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Pride, Wrath, Glee, and Fear: Emotional Responses to Senator Joseph McCarthy in the Catholic Press, 1950-1954

Glen Gendzel

American Catholics stood accused of monolithic support for Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist crusade in the early 1950s. Historians have disproved this myth by demonstrating that Catholics, like other Americans, divided between liberals and conservatives over McCarthy and his red-hunting methods – though support was higher among Catholics than among other religious groups. Catholics on both sides of the issue had strong emotional reactions to McCarthy because he was the most prominent Catholic politician in the United States. This article explores uniquely Catholic emotional responses to McCarthy by surveying news reports, columns, editorials, and letters to the editor in leading Catholic newspapers and magazines of the early 1950s. The most prevalent emotions displayed in the Catholic press were (1) pride in McCarthy's religion, (2) wrath toward his Catholic critics, (3) glee in his choice of non-Catholic victims, and (4) fear of the backlash that McCarthy might provoke against the church. These findings uphold the historical portrait of American Catholics as divided over McCarthy, but add richness and nuance to that portrait by showing how Catholics responded as Catholics to McCarthy while arguing with each other about the most controversial public figure of the early 1950s.

Introduction

When Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin roamed the political landscape in the early 1950s, he elicited strong reactions on all sides. The smoldering controversy over McCarthy and McCarthyism has flared up in recent years thanks to a well-received Hollywood movie and a spate of popular new biographies about "America's Most Hated Senator" who some believe was unfairly

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"Blacklisted by History."¹ Early in the Cold War, millions of Americans regarded McCarthy as a courageous "red-hunter" who rooted out traitors in Washington, but millions more questioned his harsh methods and his reckless, often unsubstantiated accusations. McCarthy's crusade against communists in government occurred during what historians call the Second Red Scare, when fears of subversion ran rampant. Even though foreign observers were generally horrified by McCarthy, his appeal for Americans was really no mystery: opinion polls in the early 1950s showed that most Americans simply associated the Wisconsin senator with anti-communism.² Given the parade of frightening headlines in those years about communist expansion, foreign espionage, high-level treason, the Chinese Revolution, the Soviet atomic bomb, and the Korean War, McCarthy's anti-communist rhetoric and sensational charges won him a substantial following even as his crude tactics loosed a rising tide of criticism that ultimately brought him down.

As the most prominent Catholic American politician of the early 1950s, McCarthy also elicited strong reactions from Catholics no less than from other Americans. Catholic conservatives hailed McCarthy as a heroic defender of the faith against godless communism; conversely, Catholic liberals charged that McCarthy used un-Christian, un-American methods that were a disgrace to the church. Emotions ran high on both sides of this debate because for American Catholics, anti-communism was fraught with special significance. The church had been officially and stridently anti-communist for over a century before McCarthy arrived on the scene. Papal encyclicals

1. *Good Night and Good Luck*, directed by George Clooney, Warner Independent Pictures, 2005; Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator* (New York: Free Press, 2000); Ted Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2003); Haynes Johnson, *The Age of Anxiety: McCarthyism to Terrorism* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005); Tom Wicker, *Shooting Star: The Brief Arc of Joe McCarthy* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006); M. Stanton Evans, *Blacklisted by History: The Untold Story of Senator Joe McCarthy and His Fight Against America's Enemies* (New York: Crown Forum, 2007).

2. Herman, 182. On the Second Red Scare, see M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New York: Free Press, 1995); John E. Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); and Michael Barson and Steven Heller, *Red Scared! The Commie Menace in Propaganda and Popular Culture* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001). Post-Cold War revelations, including the sensational "Venona" documents, have not vindicated McCarthy's claim that certain high officials in the United States government were communist agents. See John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 17, 396n11.

dating back to 1848 declared communism to be atheistic, materialistic, and evil.³ By the 1930s, American Catholics had enthusiastically embraced anti-communism as a way to prove their loyalty to the United States and to the church at the same time. "Religiously, the crusade against communism was a rhetorical means of rekindling commitment to Catholic doctrine," historian Robert Frank explains. "Politically, the movement affirmed the patriotism of every Catholic American."⁴

After World War II, and the Soviet conquest of millions of Catholics in Eastern Europe, church leaders and laity in the United States took up the Cold War torch with great fanfare. Francis Cardinal Spellman and other Church leaders in the United States denounced Soviet repression of Catholics in captive nations. Lay organizations such as the National Catholic Welfare Conference trumpeted their anti-communism, while the Catholic press raised alarms about the red menace.⁵ Hence it was understandable that when a new anti-communist avatar such as McCarthy appeared, most American Catholics would support him regardless of his faith. Americans of all faiths were swept up in the Second Red Scare, which triggered mass emotions that McCarthy skillfully exploited. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some basic emotional responses to McCarthy that were unique to Catholics on both sides of the issue and that were not shared by other Americans. This article examines

3. Marc Karson, "Catholic Anti-Socialism," in John H. M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974), 164-185; "Communism," in Peter M. J. Stravinskias, ed., *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1998), 257-258; Matthew Bunson, "Communism," in *Our Sunday Visitor's Encyclopedia of Catholic History*, rev. ed. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2004), 236-237.

4. Robert L. Frank, "Prelude to Cold War: American Catholics and Communism," *Journal of Church and State* 34 (January 1992): 41; Jay Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 334-336. For comparisons with other churches, see Kenneth D. Wald, "The Religious Dimension of American Anti-Communism," *Journal of Church and State* 36 (Summer 1994): 483-506.

5. Donald F. Crosby, "The Politics of Religion: American Catholics and the Anti-Communist Impulse," in Robert Griffith and Athan Theoharis, eds., *The Specter: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974), 20-38; Kathleen Gefell Centola, "The American Catholic Church and Anti-Communism, 1945-1960," (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Albany, 1984). For a clear statement of American Catholic commitment to Cold War anti-communism, see Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, *Communism and the Conscience of the West* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1948). See also Thomas Kselman and Steven Avella, "Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States," *Catholic Historical Review* 72 (July 1986): 403-424.

discussions of McCarthy that appeared in some of the leading Catholic newspapers and magazines during the senator's most prominent years from 1950 to 1954. News reports, editorials, columns, and letters to the editor in the Catholic press displayed four distinctly Catholic emotional responses to McCarthy: (1) pride in McCarthy's ethnicity; (2) wrath toward his Catholic critics; (3) glee in his choice of non-Catholic victims; and (4) fear of the backlash that McCarthy might provoke against the church.

