looks at the Church as an institution to be conquered. That prize goes to the Irreligious Left, a miserable bunch if there ever was one.

"60 MINUTES" ON PIUS XII

By Ronald Rychlak

The March 19 broadcast of CBS Television's "60 Minutes" profiled *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII*, by John Cornwell (Viking Press, 1999). As the title suggests, that book presents a very cynical portrait of Pope Pius XII.

Like many print reviews, "60 Minutes" started by discussing Cornwell's claim that he was convinced of Pius XII's evident spirituality and thought that the full story would vindicate him. So, assuring Church officials that he was on the Pope's side, Cornwell claims to have obtained special permission to look at the Vatican's archives.

By the middle of 1997, after having worked on the project for five years and having studied the Vatican files, Cornwall claims to have found himself in a "state of moral shock." He was now convinced that Pius XII had a soaring ambition for power and control that had led the Catholic Church "into complicity with the darkest forces of the era." He concluded that Pacelli was "an ideal Pope for the Nazis' Final Solution."

Crucial to his self-promotion is Cornwell's claim to have been a good, practicing Catholic who set out to defend his Church. His earlier books, however, were marketed as having been written by someone who had left the Church. According to a 1989 report in the *Washington Post*, Cornwell "was once a seminarian at the English College in Rome and knows the Vatican terrain, [but] he has long since left the seminary and the Catholic faith, and thus writes with that astringent, cool, jaundiced view of the Vatican that only ex-Catholics

familiar with Rome seem to have mastered.” At that time Cornwell described himself as a “lapsed Catholic for more that 20 years.”

In *The Hiding Places of God* (1991) he declared that human beings are “morally, psychologically and materially better off without a belief in God.” He also said that he had lost his “belief in the mystery of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.” Reviews of that book called Cornwell an agnostic and former Catholic. As late as 1996, when he was supposedly trying to vindicate Pius XII, Cornwell called himself a “Catholic agnostic,” who did not believe in the soul as an immaterial substance.

Perhaps more revealing are Cornwell’s prior comments about Pope Pius XII. In his 1989 book, *A Thief in the Night*, Cornwell mentions the “alleged anti-Semitism” of Pius without offering any explanatory comment. Then, on page 162, he mocks Pius, saying that he was “totally remote from experience, and yet all-powerful-a Roman emperor.” He goes on to call Pius an “emaciated, large-eyed demigod.” In 1995 in London’s *Sunday Times*, Cornwell described Pius as a diplomat, a hypochondriac and a ditherer. The next year, when he was supposedly working on his defense of Pius XII, Cornwell wrote in the *New York Times* of Pius XII’s silence on Nazi atrocities” as an example of a failing by the Catholic Church. In light of this evidence, his claim to have had nothing but the slightest regard for Pius XII up until 1997 is simply not believable.

As to his claim to have received special assistance from the Vatican due to earlier writings which were favorable to the Church, a simple call to the Vatican would have revealed that he received no special treatment. Any competent scholar can obtain access to the archives that he saw without promising to be “favorable” to the Church. Moreover, a quick consultation of Cornwell’s earlier books (or easily-available reviews thereof) reveals that he has never been friendly to the Holy See.

In *A Thief in the Night*, Cornwell rejected rumors of a Vatican conspiracy to poison Pope John Paul I, but his conclusion that a cold-hearted bureaucracy let the Pope die was almost as bad. Cornwell, voicing sentiments that sound exactly like what he now says about his new book, wrote: "The Vatican expected me to prove that John Paul I had not been poisoned by one of their own, but the evidence led me to a conclusion that seems to me more shameful even, and more tragic, than any of the conspiracy theories."

Cornwell's 1993 novel, *Strange Gods*, is about a Jesuit priest who keeps a mistress on whom he lavishes caviar and champagne, goes on golfing holidays in Barbados, and takes lithium for manic-depressive swings. He supports his lifestyle by absolving a wealthy Catholic benefactor from his own sins of the flesh. *The Independent* (London) called the priest "a cut-out model of a sexually tortured Catholic." Driven by fear and desperation, the priest deserts his pregnant mistress in favor of a dangerous, immoral venture in an obscure part of Latin America. When he returns to England, his faith is transformed into what one reviewer called "a soggy Christian humanism."

In *The Hiding Places of God* (1991) Cornwell wrote of his days in the seminary: "I took delight in attempting to undermine the beliefs of my fellow seminarians with what I regarded as clever arguments; I quarreled with the lecturers in class and flagrantly ignored the rules of the house."

"60 Minutes" skipped over these matters even though they were contained in the April issue of *Brill's Content* magazine, which was on newsstands at the time of the broadcast. Instead they interviewed Gerhard Riegner, who complained about Pope Pius XII's "silence."

Riegner wrote a memorandum to the Holy See, dated March 18, 1942, describing Nazi persecution. Cornwell describes this memo in his book and leaves the impression that the Vatican failed to take any action in response to it. Cornwell fails,

however, to note the letter of thanks that Riegner himself sent on April 8, 1942. In that letter, Riegner, on behalf of the World Jewish Congress, states:

We also note with great satisfaction the steps undertaken by His Excellence the Cardinal Maglione, with authorities of Slovakia on behalf of the Jews of that country, and we ask you kindly to transmit to the Secretariat of State of the Holy See the expression of our profound gratitude.

