

Anti-Catholic Bias Lingers On

By Don McEvoy

There is considerable ambiguity in American attitudes toward Catholics, if the results of a recent national survey are to be believed.

An almost unanimous majority of non-Catholics told Louis Harris and Associates, who did the study for the National Conference of Catholics and Jews, that their personal relationships with Catholics were "pleasant and easy." Nine out of ten expressed their belief that there was no significant anti-Catholic prejudice in the nation today.

So far, so good. But when the pollsters got down to the specifics they found that nearly two-thirds of non-Catholics still agree with the stereotypical statement that "Catholics tend to favor their own." And while half reject the notion that "Catholics tend to be narrow-minded and under the influence of Church dogma," a disturbing 35 percent — one out of three — agree with this claim.

Another negative factor revealed in this research is that a clear majority (60 percent to 27 per cent) deny that Catholics have ever suffered discrimination in this country because of their religion. Any knowledge of our history would certainly refute such a claim. The National Conference of Christians and Jews itself was founded specifically in response to one such era in our national life.

When Gov. Al Smith of New York was selected by the Democrats in 1928 it was the first time ever that a Roman Catholic was granted the presidential nomination by either of the major political parties. The ensuing campaign was marked

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by the upsurge of Ku Klux Klan activities and nativist type bigotry in every section of the country. It is reputed that the pastor of the largest Protestant Church in my hometown of Tulsa, Okla., warned his congregation from the pulpit on a Sunday morning that if Al Smith was elected they could expect "priests and nuns to be practicing celibacy in public." A news photo of Smith and the Catholic bishop of New York cutting the ribbon to open the Lincoln Tunnel connecting New Jersey and Manhattan ran in newspapers across the country with the caption that it was a tunnel dug under the Atlantic Ocean to expedite the movement of the Pope to take over the country immediately after Smith's inauguration.

We've come a long, long way since those primitive expressions of anti-Catholic defamation. The election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 did put to rest, perhaps permanently, the question of a Catholic's qualifications to serve in high office; but there remains a tendency toward a kind of demeaning remark in some social circles that would be unthinkable regarding other religious or ethnic groups. Anti-Catholicism may, indeed, have become "the liberal's anti-semitism," as some have suggested.

There is nothing in the NCCJ study which ought to send Catholics to the barricades, but neither should the results leave non-Catholics in their present state of complacency. While any trace of anti-Catholic bias remains, it is a matter to which all the rest of us should give concerned attention.

Fr. John Reedy



Looking for the Lord

We Can Live With Complexity

Most of us like to think that our experience of life, with all the difficulties and mistakes we encounter, has taught us a few things; has provided us with some measure of wisdom.

For example, all the turmoil and crusades of recent years have left me with the general judgment: The more absolute a public position is, the more likely it will be deficient.

I say "the more likely" because I believe there are some absolute values, but not nearly as many as most of us claim.

But in trying to be honest and thoughtful in examining public controversies, I have found that most of them involve complex issues, a confusing tangle of facts, and frequently, a difficulty in obtaining adequate, balanced knowledge of the significant facts.

Examples of generalizations I'm not willing to endorse:

"The whole program of nuclear energy must be scrapped."

"Registration or a draft will inevitably lead to war."

"Violence can never be justified for one who follows the teachings of Jesus."

"Catholic theologians are undermining the integrity of the church."

"The Vatican is suppressing the necessary contribution of Catholic theologians."

"Republicans don't care for the needs of the poor."

"Democrats have no interest in the financial stability of private industry."

I don't deny that there are elements of truth in most or all of these judgments. But the issues and the facts are just too complex, too shaded to justify the generalization.

One motive for grasping generalizations is the frustration we experience

when we recognize that important issues involve more specialized knowledge or more time and energy than we can devote to them. We've learned the danger of entrusting such decisions to those specialists who claim to have competence in the subject. We recognize that there is as much difference of opinion among the experts as there is among the general population.

In our frustration, we are attracted to the generalization which gives us the satisfaction of having resolved the matter in our own minds; it spares us the need of further investigation and thought.

I, too, distrust the wisdom of specialists on matters of great public importance. But I believe that I can formulate a workable, citizen's judgment on most of these issues without being forced to cling to the generalizations.

On the basis of the general knowledge I can obtain, and relating the facts and issues to the knowledge and values I hold, I can formulate a judgment, for example, on the priorities of human services and defense expenditures in the national budget.

It's not a refined judgment; it doesn't claim to include all the relevant facts; it doesn't assume anyone reaching a different judgment is either callous or naive. But it gives me enough probability to guide me in voting for or against a candidate.

When difficulties increase, when problems multiply — whether in the church or in our nation — we are attracted to the security of hiding behind a generalization while we close our minds to other possibilities.

Such an escape is a betrayal of our intelligence, of our vocation to honor and seek the truth. And, ultimately, it is a refusal to follow the Lord who told us He was the way, the truth and the life.

More Opinions

Stations Reflections

Editor:

This letter is in response to two articles on paralytic appearing March 19.

My first contention is with the too-free condemnation made by Mr. Driscoll of those "filled with sympathy or pity or sadness for Jesus" while making the Stations. One, rather, should view these sentiments as delayed remorse by sinners due to their position in time (i.e. after the fact of the Crucifixion). These are a reflection on how we offend the glorified Christ in the present which necessitated the "then" of the Passion. They are an encounter with the Eternal One in the Mystery of Love shown no better than in laying down His life for those whom He desires to presently call "friend." Unlike the "resurrectionists," the orthodox Catholic utilizes such sentiment in the hope of limiting his part in those evil doings perpetrated two centuries ago by contrition leading to conversion of heart. Thus, he enters the past, like Scrooge, so to appreciate the past and the present; and to learn gratitude for his Redemption — to embrace that Love that is even now not loved, Who is yet mystically wounded.