The Catholic Press in the 1950s

Needless to say, no sample of press opinion can scientifically measure the prevalence of ineffable emotions across a diverse community of nearly forty million people.⁶ Literary critics have long argued that the written word is a notoriously opaque window into the thoughts, intentions, and emotions of any writer, much less his or her readers.⁷ Individual writers featured in Catholic periodicals were hardly a random sample of the American Catholic community and did not necessarily represent broader Catholic opinion in any systematic way. Though some of these Catholic writers were quite influential leaders and shapers of opinion in their community, not all Catholics read Catholic magazines or newspapers, and it is impossible to gauge whether readers agreed with what they read or how they were influenced, if at all. Nevertheless, despite these caveats, the Catholic press of the early 1950s does offer a rich textual source of intra-sectarian discourse surrounding Senator McCarthy – who, as Catholic readers and writers at the time knew, was a Catholic himself.

6. The Catholic Church in America claimed over 36 million members in 1957. Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, rev. ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1960), 153. John Tracy Ellis, however, estimated that the actual figure was closer to 40 million. Ellis, *American Catholicism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 125.

7. See, for example, the discussion of deconstruction and poststructuralism in *The New York Times Guide to Essential Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York Times, 2007), 92-93.

The publications consulted for this study are ranked here by 1953 circulation:

| JOURNAL | PUBLISHER | 1953 CIRCULATION |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Our Sunday Visitor</i> | Private non-profit corporation | 752,331 |
| <i>The Sign</i> | Passionist fathers | 248,909 |
| <i>Brooklyn Tablet</i> | Diocesan newspaper | 105,331 |
| <i>Boston Pilot</i> | Diocesan newspaper | 85,432 |
| <i>Ave Maria</i> | Holy Cross Fathers of Notre Dame | 49,822 |
| <i>America</i> | American Jesuits | 34,370 |
| <i>The Commonweal</i> | Catholic laymen | 17,609 |
| <i>Catholic World</i> | Paulist priests | 16,381 |
| <i>American Jesuits</i> | "A Monthly Journal of Opinion" | 13,198 |
| TOTAL | | 1,323,383⁸ |

The Catholic press made up such a substantial sector of United States print media in the 1950s that a comedian wisecracked "there is nothing wrong with the Catholic press in America that an acute paper shortage would not cure." *TIME* magazine considered it the nation's "biggest specialized press" which exerted "a telling effect" on Catholic opinion.⁹ By 1954, 22 million United States households subscribed to Catholic newspapers or magazines and almost half of Catholic adults reported reading at least one such publication regularly. Catholic press readership was probably even larger than circulation figures would indicate given that average family size for Catholics in the early 1950s was 4.4 compared to 3.4 nationally. "The Catholic weekly paper is intended for the entire family," advised *Our Sunday Visitor*, and surely each copy must have passed through many hands.¹⁰

Catholic readers consulted the Catholic press primarily for guidance in religious matters, but political news and commentary were not lacking, either. "Catholics are persistently taught that only in the Catholic press can they read the truth," complained a Protestant editor. "A Catholic paper in your home is an alarm clock that alerts you to the dangers of the hour and also guides you in right

8. Circulation figures from *Catholic Press Directory, 1953-1954* (New York: Catholic Press Association, 1953). Useful profiles of each magazine can be found in Charles H. Lippy, ed., *Religious Periodicals of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986).

9. Dan Herr, *Stop Pushing!* (New York: Doubleday/Hanover House, 1961), 159; "The Catholic Press," *TIME* 67 (28 May 1956): 73.

10. *Catholic Press Directory*, 15; survey in *Catholic Digest* 18 (February 1954): 1-2; *Catholic Press Directory, 1953-1954*, 10; *Our Sunday Visitor*, 7 February 1954.

thinking," counseled a priest writing for *Our Sunday Visitor* in 1953.¹¹ Of all the worldly dangers about which the Catholic press offered guidance in the early 1950s, communism surely ranked foremost. Readers were constantly reminded about millions of Catholics suffering under Soviet rule in Eastern Europe and prominent clerics such as Archbishop Stepinac of Yugoslavia or Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary languishing in communist prisons. Catholic publications had a wide variety of missions and editorial points of view, but in the early 1950s they all ran "story after distressing story on the persecution of Catholicism in its Eastern European strongholds," according to historian Robert Ellwood.¹² Hence any politician who strongly denounced communism could count on favorable coverage in the Catholic press – especially if he were a Catholic himself. If he could also offer a coherent explanation for why the United States government seemed powerless to roll back the Iron Curtain and liberate oppressed Catholics, so much the better. For this reason, Senator McCarthy loomed large in the Catholic press from the moment he burst onto the national political stage in February, 1950, with sensational charges about communist traitors in Washington.

Over the next four years, editorial support for McCarthy in the Catholic press was strong, unwavering, and nearly unanimous. Conservative journals such as the *Brooklyn Tablet* and *Ave Maria* gave the Wisconsin senator unqualified backing; only the liberal lay weekly *The Commonweal* and the Jesuit monthly *America* consistently criticized McCarthy. Father William Clancy, a *Commonweal* editor at the time, recalled that "we stood apart from most of the Catholic press on this issue."¹³ Indeed, *America* and *The Commonweal* notwithstanding, McCarthy's coverage in the Catholic press was so uniformly positive that John G. Deedy, Jr., of the *Pittsburgh Catholic* would later blame his fellow editors "at least partially" for the "unblushing romance of many Catholics with McCarthyism." Ellwood concurs that "much of McCarthy's rapid

11. Harold E. Fay, "Catholicism and the Press," *Christian Century* 61 (13 December 1944): 1442; Rev. Roger L. Vossberg, "Tis Good for the Soul, Son!" *Our Sunday Visitor*, 8 February 1953.

12. Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 30. For example, see George N. Shuster, *Religion Behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: Macmillan, 1954).

13. Father William Clancy quoted in "Fortieth Anniversary Symposium," *Commonweal* 81 (20 November 1964): 265. On the conservative politics of most Catholic journals in this period, see Ronald Lora and William Henry Longton, eds., *The Conservative Press in Twentieth-Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 181-215.

success derived from the enthusiastic support he received in the Catholic press."¹⁴ This support contributed to the widespread impression that McCarthy commanded unanimous allegiance from American Catholics. In the early 1950s, the "received wisdom" in Washington, according to historian James Hennesey, was that "fellow Catholics widely supported Senator McCarthy's 'crusade.'" The historian Thomas Reeves confirms that during McCarthy's heyday "it was widely assumed that Roman Catholics were solidly behind the senator."¹⁵

American Catholics and McCarthy

The perception of unanimous Catholic allegiance to McCarthy seems to have originated with *Washington Post* columnist Drew Pearson, who reported in 1950 that Father Edmund Walsh, a priest from Georgetown University, was the secret Svengali behind McCarthy's anti-communist campaign.¹⁶ Reporters and commentators in the United States and Europe readily assumed that all American Catholics backed McCarthy in unison, that the senator acted on orders from the church hierarchy, and that priests across the land sang his praises from the pulpit every Sunday to mesmerize a sheeplike flock. "Many political observers became preoccupied with the question of what Catholics thought of McCarthy," historian Niels Bjerre-Poulsen writes.¹⁷ Paul Blanshard, a prominent critic of the church at the time, asserted in 1953 that "Catholic opinion in America supports McCarthy heartily." A year later, the *New Republic* concurred that "McCarthy has a tremendous gravitational pull on

14. John G. Deedy, Jr., "The Catholic Press: The Why and Wherefore," in Martin E. Marty, ed., *The Religious Press in America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963), 75; Ellwood, 30.