We are convinced that this intervention greatly impressed the governmental circles of Slovakia, which conviction seems to be confirmed by the information we have just received from that country...

In renewing the expressions of our profound gratitude, for whatever the Holy See, thanks to your gracious intermediation, was good enough to undertake on behalf of our persecuted brothers, we ask Your Excellency to accept the assurance of our deepest respect.

Ed Bradley asked about the numerous letters sent from various Jewish groups following the war, but there was no mention of Riegner's own letter of thanks.

In fact, the recently-released memoirs of Adolf Eichmann, chief of the Gestapo's Jewish Department, reveal the Nazis' knowledge that Pius was deeply offended by these arrests and that he worked hard to prevent the deportations. (Ironically, given complaints about secrecy within the Vatican, this important piece of evidence was suppressed by the Israeli government from 1961 until March 2000.)

On a different matter, Bradley said that Pius objected to having black soldiers garrison the Vatican following Rome's liberation because the Pope had heard reports of rape being committed by African-American troops. This clearly offended Bradley, and he used it to raise questions about the canonization effort.

Actually, confusion about this situation stems from a report the Pope received about French Algerian troops. The report said that these troops had raped and pillaged in other areas where they were stationed, and the Pope did not want these specific soldiers stationed in Rome. Pius expressed his concerns about these specific men to British Ambassador Osborne who broadened the statement in his cable back to London, saying that the Pope did not want "colored troops" stationed at the Vatican. Bradley said that Pius was talking about African-American troops, which is clearly not correct.

Cornwell expressed the opinion in the "60 Minutes" segment that things could not possibly have been worse for the Jews than they were. To say this is to ignore the hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of Jewish men, women, and children who were saved by Pius XII and those who were working at his direction. Those Jewish victims, however, were very thankful during and after the war.

Gerhard Riegner said that the numerous offers of thanks and praise at the end of the war were merely political maneuvers, designed to restore good relations between Jewish and Catholic people. However, 13 years later, at the time of his death, Pius XII efforts to save Jews from the Nazis was still the primary focus of attention. The Anti-Defamation League, the Synagogue Council of America, the Rabbinical Council of America, the American Jewish Congress, the New York Board of Rabbis, the American Jewish Committee, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and the National Council of Jewish Women all expressed sorrow at his passing and thanks for his good works. *The Jewish Post* (Winnipeg) explained in its November 6, 1958 edition:

It is understandable why the death of Pius XII should have called forth expressions of sincere grief from practically all sections of American Jewry. For there probably was not a single ruler of our generation who did more to help the Jews

in their hour of greatest tragedy, during the Nazi occupation of Europe, than the late Pope.

Then Israeli representative to the United Nations and future Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir, said: "During the ten years of Nazi terror, when our people went through the horrors of martyrdom, the Pope raised his voice to condemn the persecutors and to commiserate with their victims." Nahum Goldmann, President of the World Jewish Congress, said: "With special gratitude we remember all he has done for the persecuted Jews during one of the darkest periods of their entire history."

Unfortunately, these voices were not heard on "60 Minutes," nor are they to be found in Cornwell's book.

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SEEING EVIL IN GOOD

Prayer and the crucifix. Fairly non-controversial subjects, one would think. But to some, they are sources of evil.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has been combating anti-Semitism since the early part of the 20th century. That some of its leaders are need in of a workshop on tolerance is as regrettable as it is true. Take Dena Marks, for instance, the head of the Texas ADL.

Ms. Marks is opposed to students praying in a huddle before a

football game. But besides the usual church-state argument, she advances a non-legal position, one which gives clarity to her reasoning: she sees sectarian prayer as hate speech.

Appearing on the March 28 edition of "Pros & Cons" on COURT TV, Marks explained her objection this way: "When it [prayer] excludes certain people, when it excludes the people who aren't the majority or the people who aren't saying that prayer, that can also be a trigger for hatred." That this should roll off the lips of a professional engaged in fighting intolerance is cause for real concern. She apparently is oblivious to her hypocrisy.

Then there is the case of the school crucifix that scared the daylights out of Jewish professors. It seems that some of them went ballistic when informed that the Organization of American Historians had settled on a Catholic institution, St. Louis University, to hold its annual meeting. St. Louis, the angry historians protested, was run by the Jesuits. Worse, they had crucifixes in the classrooms, symbols of "lethal anti-Semitism."

"To us," wrote one of the historians, "it [the crucifix] is a particularly potent historical symbol of aggressive, even lethal, Antisemitism." Who the "us" is he did not say, but it is only logical he meant Jews. That, however, makes him appear even dumber: most Jews do not suffer apoplexy when confronted with Christian symbols.