Must there be a conscious "resurrectional element" in the Stations? I think not, for the Risen Christ comes to us on the altar under the Signs of Death, not Resurrection. The Holy Crucifixion should be

our spiritual "bread and butter."

My second "beef" is with the notion that Catholics should revert to the practice of the Seder. St. Thomas Aquinas was explicit on relapsing into Hebraic worship: "Now man can make profession of his inward faith by deeds as well as by words; and in either profession, if he makes false declaration, he sins mortally." To celebrate the Seder is to leave even momentarily the Judaism completed in Almighty Christ to dabble in the Judaism left incomplete in the Mosaic Law; to caress darkness in leaving Him Who is the light of the world with the pretense of coming to appreciate the Light Which is being deserted; to abandon the hidden Eucharistic Christ for a pretreatment! Is it ignorance or ingratitude which swells the mind into thinking that the "grass is greener on the other side"? One does not return to the womb.

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Redemptorist Served Well

Editor:

Farewell, Brother Thaddeus Wright, CSSR.

I have just returned from Florida and was saddened to hear of the passing of Brother Thaddeus Wright, a Redemptorist Brother, who served so faithfully at Our Lady of Victory-St. Joseph

Church for the past eight years. Small of stature but large of heart and devotion to duty, Brother Thaddeus was truly an Instrument of God's Peace to the people he served so well. Each morning, in his habit and surplice, he would serve Mass, lector or help with Holy Communion. In his black shirt and collar, Brother could be seen each day working around the altar as he performed his many jobs as Sacristan. He would smile and greet the many people who make Daily Mass an important part of their lives. His love for his Holy Vocation was quite evident as he performed his religious duties as a Redemptorist Brother. Yes, another religious has left this world to claim the reward of a "good and faithful" servant. May Brother Thaddeus rest forever in the peace of Christ. He earned it.

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Minister Thanks SSJs

Editor:

Our church makes a very special experience of including all Sunday School children in our Palm Sunday service, when the children describe their personal Lenten quest before distributing palms to the congregation. It is a most fondly remembered time for young and old alike.

On Saturday evening, the palms we had ordered had not yet arrived. We were apprehensive of doing without and, therefore, losing the benefit of this experience.

Through the efforts of a

Catholic friend, we were directed to the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph, where help was found.

We wish to thank the good Sisters for their kind and gracious generosity in providing us with palms from their supply. Our Palm Sunday service was enriched and smooth-running as a result.

Rev. Robert Preston
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Evolution Not Proven

Editor:

I just read the article titled "Fundamentalists Still Rocking the Darwin Boat." May I ask when evolution was ever proven a fact? It seems to me that there has always been a "missing link" — or is that conveniently forgotten because time has passed? Evolution is a theory. Creation, whether evolved or literal, is a fact.

The Holy Spirit doesn't lie. And the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Old and New Testaments. Is it so hard to have faith in God alone? How many people doubted the story of the Ark — until it turned out to be proven from all historical and geographical findings, true?

Slow down, Mr. Renner. Don't get so fazed. These "fundamentalists" are simply trying to bring faith back into people's lives.

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Looking Back . . .

From the pages of the Courier-Journal:

75 years ago this week — A front page story serves as a reminder that 1905 was a lot closer to the Civil War than to our day. The story is an obituary on Col. Henry N. Schlick who "died suddenly Tuesday night at about 11:30 o'clock while talking with a friend at Main Street east and North Union street." He had been at a meeting of St. Mauritius Commandery, in St. Joseph's Hall, and was talking with a friend "when he suddenly gasped and fell against him and then to the ground. Mr. Bauer hastily called Dr. Roseboom but the doctor had found that Colonel Schlick had breathed his last."

Later in the obit it is recorded, "When the Civil War broke out he enlisted in Company K, New York Volunteers, and afterwards was made captain of the First New York Dragoons."

Ah, for the good old days! "On Sunday, April 23rd, the New York Central will sell one day excursion tickets to Buffalo and Niagara Falls at the low rate of \$1.25 round trip."

50 years ago this week — "Propagation of Faith Society in Rochester Gives \$153,852.52 to the Missions," read the banner headline on Page 1, April 18, 1930. The subhead declared, "Diocese Is Second In Entire Country In Its Generosity" and a further subhead said, "Archdiocese of New York Stands at Head of All."

Dateline Auburn: "One hardly recognizes East Genesee street, just beyond Lewis, where the Coburn House once stood but now has been razed to make way for the beautiful edifice to be erected by St. Alphonsus Church. Father Straub expects to start building very soon, as the debris is now being cleared away and excavation will begin at once."

25 years ago this week — Pope Pius XII in his Easter

message voiced a plea which has become a familiar cry from our popes. He asked that the world's leaders "arrange treaties that will insure peace, start a progressive disarmament and thus spare mankind the destruction of a new war." The pontiff in a prophetic manner asked that scientists persevere to obtain "a worthwhile production of easily accessible energy . . ." and at the same time he prayed that God will prevent such efforts "from being turned into an infernal violence that would destroy everything."

Local page headline: "Geneva School Drive Tops Goal by \$4,000." St. Francis DeSales School building fund had a \$75,000 goal and supporters contributed \$79,032, according to Father Edward K. Ball, pastor.

10 years ago this week — And the news took on a grim tone: "Abortion Okayed, Dispute Continues." The story: "Despite a last-minute appeal by N.Y. State's Catholic Bishops the state's new abortion bill was signed into law last Saturday without comment by Gov. Nelson Rockefeller."