15. James Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 293; Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 590. See also David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 305-307; and Herman, 176-180.

16. Drew Pearson column in *Washington Post*, 14 March 1950; Jack Anderson and Ronald W. May, *McCarthy: The Man, The Senator, The 'Ism'* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), 172-173. See the discussion of Walsh's role in Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, 202-203; and Patrick H. McNamara, *A Catholic Cold War: Edmund A. Walsh, S.J., and the Politics of American Anticommunism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 156-160.

17. Niels Bjerre-Poulsen, *Right Face: Organizing the American Conservative Movement, 1945-1965* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002), 71.

Catholic masses" because he had become the "political mouthpiece" of the church hierarchy in the United States.¹⁸

Did American Catholics unanimously support McCarthy? This question was decisively answered to the negative by historian Donald Crosby, S.J., in *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950-1957* (1978). Father Crosby demonstrated that the most salient political cleavage opened by McCarthy in the early 1950s was not between Catholics and non-Catholics, but between pro-McCarthy conservatives and anti-McCarthy liberals of all faiths. Support for and opposition to McCarthy cut across all religions, none of which stood arrayed wholly for or against him. Among American Catholics, leading prelates were generally supportive of McCarthy, but the laity were divided.¹⁹ Crosby demonstrated this diversity of opinion within the church in an effort to dispel stereotyped assumptions about Catholic conformity and unanimous support for McCarthy. But Crosby showed little interest in specifically Catholic reactions to McCarthy. While admitting that the Catholic press showered McCarthy with "unrestrained hero worship," Crosby was content to prove that Catholics in general divided over McCarthy along the same liberal vs. conservative lines as other Americans. Indeed, Crosby pointed to American Catholics' discord over McCarthy as proof of their final "assimilation" into the nation's cultural mainstream, because the Wisconsin senator polarized the Catholic community as he did the country at large.²⁰

Catholic opinion about McCarthy, however, did not precisely mirror national opinion. Consider this compilation of Gallup polls conducted between August 1951 and March 1954, asking the question: "In general would you say you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy?" Here is how responses broke down among the major religious faiths:

18. Paul Blanshard, *The Irish and Catholic Power: An American Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), 291; T.R.B., "Washington Wire," *New Republic* 130 (January 11, 1954): 2. On Blanshard's critique of American Catholicism and the resulting controversy in the 1950s, see John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 166-188.

19. Donald F. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950-1957* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978). For an earlier exoneration of American Catholics from the charge of monolithic support for McCarthy, see Vincent P. De Santis, "American Catholics and McCarthyism," *Catholic Historical Review* 51 (April 1965): 1-30.

20. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 65, 228-251.

| | PRO | CON | NO OPINION |
|-------------------|-----|-----|------------------|
| Catholic | 56% | 29% | 15% |
| Protestant | 45% | 36% | 19% |
| Jewish | 12% | 83% | 3% ²¹ |

Catholic support for McCarthy was not at all monolithic: only a bare majority (56 percent) of self-identified Catholics voiced favorable opinions of the senator. Still, support for McCarthy was noticeably stronger among Catholics than among other faiths. Crosby downplayed the opinion gap between Protestants and Catholics on this issue as "hardly a major statistical difference." He attributed McCarthy's noticeably higher approval rating among Catholics to the failure of pollsters to ask separate questions about the senator's goals and methods. But the same open-ended question was asked of all respondents, Catholic or not.²²

Poll data indicating majority Catholic support for McCarthy raise an empirical paradox that Crosby did not address. The paradox becomes clear when these data on Catholics are compared with data on McCarthy's support among the general population. The most detailed statistical analysis of McCarthy's popular appeal was conducted by political scientists Nelson Polsby and Michael Paul Rogin in the 1960s. These scholars stressed the importance of partisanship in shaping attitudes toward McCarthy. As a Republican who attacked Democrats, the Wisconsin senator appealed most of all to fellow Republicans. "McCarthy succeeded at the grass roots primarily among Republicans," Polsby concluded. The more Republican the observer, the more favorably McCarthy was viewed.²³ Yet American Catholics, who were heavily Democratic, tended to hold pro-McCarthy opinions in direct contradiction to the Polsby-Rogin model. Nearly 70 percent of Catholics voted for Harry Truman, a Democrat, in 1948. Four years later, despite a national landslide for Dwight Eisenhower, a majority of Catholics voted for Adlai Stevenson, another Democrat.²⁴ Thus the Catholic preference for McCarthy,

21. Poll data compiled in Frank J. Kendrick, "McCarthy and the Senate," (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1962), 330.

22. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 150, 229-231.

23. Nelson W. Polsby, "Towards an Explanation of McCarthyism," *Political Studies* 8 (October 1960): 258. See also Michael Paul Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967); and Thomas C. Reeves, "McCarthyism: Interpretations Since Hofstadter," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 60 (Autumn 1976): 42-54.

24. Ellwood, 31-32; Andrew M. Greeley, *The American Catholic: A Social Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 90-95. On Catholic voting behavior in 1948 and 1952, see Angus Campbell and Robert L. Kahn, *The People Elect a President* (Ann Arbor:

though not overwhelming, ran against the deeper political grain of American Catholics as Democrats, contrary to the national tendency of partisanship to determine attitudes on this issue. Catholics should have been *less* pro-McCarthy than other Americans because they were *more* Democratic. Yet the exact opposite was true: Catholics were *more* pro-McCarthy than other Americans, by a considerable margin, despite his Republican partisan identity and their own Democratic allegiance. This empirical paradox suggests that even though not all Catholics were McCarthyites, Catholic responses to the controversial senator are still worth exploring.



Joseph R. McCarthy, 1954.

Photograph by United Press. Courtesy of the Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-71719.

Pride

Pride was the first of four uniquely Catholic emotional responses to McCarthy in the Catholic press. Of all McCarthyites, only Catholics could take satisfaction in their sectarian religious identification with the Wisconsin senator. McCarthy's Irish surname and Marquette University degrees were enough to mark him as

University of Michigan, 1952), 36; and Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, 1954), 71.

