

ADV 3836

Timely Topics Series No. 17

The Anti - Catholic Campaign

FACTS AND THE QUESTION OF POLICY.

BY

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3835 Westminster Place

St. Louis, Mo.

1923

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The Anti-Catholic Campaign.

The Catholic Church in the United States is being subjected to one of the country's recurrent attacks of religious bigotry. Scores of weeklies whose only object is to vilify the Church, are being spread broadcast. Hundreds of lecturers are traveling up and down the country shouting out denunciations of Rome and the Pope. And this time there has been added the curious phenomenon of the multi-K'd bamboozlers.

Naturally, it is not particularly agreeable to Catholics to go through this experience. They resent the injustice of the whole proceeding, the falsehoods and inventions supporting it, the bigotry and ignorance on which it flourishes. If they could, they would like to do something spectacular to make the whole campaign collapse. That is probably impossible. Very shortly, however, the present anti-Catholic campaign will die down, because human emotions cannot be kept up to this high pitch for very long. But unless we act more wisely and energetically than we have in the past, there will be only a sort of truce. In a few years another wave of bigotry will sweep the country and we shall have the same experiences to go through with again. It will be useful for us, therefore, to consider this phenomenon of bigotry and what we can do about it.

First of all we ought to remember that in the very midst of a campaign practically nothing can

be done. People are too excited. They will not listen to reason and explanation. There were thousands of persons in this country who knew that the Germans were not guilty of the atrocities attributed to them, but they never could have convinced the American public of this fact during the war. And similarly it is impossible to reach the consciousness of excited Protestants when they are in a like hysterical condition regarding the menace of Popery.

“Keep Down Passion.”

It is a hard lesson to learn, but the best thing we can do is simply to keep passion down as much as possible; this hysteria feeds on passion, and everything that we do to arouse it further makes matters worse. We ought to be careful, therefore, to be absolutely fair to non-Catholics. There is a temptation to fight fire with fire, to use something of the same methods against our enemies that they are using against us. But this is not Christian and it does not pay. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” is the only safe and wise policy. There is only one way of overcoming evil, and that is by good.

St. Paul tells us that charity thinketh no evil, and we must try not to think evil of those who are fighting us. Certainly we must not get into the attitude of looking for evil. I remember several years ago seeing in a Catholic paper an account of a fire at the old Holy Cross Academy in Washington. The Catholic paper remarked that probably some anti-Catholic bigot had set the building on fire. There was absolutely no evidence of any such thing and to make such a remark was on a

par with the "Menace" saying that probably the Sisters set the place on fire to collect the insurance. This unchristian spirit fans the flames of religious bigotry. It does not overcome the evil, but adds to it.

It is really a very easy thing to misjudge Protestants and to see bigotry where it does not exist. For a long time a great Methodist worker, an acquaintance of mine, always called me "Doctor" instead of "Father." I thought that it was because of a Protestant prejudice against calling a Catholic priest "Father." But it turned out that it was through the mistaken idea that only Catholics were allowed to call a priest by this title. A great deal that we think is bigotry really is not. Our own excited and inflated state of mind makes us misjudge others, just as others misjudge us.

Bigotry Not As Wide-Spread As Supposed.

Indeed, the first thing that we ought to keep in mind in regard to anti-Catholic bigotry is that it is not nearly so widespread as some people think. For the past nine years, I have worked in Texas. During that time I have given missions in a number of places, besides associating with students from all over the State. Texas, unfortunately, has a reputation among Catholics in other sections of the country as being extremely bigoted. Perhaps it shares the unenviable distinction with Georgia. But during this wide experience in Texas I have never had any but the most courteous treatment. Once when I was giving a mission on the Church lawn in a small town, there would be people playing and singing across the street. But as soon as our services commenced they stopped. Not long ago,

in another town that was split into two bitter factions, the Klan and the anti-Klan, two good Baptists took charge of the music for the mission. Elsewhere, because the pews could not accommodate all who came, we borrowed chairs from the Methodist church close by. Again, when Catholics did not have hymn-books I have borrowed them from the Protestant churches.

