

There's precious little Catholic respect in the United States

There is little question that anti-Catholicism has increased markedly in recent times, and if there is any serious doubt I invite anyone to stop by my New York office to avail himself or herself of the evidence.

It must be noted that the way anti-Catholicism manifests itself today bears little resemblance to past patterns of bigotry. The nativistic impulses that once characterized immigration policy, and the fantastic charges of dual loyalty to nation and papacy, have certainly not disappeared, but they have subsided.

What is different about today's strain of anti-Catholicism is that it derives almost entirely from the well-educated strata of society and is directed at both church teachings and traditional Catholics.

In addition, we have a new phenomenon, that of the "self-hating Catholic" – 1960's generation-types who were raised Catholic but have long stopped practicing (an important minority are still attending to the sacraments).

Their defining mark is their deep-seated hatred about anything Catholic. What accounts for the new wave of anti-Catholicism is the content and constancy of church teachings on morality; the "progressives" want to force a modernist agenda on the ever-resisting church.

Topping the list of contemporary examples of Catholic-bashing has been the Nazi-like tactics of gay militants. In Boston, gay activists have thrown condoms at those attending the installation of a new bishop. In Washington, Queer Nation

disrupted a Mass at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. St. Patrick's Cathedral was the site of gays who interrupted Mass and spit the Communion wafer on the floor. And just recently another gay and lesbian group held a demonstration during Mass at a church in Brooklyn.

If this had happened in a synagogue, the media would have gone ballistic. That they didn't is testimony to their politics.

The media's reaction to the recent papal visit to Denver was rife with bias. Every splinter group that could be found, including Catholics for a Free Choice (which has no membership), was given a degree of visibility and credibility that was grossly disproportionate to its following among the rank-and-file.

The mindless polls, all of which failed to discriminate between practicing Catholics and Phil Donahue-type Catholics, added more fuel to the fires of discontent. The goal was clearly to accentuate the negative and thereby marginalize the influence of the Catholic Church on society.

TV and radio shows this fall have been replete with snide references to priest as pedophiles. Would the media generalize from the few to the collective if the subject were the deviant practices of blacks or Hispanics? Obviously not, which begs the question: Why is there a double standard?

It's not just the media that is at fault. How many realize, for example, that the prevailing climate of political correctness on college campuses means that being pro-life is greeted with disdain and discrimination by faculty and administrators? We even have public officials who are anti-Catholic.

Dr. Joycelyn Elders, the surgeon general, succeeded in being confirmed despite statements that evinced an animus against Catholics. In New York, councilperson Ronnie Eldridge recently said that mayoral hopeful Rudy Giuliani should be considered

“suspect” because he once attended Catholic schools.

Imagine saying that a Jew should be considered suspect because he attended a yeshiva.

In short, in this day and age of the much-vaunted multicultural mantra of respect for diversity, there is precious little respect for Catholics. It’s about time Catholics not only recognized this abuse, but did something about it.

This commentary on contemporary anti-Catholicism was prepared for Catholic News Service and published in numerous diocesan weeklies across the country.