Catholic in the public eye. "With the Church's adamant stand against communism so firmly etched into the national consciousness, no one could realistically ignore the Catholicism of the nation's most publicized Red hunter," Crosby acknowledged. Once McCarthy began grabbing headlines in 1950, he quickly became a hero to many of his coreligionists. This was somewhat ironic given that the senator himself only occasionally flaunted his religion. McCarthy told *TIME* magazine that he was "a good Catholic, but not the kiss-the-book, light-the-candle Catholic."²⁵ Nonetheless, biographers have found ample evidence of McCarthy's religiosity which was not hidden from the public. "He went regularly to confession, observed meatless Fridays, gave generously to Catholic charities, and rarely missed Sunday Mass," according to David Oshinsky. Arthur Herman agrees that McCarthy "attended mass every Sunday, built strong friendships with priests and clerics, and remained a strict Catholic." Crosby, however, insisted that McCarthy "never paraded his own identity as a Catholic to get Catholics to vote for him" and that "few Catholic politicians ever made less public display of their religion than did Joe McCarthy."²⁶

McCarthy could play the religion card when it suited him. The journalist Richard Rovere, who covered McCarthy in the early 1950s, recalled that the Wisconsin senator posed effortlessly as a "nice Catholic boy" for appearances before the Holy Name Society, the Catholic War Veterans, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and similar groups.²⁷ On such occasions McCarthy knew how to please the crowd. "You have been engaged in what may well be the final Armageddon foretold in the Bible – that struggle between light and darkness, between good and evil," McCarthy told a packed and cheering Catholic Press Association convention in 1950. "St. Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland," McCarthy told the Irish Fellowship Club in 1954, "and the snakes didn't like his methods either." That line nearly brought down the house as listeners hooted loudly and stamped their approval.²⁸ Generally, though, McCarthy did seem to refrain from exclusively Catholic appeals, and he or his followers took offense if

25. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 41-42; McCarthy quoted in "Weighed in the Balance," *TIME* 58 (22 October 1951): 22.

26. Oshinsky, 11; Herman, 10-11; Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 29, 34. See also the discussion of this issue in David Cauter, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).

27. Richard H. Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), 49; Herman, 176; Oshinsky, 305.

28. McCarthy quoted in Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion, Vol. 3: Under God, Indivisible, 1941-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 358; McCarthy quoted in Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 152. See also De Santis, 19-20.

others broached the topic of the senator's religion – such as when *TIME* magazine reported that McCarthy "cannot pass up a steak on Fridays." Perhaps it was Pearson's intimation of McCarthy's subservience to church control that goaded the hot-tempered senator to assault the columnist physically at a Washington dinner party in 1950.²⁹

For many Catholic conservatives, McCarthy's ethnicity, religion, and robust anti-communism made him an ideal public representative of the church. "He is Mr. Catholic-in-politics," an admiring priest wrote to *The Commonweal*.³⁰ Catholic press coverage of McCarthy highlighted his anti-communist campaign, of course, but it differed from mainstream coverage in that it also dwelled on the particulars of McCarthy's religious observance, assuring readers, for example, that the senator contributed to Catholic charities, bowed to priests, and never missed a Sunday Mass. A Wisconsin woman told readers of *Catholic World*: "Nowhere will you find anyone in his home community questioning Joe McCarthy's religious fervency," because he was "a deeply religious man" with a "deep sense of religious devotion." She quoted an old friend of the senator's who claimed that "Joe always takes time out to pray, even in the heat of a tight political campaign." Patrick Scanlan, pro-McCarthy editor of the *Brooklyn Tablet*, reveled in "the solemnity of the Catholic marriage rite" that he encountered as a guest at McCarthy's wedding in 1953. He reported triumphantly that non-Catholics told him afterward "how deeply they were affected by the religious significance of the ceremony." Father Richard Ginder, national columnist for *Our Sunday Visitor*, advised readers that "Senator McCarthy is a Catholic in good standing. . . . He goes to confession like the rest of us."³¹ Catholic press coverage of McCarthy's piety and fealty to the church encouraged sympathetic readers to feel proud of McCarthy because here at last was a prominent United States politician who shared their own rituals, devotions, and beliefs.

Catholic McCarthyites differed from other McCarthyites in that they identified with the senator's faith as well as his cause. To them it seemed obvious that McCarthy's faith led him to fight communism,

29. "Weighed in the Balance," 22; Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 36-37; "Battle of the Billygoats," *TIME* 56 (25 December 1950): 11. The physical assault is discussed in Mary Jane Ferguson, "McCarthy vs. Pearson," (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1969), 47-50; Oshinsky, 179-181; and Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, 348-349.

30. Letter to *Commonweal* 56 (11 April 1952): 17.

31. Helen Williams, "Never Sound Retreat!" *Catholic World* 176 (November 1952): 88-89; Patrick Scanlan column in *Brooklyn Tablet*, 3 October 1953; Father Richard Ginder column in *Our Sunday Visitor*, 30 August 1953.

and that faithful Catholics should support him by all available means – including prayer. Women regularly wrote in to the Catholic press pledging prayers for McCarthy. "Every day I pray a Rosary for you and your staff," offered one woman in an open letter to McCarthy, "bearing in mind that the Rosary is more powerful than the Atomic bomb." Fifty women in Cincinnati organized a novena for McCarthy, and a New York woman urged Catholics to join together in saying a daily "Hail Mary" for him.³² Catholic men, too, could admire McCarthy as a religious figure, not just a political one. Father James Gillis, whose *Boston Pilot* column ran in diocesan newspapers across the country, compared McCarthy to St. John the Baptist, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and "all the prophets and all the apostles." Another Catholic McCarthyite threw in St. Paul and St. Bernard for good measure.³³ "Just imagine if we stood together, and got behind the Senator McCarthys . . . , what a force for good in rooting out the Communist evil we would be," mused one letter-writer. "And as Catholics we really should."³⁴ Pride in McCarthy led many of his conservative coreligionists to praise the senator for "driving the Reds out of places of importance, similar to the way our dear Lord lashed the money changers out of the temple." This comparison was frequently invoked by Catholic McCarthyites, who then viewed the senator's downfall in the Army-McCarthy hearings as a televised crucifixion. "Only Senator McCarthy," wrote an embittered Catholic fan, "has not flinched to find Capitol Hill become a Calvary."³⁵

All McCarthyites tended to view the senator's opponents as communists or communist sympathizers. Catholic McCarthyites, however, were additionally prone to assume that they were prejudiced as well. "The perpetrators of the anti-McCarthy movement . . . incite Protestant Americans to distrust and hate Catholic Americans," fretted the *Brooklyn Tablet*. "Many of the attacks on Senator McCarthy . . . have been inspired by bigotry," a letter to the same newspaper declared. Father Ginder was certain that "animosity has developed against [McCarthy] because he is a Catholic."³⁶ This oft-voiced suspicion was the flipside of the pride that Catholic

32. Letter to McCarthy in *Brooklyn Tablet*, 21 August 1954; Patrick Scanlan column, *Brooklyn Tablet*, 10 April 1954; letter to *ibid.*, 27 March 1954.

33. Father Gillis column in *Boston Pilot*, 6 September 1952; letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 26 June 1954. Father Ginder described Father Gillis' column as "perhaps the most widely syndicated column in the Catholic Press." *Our Sunday Visitor*, 28 June 1953.

34. Letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 26 June 1954.

35. Letter to *Boston Pilot*, 1 March 1952; letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 10 July 1954.

36. Editorial in *Brooklyn Tablet*, 5 December 1953; letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 17 April 1954; Father Ginder column in *Our Sunday Visitor*, 30 August 1953.

McCarthyites felt for their hero. For them, any non-Catholic who spoke against McCarthy was not just a traitor but a bigot, because in their eyes McCarthy stood for all Catholics in the righteous battle against communism. A priest told the Catholic War Veterans in New York that McCarthy had enemies "solely because of his Catholic ideals." Father Gillis lamented that McCarthy was forever suffering "waspyish insults" and he believed "the opposition to McCarthy is because of his race and his religion." *Ave Maria* charged Protestants with "trying to make McCarthyism a religious issue."³⁷ "The Senator would not have nearly so many enemies if he were a high-ranking Protestant and a Mason," huffed Ginder, and Scanlan agreed: "If he were a Protestant or Mason the present furor over him would not occur."³⁸ "Could it be," asked a letter-writer to *Our Sunday Visitor*, "that they are attacking his religion rather than the man . . . ?" The *Brooklyn Tablet* resorted to a rhetorical question: "Is religious bias playing a part in the controversy over Senator McCarthy? Obviously it is." *The Sign* charged that the very word "McCarthyism," which the senator's critics used to caricature his crude techniques, was simply a new version of the old anti-Catholic epithet "Rum, Rome, and Rebellion."³⁹

For Catholic conservatives, then, McCarthy qualified as a Catholic hero primarily because of his religion and his noble cause, but secondarily because of the presumptive prejudice of his critics, which triggered an instinctive circling of the ethno-religious wagons when McCarthy came under attack from civil libertarians and others concerned about his methods. "I think we [Catholics] all owe him [i.e., McCarthy] a vote of confidence to let him know that we believe in him," wrote one reader to the *Brooklyn Tablet*. "There is nothing like a pat on the back when everyone is against you." *Our Sunday Visitor* similarly wished "that all Catholics would be with him because all the Church's enemies are against him."⁴⁰ John Cogley, a liberal anti-McCarthy editor at *The Commonweal*, complained about "the good old

37. Monsignor Edward R. Martin speech in *Boston Daily Globe*, 8 November 1954, as quoted in Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 200; Father Gillis columns in *Boston Pilot*, 18 March 1953, and 27 March 1954; "The Real Victim," *Ave Maria* 79 (24 April 1954): 5.

38. Father Richard Ginder column in *Our Sunday Visitor*, 26 July 1953; Scanlan editorial in *Brooklyn Tablet*, 29 May 1954.

39. Letter to *Our Sunday Visitor*, 26 July 1953; editorial in *Brooklyn Tablet*, 26 December 1953; editorial in *The Sign* (October 1951): 6.

40. Letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 27 March 1954; "So Many 'Views' Not Founded on Facts," *Our Sunday Visitor*, 13 June 1954. See also letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 26 July 1952, urging Catholics to rally behind McCarthy in reaction to Protestant criticism of the senator.

tribal spirit" that impelled Catholic McCarthyites to demand unanimity of support for their hero just because he happened to be a Catholic and because most of his critics were not. Cogley believed that this "tribal spirit," the instinctive urge to defend a member of the tribe under attack by members of another tribe, drove many Catholics to support McCarthy against their better judgment. Another *Commonweal* liberal protested that "we owe allegiance" to "the truth," not to "the tribe."⁴¹ Such appeals were unavailing, however, because Catholic conservatives were quick to accuse Catholic liberals of apostasy to the church for opposing the Wisconsin senator. "I can't see why *anyone* is against Senator McCarthy," a Mother Superior groused. But like many Catholic McCarthyites, she found opposition from within the senator's own faith especially hard to accept.⁴²

Wrath

Wrath toward Catholic liberals was the second emotional response to McCarthy in the Catholic press of the early 1950s. For many Catholic conservatives, the papal directive to oppose communism constituted a holy obligation to close ranks around McCarthy, and thus for any Catholic to speak out against the Wisconsin senator was, as one letter-writer charged, "to flout the Holy Father's injunction." *The Commonweal*, the leading voice of Catholic liberal opposition to McCarthy, objected that for Catholic McCarthyites, support for their hero had become "a test, if not of faith, at least of loyalty to the Church."⁴³ Harold Smith, a Catholic journalist who dared to criticize McCarthy, had to remind irate readers: "One does not become less Catholic or more Catholic by being for or against certain congressional committees." But Catholic liberals were unable to convince Catholic conservatives of the need to respect intellectual freedom on this issue. "An anti-McCarthy Catholic to such people is a contradiction in terms," lamented *The Commonweal*, tracing out the faulty logic of Catholic McCarthyites: "The Church is anti-communist; Senator McCarthy is anti-communist; therefore anyone who is anti-McCarthy is pro-communist and anti-Catholic." The editors objected to "Catholic McCarthyites, who have long propagated the idea that all *good*

41. John Cogley, "Two Images of One Man," *Commonweal* 62 (3 June 1955): 233; and, "Behind the Many Faces," *Commonweal* 62 (20 May 1955): 182; Francis Downing, "The Tribal Approach," *Commonweal* 55 (19 October 1951): 37.

42. Quoted in letter to *America* 91 (17 April 1954): 70.

43. Letter to the *Brooklyn Tablet*, 12 June 1951; editorial in *Commonweal* 59 (2 April 1954): 639.

Catholics are behind the Senator from Wisconsin."⁴⁴ Years later, Cogley recalled that *The Commonweal's* opposition to McCarthy led seminary rectors to blacklist the publication, Catholic college librarians to hide it under the counter, priests to excoriate it from the pulpit, and numerous diocesan newspapers to cancel their subscriptions. Cogley never forgot how Catholic conservatives deemed Catholic liberals "deficient in religious orthodoxy" for daring to raise doubts about McCarthy.⁴⁵

The church hierarchy did not condemn McCarthy's critics or specifically endorse him – except for New York's Cardinal Francis Spellman, who publicly gave Senator McCarthy his authoritative blessing. Approval from the "American Pope" presumably carried more prestige among Catholics than a few editorials in *The Commonweal* and *America*, and it did seem to imply official support for the Wisconsin senator.⁴⁶ Still, even if the hierarchy did not make McCarthy into a test of faith, the uncharitable notion that anti-McCarthy Catholics were religious as well as political apostates – traitors to their church as well as to their country – was expounded by no less a figure than McCarthy himself. In 1952, after *America* questioned McCarthy's methods, the senator sent a characteristically vitriolic letter to the editors accusing them of a "vicious smear job" and suggesting that they owed an apology to "good Catholic people who assume that at least in a Jesuit operated magazine they can read the truth." Laying it on thick for *America's* readers, McCarthy declared: "Being an ardent Catholic myself, . . . it is inconceivable to me that a Catholic priest could indulge in such vicious falsehoods in order to discredit my fight to expose the greatest enemy of not only the Catholic Church, but our entire civilization." McCarthy typically conflated criticism of himself with treason to the nation, but when the barbs came from fellow Catholics, he accused them of betraying the church as well. A year later, McCarthy sent a similar letter to *The Commonweal* charging that the magazine's criticism of his methods

44. Harold Smith, "A Catholic Party Line?" *Commonweal* 59 (2 April 1954): 643; "What Is The Commonweal?" *Commonweal* 59 (5 February 1954): 443; editorial in *Commonweal* 60 (17 September 1954): 574.