Undoubtedly, the Klan has been anti-Catholic. It has sent lecturers around who were decidedly unfair to us, and it seems to have sponsored certain vile anti-Catholic sheets. But it has not affected me personally in any way. The non-Catholics I know, and even those I suspect of being Klansmen, have been just as friendly and cordial as previously. Nor have I ever received any threatening letters. And while there have been some tar and feather parties in Texas, I do not know of one instance where the violence of the Klan was directed against a Catholic because of being a Catholic.

See Things Straight!

First of all, then, we should see things straight. The bigotry is not as wide-spread as many persons think. And there is considerable truth in the old proverb that we get what we expect. If a man looks for trouble, he will find it. If he looks for bigotry, he will experience it. And the reason is that he will assume a certain attitude and tone that will irritate others, and they will retaliate. Do not look for bigotry, and you will be in a much better frame of mind to see how much broadmindedness and good fellowship there is and how little of bigotry in the great world of people.

As a matter of fact, each recurring wave of

bigotry in this country seems to be smaller than was the preceding. My own impression is that the present Klan outbreak is not nearly so important as the A. P. A. was, and the A. P. A. was not as important as the Know-Nothings. More and more we are coming to secure the good will of the better educated Protestants, of their biggest leaders. We have the sympathy of more Protestants under this attack than are to be numbered in the ranks of the bigots. All this is encouraging and we ought to do all we can to foster it. A Catholic paper that publishes the good things Protestants say about us, that is fair and impartial, is doing a great deal more for us than one always harping on bigotry and stirring us up by every instance of injustice that comes to its notice.

We should, then, conclude that the first thing for us to do in meeting bigotry is to recognize its limitations; and to emphasize the lack of bigotry among large numbers of our fellow citizens. The heart of the American people is sound at the core. Our fellow citizens are fair and honest at the bottom, and we shall help that fairness to assert itself more quickly by expecting fairmindedness than by looking for injustice.

Duty Of Removing Ignorance.

In the second place, we ought to realize that bigotry is based on ignorance. Of course, there are some professional bigots, men and women, who are in the business of stirring up religious hate merely for the money they can get out of it. But their profit depends upon large numbers being ignorant. It is ignorance that is really the breeding place for religious bigotry. These bigots are not

human monsters. They are not denatured in any way. They are of the same flesh and blood as ourselves, and we ought to remember that Catholics have been guilty of somewhat similar bigotry. For instance, I heard a lecturer, sent around by the Knights of Columbus to attack Socialism, who was so unfair and boorish that I was ashamed of him. It is only a few years, too, since Catholics were indulging in the same sort of fanaticism and propaganda that they themselves are now suffering from. The field in which it was exercised was not religious, it is true, but the nature of the thing was the same. Our Catholic papers, many of them, were willing to publish any wild tale of German atrocity without questioning its veracity at all. To some extent they are doing the same thing about Russia today.

If we would only learn the lesson of being absolutely fair to others because of what we suffer, the persecution would be well worth-while. But if we have been slow to learn it, we ought not to feel so badly because others have not learned it either. It is apparently a very difficult lesson to learn. Human nature is prone to believe evil about one's enemies. And therefore just so long as non-Catholics in this country look upon us as their enemies, and think that we are fighting the public schools and that our allegiance to the Pope is inconsistent with our allegiance to the government, so long will anti-Catholic campaigns continue.

Self-Training.—Some Suggestions.

This ignorance on which religious bigotry feeds can only be overcome by persistent and wide-spread

efforts on our part. Missions for non-Catholics, lectures, the distribution of pamphlets will all help. But these things only scratch the surface, they reach only a small percentage of the great non-Catholic public. There is, in fact, only one way of reaching the whole public, and that is by each Catholic layman being a missionary. Every week practically every non-Catholic in this country comes in contact with some Catholic. If all Catholics were real missionaries then the non-Catholics could not remain in ignorance. Their ignorance is really to be laid at the door of their Catholic acquaintances.

