



The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice

By Philip Jenkins

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Anti-Catholicism has a long history in America. And as Philip Jenkins argues in *The New Anti-Catholicism*, this virulent strain of hatred--once thought dead--is alive and well in our nation, but few people seem to notice, or care.

A statement that is seen as racist, misogynistic, anti-Semitic, or homophobic can haunt a speaker for years, writes Jenkins, but it is still possible to make hostile and vituperative public statements about Roman Catholicism without fear of serious repercussions. Jenkins shines a light on anti-Catholic sentiment in American society and illuminates its causes, looking closely at gay and feminist anti-Catholicism, anti-Catholic rhetoric and imagery in the media, and the anti-Catholicism of the academic world. For newspapers and newsmagazines, for television news and in movies, for major book publishers, the Catholic Church has come to provide a grossly stereotyped public villain. Catholic opinions, doctrines, and individual leaders are frequently the butt of harsh satire. Indeed, the notion that the church is a deadly enemy of women, the idea of Catholic misogyny, is commonly accepted in the news media and in popular culture, says Jenkins. And the recent pedophile priest scandal, he shows, has revived many ancient anti-Catholic stereotypes.

It was said that with the election of John F. Kennedy, anti-Catholicism in America was dead. This provocative new book corrects that illusion, drawing attention to this important issue.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The American media, usually painstaking in their efforts to offend members of no racial, religious or gender category, consistently make one major exception—the Roman Catholic Church. So argues Jenkins, professor of history and religion at Penn State and a prolific author whose titles include *Pedophiles and Priests* and *The New Christendom*. Though anti-Catholicism arrived with the Pilgrims, only since the 1960s has it been aided by dissenters within the Catholic Church, primarily those who disagree with the church on sexual matters: birth control, feminism, abortion, homosexuality. Citing copious recent examples of anti-Catholicism in public protests, movies, television, publishing, the arts, the news media and academia, Jenkins concludes that offenses against Catholicism, unlike those against, say, Judaism or Islam, are rarely censored and never considered hate crimes. Similarly, historical offenses by Catholics are treated differently from those against Catholics: "If seizing Christian Syria and Palestine by the Muslim sword was acceptable in the seventh century, why was it so atrocious to try to reclaim them with the Christian lance 400 years later?" Jenkins, an Episcopalian, wants evenhanded treatment for all religions, whether through equal respect or equal openness to attack. Liberal Catholics may contend that vigorous dissent helps keep the hierarchy honest; others might argue that the largest American denomination does not need the protections afforded more vulnerable groups. For Jenkins, however, it's about fairness: "One does not make light of black heroes and martyrs, of AIDS or gay-bashing, yet when dealing with Catholics, no subject is off-limits."

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From [Booklist](#)

Fear and hatred of Catholicism have a long pedigree in English North America—land settled, after all, by Protestants more sanguinary than sanguine about their religious freedom. The anti-Catholicism book Jenkins promised in "The Booklist Interview" [BKL O 1 02] first recaps the history of American anti-Catholicism and distinguishes anti-Catholicism from anticlericalism, or distrust and hatred of the clergy, which need be neither anti-Catholic nor anti-Christian. Both right and left have been anti-Catholic at different times. The Know Nothing Party and the Ku Klux Klan attacked Catholicism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but liberals prosecuting Prohibition, family planning, sex education, legalized abortion, feminism, gay rights, and other progressive causes embraced anti-Catholicism later. Jenkins examines liberal anti-Catholicism in chapters on whether "The Church Hates Women" and "The Church Kills Gays"; the treatment of Catholics and the church by the news media, in the movies, and on TV; the current "pedophile priest" crisis; and dissident Catholic historians' critique of Pope Pius XII's relations with the Third Reich. He always carefully discriminates prejudice from mere tastelessness (e.g., recognizing *South Park* as deliberately vulgar, not bigoted) and liberal from conservative conceptions of what is antireligious. He concludes with shrewd prognostication about what may cause future flare-ups of this resilient American prejudice. If not as globally portentous as *The Next Christendom* [BKL Ap 1 02], this book is at least as eye-opening and complacency shaking. *Ray Olson*

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Review

"A fascinating tale, exploring the depths of the consciousness of this country—diverse forces that weave together the history of the civilization that we share.... His prose is energetic, assertive and blessed with a crystalline coherence. Packed with historic detail and intricate referential material, it is nonetheless crisp and easy to read. This is a book of powerfully convincing fairness, of impressive scholarship and of

extraordinary courage--Jenkins strips naked some of the most cherished hypocrisies of American ideologues from one extreme of the spectrum to the other."--Michael Pakenham, *Baltimore Sun*

"A provocative brief on some of the uglier prejudices lurking behind today's Catholic controversies.... Alerts readers to the forgotten history and persistence of anti-Catholic biases in American politics and culture."--Paul Baumann, *The Washington Post*

"A spirited account of how deep, pervasive, and multifaceted is the elite culture's animus toward the Catholic Church."--*First Things*

"A thought-provoking and balanced analysis of prejudice against Catholics.... Honest, passionate, and convincing, it will cause the reader to reconsider basic assumptions."--*Library Journal*

"Eye-opening and complacency shaking.... Jenkins examines liberal anti-Catholicism in chapters on whether 'The Church Hates Women' and 'The Church Kills Gays'; the treatment of Catholics and the church by news media, in the movies, and on TV; the current 'pedophile priest' crisis; and dissident Catholic historians' critique of Pope Pius XII's relations with the Third Reich."--*Booklist* (starred review)

"A serious look at the why anti-Catholicism is the 'last acceptable prejudice' in the United States--why opinion leaders of every sort of casually slam the Catholic Church when they wouldn't dream of slamming any other church or institution."--*Our Sunday Visitor*

"A long overdue dissection of the most protean prejudice in American history, *The New Anti-Catholicism* should challenge the complacent who imagine anti-Catholic bias to be confined to the nation's fever swamps. It should also (although it probably won't) cause a serious examination of conscience on the political left, where anti-Catholic canards are now epidemic. Emphatically not a book for Catholics only, *The New Anti-Catholicism* should be required reading in every newsroom in the country." --George Weigel, author of *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, *The Truth of Catholicism: Ten Controversies Explored*, and *The Courage to Be Catholic: Crisis, Reform, and the Future of the Church*

"This is an astonishing book. Most of us get used to the contempt heaped upon the Catholic church by nice, liberal people (as if such contempt were only to be expected), so we stop thinking of it as the gross deformity of soul it is. Jenkins, once a Catholic but no longer, quietly amasses evidence about more types of prejudice and bigotry against Catholics than most of us are conscious of. He is particularly good at diagnosing 'the black legends' about Catholicism which everybody 'knows' are true--the Crusades, the Inquisition, 'silence' regarding the Holocaust--and the inner agitation of 'anti-Catholic Catholics,' who have internalized the world's contempt. A serious, original, provocative study." --Michael Novak, author of *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*

"There are few scholars in the nation better equipped to address the subject of anti-Catholicism than Philip Jenkins. That he has succeeded is indisputable. *The New Anti-Catholicism* is thorough, erudite, and convincing. I highly recommend it." --William A. Donohue, President, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rebecca Shadwick:

As people who live in the particular modest era should be upgrade about what going on or details even knowledge to make them keep up with the era that is always change and move forward. Some of you maybe can update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice to suit your needs but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know which one you should start with. This *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* is our recommendation to cause you to keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and want in this era.

Angela Hampton:

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