45. John Cogley, *Catholic America* (New York: Dial Press, 1973), 177, 84. On *The Commonweal's* struggle against McCarthy, see Rodger Van Allen, *The Commonweal and American Catholicism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 107-116.

46. John Cooney, *The American Pope: The Life and Times of Francis Cardinal Spellman* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 218-230; Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 132-135; Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, 493; Herman, 179.

did "a tremendous disservice to the Catholic church and a great service to the Communist Party."⁴⁷

McCarthy's diatribes against Catholic liberals were echoed by Catholic conservatives, touching off a vicious controversy within the church over the senator, his methods, and whether or not Catholics were obligated to support him. The controversy certainly did not reflect historian Patrick Allitt's impression that liberal and conservative Catholics showed "remarkable decorum" toward each other or that they argued "deferentially and circumspectly" in the 1950s.⁴⁸ Rather, Catholic liberals drew heavy fire from Catholic conservatives for their refusal to join the McCarthyite camp. They struggled to defend their right to oppose McCarthy's methods, even while insisting that they shared his anti-communist goals. The problem was many Catholic McCarthyites saw no difference between their hero's goals and methods, or between McCarthyism and anti-communism, or between allegiance to church and to McCarthy. Catholic conservatives seemed to believe that loyalty to McCarthy was a spiritual duty incumbent on all church members, and anyone who failed to meet this test was a "pseudo-Catholic" at best, as one letter-writer admonished. Another letter likened anti-McCarthyites within the church to "those Catholics whose indoor and outdoor sport consists in roasting their neighbors and priests."⁴⁹ "Catholics can hardly justify inactivity in view of the warning given them by the Holy Father," exhorted the *Brooklyn Tablet*. "Write your support of Senator McCarthy NOW!" One disgusted reader pointed McCarthy's Catholic critics to The Gospel of Matthew, chapter twenty-three: "You serpents, generations of vipers, how will you flee the judgment of hell?"⁵⁰

Prominent Catholics who spoke out against McCarthy weathered storms of recrimination in the Catholic press. When Senator Dennis Chavez of New Mexico denounced McCarthy "as a Catholic," he took a beating from Scanlan and other Catholic editors.⁵¹ In 1952, the English Catholic author Graham Greene chastised American Catholics for supporting McCarthy, and for weeks the Catholic press

47. McCarthy letter to *America* 88 (13 December 1952): 316; McCarthy letter to *Commonweal* 59 (27 November 1953): 190.

48. Patrick Allitt, "American Catholics and the New Conservatism in the 1950s," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 7 (Winter 1988): 23; Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 12.

49. Letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 30 January 1954; letter to *The Sign* (October 1951): 2.

50. Editorial in *Brooklyn Tablet*, 25 March 1950; letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 4 December 1954. See also "The Methods," *Ave Maria* 79 (16 January 1954): 6.

51. Patrick Scanlan column in *Brooklyn Tablet*, 20 May 1950; Oshinsky, 157; Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 77.

was full of letters and columns denouncing the un-Christian "immorality" of Greene's novels.⁵² Two years later, when Bishop Bernard Sheil of Chicago gave a speech attacking McCarthy's "lies, calumny, . . . and calculated deceit," many Catholics accused the prelate of voicing a heretical opinion "utterly foreign to Christian spirit and Catholic doctrine," as one letter-writing priest protested. Diocesan newspapers condemned or ignored Sheil's speech and it ultimately ruined his career.⁵³ Liberal editors at *America* and *The Commonweal* fared little better. Conservative readers bombarded them with indignant letters of protest for daring to rebuke their hero. "Please accept my prayers for your conversion," wrote one McCarthyite priest to the liberal Jesuits at *America*. "Editors like you make it very easy to understand how all the Catholic countries go Communist," scolded another reader. "From what some of our critics write," protested *America's* editors, "one would think that the twelve priests editing *America* were practically apostates."⁵⁴ *Commonweal* editor James O'Gara later recalled receiving a towering stack of letters all of which suggested he "go straight to hell and burn for all eternity." By 1956, the president of the Catholic Press Association felt compelled to step in and scold editors or readers who "called *Commonweal* Communist" or who "claimed that *America* has sold out to the Commies."⁵⁵ Cogley of *The Commonweal* pleaded with his coreligionists: "The whole nation is divided over this highly controversial question. Does it not seem natural enough that Catholic editors should be, too?" But Catholic McCarthyites looked to the Catholic press for "the sensitive, Christian side of Joe McCarthy," as

52. Letters to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 22 and 29 March 1952. See also Patrick Scanlan column in *Brooklyn Tablet*, 29 March 1952. Another English critic wrote: "In Europe it is more usual for the Catholic to question whether Mr. McCarthy is one at all, and to be embarrassed at the mere suggestion that he might be." Douglas Hyde, "British Impressions of U.S. Catholics," *America* 90 (26 December 1953): 237.

53. Philip A. Grant, Jr., "Bishop Bernard J. Sheil's Condemnation of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy," *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 97 (March-December 1986): 43-49; letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 17 April 1954; De Santis, 11-12. See also letter from Rev. Edward Lodge Curran, President of the International Catholic Truth Society, in *Brooklyn Tablet*, 17 April 1954. For the text of Sheil's speech see *New York Times*, 10 April 1954.

54. Letter to *America* 91 (17 April 1954): 71; letter to *America* 88 (3 January 1953): 375; editorial in *America* 91 (10 April 1954): 35. On the fate of *America's* liberal editors who were ultimately silenced by their Jesuit superiors in Rome, see Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 178-185; and Donald F. Crosby, "The Jesuits and Joe McCarthy," *Church History* 46 (1977): 374-388.