The historian continues by bashing Catholicism and then justifying it: "And it is not bigotry. It is the response to over a thousand years of persecution in the name of Christianity—a persecution which has persisted into our own lifetimes." Yet when someone says that anti-Semitism can historically be understood as a reactive condition, namely as a response to offensive Jewish behavior, he is instantly branded a bigot. But one size evidently doesn't fit all.

To those who think that such thinking only applies to the public display of Christian symbols, think again. "If they really want to spare the feelings of Jews," writes the professor, Christians "shouldn't display the cross on the outside of their churches, or wear crosses around their necks. Indeed, Christians shouldn't even have crosses inside their churches, or inside their purses or pockets, because it is the same antisemitic symbol, hidden though it is from their Jewish brethren. In fact, the hiddenness [sic] makes it seem even more sinister and sneaky."

What is most troubling about this remark is its totalitarian implications. The goal is not to privatize religion, which is offensive enough, but to eradicate it. Indeed, there is no law punitive enough to satisfy such perverted urges, which is why freedom of conscience remains the first freedom: it is the one freedom even the most committed tyrants cannot destroy.

HOLOCAUST COMMISSION

The January/February edition of *Catalyst* carried a story on the launching of the Catholic-Jewish Holocaust Commission. In it we noted that one of the Catholic scholars, Father John Morley, had labeled the work of Father Peter Gumpel, the realtor of the cause of Pius XII, as being "biased." As we now know from Father Morley, the context in which the "biased" remark was made is quite different from what was conveyed.

Father Morley has expressly said that he has "admiration for his [Father Gumpel's] dedication and years of research." The "biased" comment was made in reference to Father Morley congratulating Father Gumpel for being *positively* biased toward the good cause of promoting the virtue of Pius XII.

There is, of course, a world of difference between John Cornwell's *negative* bias against Pius XII, and a bias born of admiration.

We are sorry for conveying the wrong message, and we wish Father Morley, who teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at Seton Hall University, all the best in his work dealing with this sensitive subject. We are also proud to note that Father Morley is a member of the Catholic League.

NBC AXES "GOD"

The animated comedy, "God, the Devil and Bob," has been axed by NBC after a number of the station's affiliates refused to air it. Its poor ratings and controversial nature were also mentioned as reasons why the show was dropped.

The Catholic League let NBC know that we were monitoring the show. Our position was that "God" was crude but not deeply offensive. While there was no specific mention of Catholicism in the program, the four episodes that did air clearly trivialized religion. The occasional profanity attributed to "God" was uncalled for, as was the unseemly behavior of some of the cartoon's characters.

Our single most important objection with the show was its attempt to establish a moral equivalency between good and evil. For that reason alone, our culture is better off without "God" on the air.

BRYANT GUMBEL'S PROBLEM WITH CATHOLICISM

The March edition of the CBS program, "The Early Show," featured another attack on Catholicism; it was the third outburst in less than two months. Joining Bryant Gumbel in this attack was his co-host Jane Clayson, anchor Julie Chen and meteorologist Mark McEwen. Here is a sample of the extended discussion:

McEwen: Do you go to church?

Gumbel: No.

McEwen: Then why do you give up stuff for Lent?

Gumbel: Because I think there is a great deal of Catholic guilt that remains.

McEwen: That's what—that's what drives the Catholic Church, is guilt.

Gumbel: I mean, so if you even—if you even think about Betty Sue in the backseat, forget about doing it. Save your effort. You already sinned.

Chen: I haven't thought of Betty Sue in the backseat...

McEwen: ...if you do go to the backseat, you can go say you're sorry.

Gumbel: That's right.

McEwen: It's called confession.

Gumbel: ...were, like no matter what you did, if you had a double murder, he'd give you, like, a Hail Mary.

McEwen: That's right.

Gumbel: Say a Hail Mary and go home. And the other one, if you, like, ate meat on Friday, he'd make you take a trip to Lourdes. Seriously. I mean, no—the penance was different...

In a statement to the press, Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

“I mean, like, hey man, like, when will Bryant grow up?”

“CIDER” TURNS TO VINEGAR

Hollywood's love affair with abortion rights was proven once again at this year's Academy Awards celebration. According to an AP story, John Irving got a “thunderous applause” when he picked up his Oscar for “Cider House Rules.” That's because the abortion-rights enthusiast went out of his way to thank “everyone at Planned Parenthood and the National Abortion Rights League.”

Accepting the Oscar for Best Screenplay, Irving also said “I want to thank the Academy for this honor to a film on the abortion subject, and Miramax for having the courage to make this movie in the first place.”

Now it is a little disingenuous to say that “Cider” is a film “on the abortion subject.” That's like saying “Patton” is a movie on the subject of war. Even more absurd is the pretension—entertained *ad nauseum* in Tinsel Town—that it takes “courage” to make a [pro] abortion movie. Yeah, just like it took guts for Miramax to bash Catholics in “Priest” and “Dogma.”

Those in search of what courage looks like might try to access the April 1 edition of the Jesuit magazine, *America*. See the

splendid piece by Paul W. McNellis, S.J. on the movie. Father McNellis shows quite clearly how “Cider” turns to vinegar.