It is not asking the impossible to suggest that all Catholics should be vitally interested in spreading a knowledge of Catholicism. Apparently Christian Scientists are eager to talk Science to any one who will listen. They will buttonhole you on the street, in a trolley car, any place at all, to get in a few words—or many words—on their pet subject. Socialists are willing to preach Socialism in season and out of season. A New Thought advocate is using such an unlikely medium as the magazine called "Correct English" to inculcate her religious theories. Assuredly, the children of this world are wiser than the children of light.

A generation ago a nation-wide dry law was a wild improbability. Today we have a constitutional amendment and the Volstead law as the result of the earnest efforts of a little handful of men and women who started the movement. Within our memory, Woman Suffrage was a joke. But women in all of our large cities went week after week to the headquarters to learn the arguments for and

against suffrage, to be drilled thoroughly in the advocacy of this cause. Today women vote.

Interest in Our Own Religion and Zeal Required.

If Catholics taken generally would only show the same interest in Catholicism that Christian Scientists do in Science, that Socialists and Prohibitionists and Suffragists have shown in their various causes, the professional bigots would be out of a job. Certainly, there would be no room for an anti-Catholic movement based on ignorance. But first of all, Catholics would have to know Catholicism. And unfortunately we must admit that Catholics do not know their religion. Sometimes they are as ignorant as non-Catholics.

I must confess I do not understand the lethargy and laziness of Catholics. In my simplicity I had hoped that the Ku Klux Klan would scare them out of their indifference, and I was prepared to bless the Klan for that. But Catholics have remained just about as listless as before.

It is not much that is asked of them. Fifteen minutes a day given with absolute regularity to reading would in a few years give them sufficient familiarity with the teaching and practices and history of the Church to make them capable apostles in their own little sphere. Regularity is the main thing. Fifteen minutes, or ten minutes, or even five minutes a day will accomplish wonders. Longfellow is said to have translated the "Divine Comedy" while his coffee was cooling at breakfast. And while some critic has said that he could easily believe it from the result, yet the fact remains that this short time given regularly day after day was

enough to translate one of the longest poems ever written. That same time given to systematic study of religion will do as much.

Reading Recommended.

And in order to make the matter definite, I suggest that Catholics commence with Cardinal Gibbons' "Faith of Our Fathers," DiBruno's "Catholic Belief" and Conway's "Question Box." All of them are published in cheap paper-backed editions, and the three of them can be bought for less than a dollar. There is no Catholic who cannot afford to buy them, and who cannot snatch enough time each day to read and study them. Have your own copies, mark them up, read and re-read them. Really master them. Then you can go on to some good history of the Church, such as Stebbings or Alzog.

For a Catholic to know his religion is a duty. And one does not get a sufficient knowledge of it in a parochial school or in Sunday school. The average Sunday school is merely an excuse and the parochial school cannot give to children ten and twelve years of age the mature conception of Catholicism that will be needed by the man and woman of thirty. A study of religion is necessary after one leaves school. In fact, it should continue through life.

To neglect this duty may well be a mortal sin. A parent, for instance, who has children going to a non-sectarian school, and who cannot talk intelligently with them on their religious problems, may be endangering their faith. The man or woman married to a non-Catholic, and unable to answer

their questions about the Catholic Church, may be responsible for their remaining outside of the faith. Those ignorant Catholics who cannot answer the casual acquaintance on some point of Catholic practice, may have to answer for their ignorance when they appear before Christ's judgment seat. I have no patience with those Catholics who go to Mass every Sunday, who would not think of eating meat on Friday, but who nevertheless neglect this very serious duty of studying and knowing their religion. At least, they are going to have a long time in Purgatory.

Lethargy A Greater Danger Than Professional Agitators.

The way to meet bigotry in this country, then, is to do it cheerfully. Discount it as much as possible. Do not look for it. Emphasize the other side, the fairness and broadmindedness of Protestants. After that know your own religion. Be able to inform inquiring non-Catholics. Let each Catholic be as much interested in Catholicism as a Socialist is in Socialism, a Christian Scientist in Science, and a Suffragist in Suffrage, and the Church will have nothing to fear. Our own worst enemies are not the professional agitators, but the indifferent, lethargic, lazy Catholics.