55. Letter quoted in "Fortieth Anniversary Symposium," *Commonweal* 81 (20 November 1964): 265; Charles McNeill quoted in "The Catholic Press," *TIME* 67 (28 May 1956): 73.

one of them wrote to the *Brooklyn Tablet*, and hence they erupted in wrath when they found criticism of their hero there instead.⁵⁶

Glee

The third emotional response to McCarthy in the Catholic press was glee at the senator's choice of victims. It gratified Catholic conservatives that so many of the alleged traitors and communist sympathizers whom McCarthy flayed in the press, on the stump, and before his investigating committee were members of the nation's mainstream elite of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) with impeccable Ivy League credentials.⁵⁷ Crosby was reluctant to acknowledge that any such ethno-religious *Schadenfreude* over the downfall of prominent WASPs might have motivated Catholic McCarthyites. Yet Crosby's peremptory dismissal of this possibility contradicts the nearly unanimous impression voiced by contemporary observers that Catholic McCarthyites were engaged in a form of displaced ethnic revenge when they railed about communists in government betraying the nation. In 1955, the prominent Columbia University historian Richard Hofstadter theorized that Catholic McCarthyites jumped on the Red Scare bandwagon mainly because it gave them a chance to question the patriotism of mainstream WASPs in high places while asserting their own 100% Americanism. Fellow Ivy League historian Peter Viereck of Mt. Holyoke agreed: "McCarthyism is the revenge of the noses that for twenty years of fancy parties were pressed against the outside window pane."⁵⁸

It was true that McCarthy's most high-profile targets tended to have perfect upper-crust pedigrees from Groton, Harvard, and Yale – or from all three, as in the case of Secretary of State Dean Acheson, whom McCarthy taunted as "a pompous diplomat in striped pants

56. John Cogley, "Must Protestants Distrust Catholicism?" *LOOK* 18 (1 June 1954): 40; letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 10 July 1954. "Until proved otherwise," protested Professor Edward Cronin of Notre Dame University, a liberal critic of McCarthy, "I must ask that my loyalty to America be granted." Letter to *Our Sunday Visitor*, 27 December 1953.

57. M. J. Heale, *McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1955* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 171-173; Herman, 177-180; Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics*, 20-21.

58. Richard Hofstadter, "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt, 1955" in Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right*, 3rd ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2000), 75-95; Peter Viereck, "The Revolt Against the Elite, 1955," in *ibid.*, 162. See also Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Sources of the 'Radical Right,'" in *ibid.*, 307-371; and Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 209-247.

with a phony British accent." To quote from McCarthy's most famous speech, delivered in Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1950:

It has not been the less fortunate or members of minority groups who have been selling this Nation out, but rather those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has to offer – the finest homes, the finest college education, and the finest jobs in Government. . . . [T]he bright young men who are born with silver spoons in their mouths are the ones who have been worst.⁵⁹

Much of the Catholic press cheered for this sort of anti-establishmentarian rhetoric. For generations, Protestant Americans had questioned the patriotism of Catholic Americans by insinuating that they were more loyal to Rome than to Washington. Now Catholics were thrilled to turn the tables by casting doubt on Protestant patriotism for a change, suggesting that some of Washington's most respected blue-bloods were more loyal to Moscow. But was it true, as the *New Republic* complained in 1954, that "an anti-Protestant drive over the 'Red' issue is underway"?⁶⁰

For some Catholics, McCarthy may have seemed like an avenging angel as he dragged effete WASP Brahmins to sweat and squirm before his investigating committee. Perhaps it felt like payback for generations of anti-Catholic bigotry and unfair aspersions on Catholic loyalty. The Catholic press smugly celebrated the scarcity of Catholics and the prevalence of Protestants among those whom McCarthy charged with treason. A letter to *Catholic World* boasted that "Catholic civil servants are practically never numbered among those suspected of Communist affiliations or disloyal and treasonable conduct . . . due mainly to the utter impossibility of being a practicing Catholic and Communist at the same time." American communism was "directed by educated and often wealthy Americans, of old

59 McCarthy quoted in Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 305; McCarthy speech reprinted in Allen J. Matusow, ed., *Great Lives Observed: Joseph R. McCarthy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 22-23.

60. T.R.B., "Washington Wire," *New Republic* 130 (11 January 1954): 2. See also Most Rev. Richard J. Cushing, "Loyal to the Cross and to the Flag," *Our Sunday Visitor*, 1 July 1951; "Catholics Should Be Proud of Their Record," *Our Sunday Visitor*, 27 September 1953; Rev. Richard Ginder's column in *Our Sunday Visitor*, 24 October 1954. On McCarthyism as ethnic revenge, see David Harry Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 238-315; Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 173-178; and Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 252-256.

families . . . going back to colonial times," smirked the *Brooklyn Tablet*.⁶¹ "You don't find Catholics advocating a soft policy on the Commies," boasted Father Gillis. "Our score is 100 to zero." Or as the *Brooklyn Tablet* joked: "What is the best way to go to Washington? You go to Harvard and turn left."⁶²

Still, despite some overtones of ethnic revenge, McCarthy's appeal for Catholics was always based primarily on his anti-communism. To assume that Catholics supported McCarthy for ethnic reasons above all is to assume that Catholics were incapable of the same political and ideological identification with the senator that other Americans felt. It is true that a few Catholics could not resist gloating when mainstream WASPs who had for so long cast doubt on Catholic loyalty proved untrustworthy themselves. But more often, Catholic McCarthyites placed anti-communism ahead of all other considerations in explaining their allegiance to the senator. Proving their own loyalty was unnecessary. Millions of American Catholics had just served their country with distinction in World War II; they had nothing left to prove.⁶³ In the 1950s they simply wished to claim a leading role in the Cold War crusade against communism. John Lukacs observed in *The Commonweal* that thanks to the Cold War, being Catholic was "for the first time in the history of the United States . . . a practical advantage, and not a handicap," because the church already opposed communism. "The Catholic Church is the only organization in the entire world which has constantly opposed Communism," crowed *Our Sunday Visitor*.⁶⁴ "No single group has been more alert to the communist threat . . . than the Catholic Americans," boasted the *Boston Pilot*. It was mainly in this respect that Catholic McCarthyites evinced glee over their hero's choice of

61. Letter to *Catholic World* 178 (January 1954): iii; *Brooklyn Tablet*, 28 January 1950.

62. Father Gillis column in *Boston Pilot*, 24 July 1954; *Brooklyn Tablet*, 6 May 1950.

63. Philip Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity: Language and Ethnicity in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 153-187; Hennesey, 280-283; Gerstle, 187-189, 220-237. For context see Richard Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible: Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States since 1938* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 46-85.

64. John A. Lukacs, "The Totalitarian Temptation," *Commonweal* 59 (22 January 1954): 398; editorial in *Our Sunday Visitor*, 31 December 1950. On American Catholic claims to anti-communist leadership in the Cold War, see Father Richard Ginder's column in *Our Sunday Visitor*, 7 January 1951; David J. O'Brien, *Public Catholicism*, (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 220-229; and Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity*, 272-300.

victims and their faith that, in the end, as *Our Sunday Visitor* predicted, "Communionism Will Overcome Communism."⁶⁵

Fear

Laying claim to anti-communist vanguard status was a potentially dangerous game for American Catholics to play. Flaunting the religious dimension of McCarthy's crusade made some Catholic conservatives feel good about themselves, but Catholic liberals worried that it might boomerang to the church's detriment. In 1953, McCarthy himself inflamed tensions between Catholics and Protestants by refusing to fire a staff member who had written that "[t]he largest single group supporting the Communist apparatus in the United States today is composed of Protestant clergymen."⁶⁶ Some Catholic liberals sensed that by hounding so many Protestant victims, McCarthy, as a prominent Catholic politician, was treading on potentially volcanic ground that could eventually erupt with devastating effect on the church and the American Catholic community.

This concern prompted Catholic liberals to express a fourth emotional response in the Catholic press: fear – not the fear of public humiliation, character assassination, and career damage that McCarthy inspired in many Americans at the time, but the fear that McCarthy's controversial crusade would invite new attacks on the church unless more Catholics voiced their opposition to the senator as proof of ideological diversity within their ranks. Professor Vincent De Santis of the University of Notre Dame warned his fellow Catholics in 1954 that "the time is long overdue for those who oppose McCarthy to speak out. If they do not, they run the risk of producing a climate favorable to an anti-Catholic crusade." Catholics could not afford to appear monolithically arrayed behind an unscrupulous demagogue, which was how many Americans of other faiths perceived McCarthy at the time. Catholic liberals feared, in short, that McCarthy's strong identification with the Catholic Church in the public mind meant that

65. Editorial in *Boston Pilot*, 1 April 1950; John C. Scanlon, "Communionism Will Overcome Communism," *Our Sunday Visitor*, 15 January 1950.

66. Joseph B. Matthews, "Reds and Our Churches," *American Mercury* 45 (July 1953): 3. Matthews was McCarthy's chief investigator at the time. For typical Catholic press reaction, see "Joe's Bloody Nose?" *Ave Maria* 78 (15 August 1953): 6. The Matthews episode is discussed in Reeves, *Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, 498-502.

resentment of McCarthyism could easily backfire against the church itself.⁶⁷

The danger was real because stereotypes of Catholicism and suspicions about McCarthyism paralleled each other quite closely. For example, the church critic Paul Blanshard readily agreed with Catholic McCarthyites that their hero was leading a religious crusade incumbent upon all church members because in Blanshard's view the existence of such an obligation would confirm his lurid image of the church as autocratic, monolithic, and intolerant of dissent. In 1954, the Reverend Robert McCracken, a prominent Protestant minister in New York, gave a scathing sermon that cited McCarthyism as proof that the Catholic Church was still a repressive institution that had "never disavowed the Inquisition, that makes a policy of censorship, that insists on conformity." That same year, Dr. James H. Nichols of the University of Chicago Divinity School accused the Catholic Church of using "authoritarian methods" such as "coercion and censorship" in the name of anti-communism.⁶⁸ It was in response to such prestigious attacks that a concerned Catholic liberal wrote to *America* asking "how many Catholics have considered that the present situation does more to prove Paul Blanshard's thesis than any of his books? How many Americans are connecting McCarthyism with Catholicism?" Another Catholic liberal, fearing the church would lose prestige through association with McCarthy, wrote to the same journal: "I dread the slowly developing but perceptible undercurrent of public opinion that whispers that the Church approves of Sen. McCarthy because he is a Catholic." *The Commonweal* warned readers that the constant demands from Catholic conservatives for unanimity in support of McCarthy only made the Church appear intolerant and authoritarian to outsiders. "And this caricature of the Church is, on occasion, made worse by individual Catholics who give the impression

67. De Santis letter to *New Republic* 130 (7 June 1954): 22. On Catholic liberals in this period, see James Terence Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); and Philip Gleason, "American Catholics and Liberalism, 1789-1960," in R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach, eds., *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45-75.

68. Paul Blanshard, *Communism, Democracy, and Catholic Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951), 298-299; McCracken quoted in Oshinsky, 305; Dr. James H. Nichols, "What Disturbs Protestants About Catholics?" *LOOK* 18 (18 May 1954): 47. For a response to Blanshard, see James M. O'Neill, *Catholics in Controversy* (New York: McMullen Books, 1954).

that there is no room in the Church for diversity of opinion." The editorial cited McCarthy himself as a leading offender.⁶⁹

Catholic liberals feared that even the appearance of monolithic Catholic support for McCarthy invited a terrible backlash against the church if the senator's political fortunes should ever take a turn for the worse. This is why in 1954 a group of Fordham University seniors signed a petition, published in the *Brooklyn Tablet*, that "protested firmly against the identification of Catholicism with the cause of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy." The students denounced the assumption made by the senator's Catholic fans that "to be a good Catholic, one must necessarily support the Senator" and that those who did not were "in some way suspect. . . . As Catholics, we oppose this attempt to yoke our faith to a transient political doctrine."⁷⁰ These young men of Fordham understood that if Catholic McCarthyites could enforce uniformity within the church on this issue, anti-Catholic backlash would likely accompany any future reaction against the senator, triggering new outbursts of religious hatred such as the Ku Klux Klan had unleashed in the 1920s. "Catholic support of Joseph McCarthy confirmed the stereotypes held by many Americans," writes historian F. Michael Perko, and that was troubling to Catholic liberals already concerned about the church's image. Thanks to McCarthy, "the Protestant liberal establishment, which had always distrusted Catholics, now had explicit reason to hate and fear them."⁷¹

The Commonweal voiced this Catholic liberal fear that McCarthy might reignite the fires of religious enmity and persecution. Early on, *The Commonweal* called McCarthy a "reckless, irresponsible bogeyman" who threatened to do more harm to democracy than good for anti-communism. *Commonweal's* editors yielded to no one in their anti-communism, but they pointed out that expecting all Catholics to support McCarthy violated American ideals and gave credence to charges that the church practiced totalitarian thought control.⁷² Catholic liberals understood that the early 1950s were an especially inopportune time for the church to appear monolithic in politics. Raging controversies over public funding for parochial schools, United States envoys to the Vatican, and United States support for Francisco

69. Letter to *America* 91 (17 April 1954), 70; letter to *America* 91 (10 April 1954): 44; editorial in *The Commonweal* 60 (23 April 1954): 56.

70. Letter to *Brooklyn Tablet*, 25 December 1954.

71. F. Michael Perko, *Catholic and American: A Popular History* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1989), 259.

72. "The Long Road Home," *Commonweal* 52 (2 June 1950): 188; Van Allen, 107-116.

Franco's dictatorship in Spain had already provoked many church critics to accuse American Catholics of slavish subservience to the church hierarchy in political affairs. In recent years, the prominent public philosopher Lewis Mumford had warned Americans that the Catholic Church was "acting as a bloc" in politics, and the respected theologian Reinhold Niebuhr had openly questioned whether "the presuppositions of a free society and the inflexible authoritarianism of the Catholic religion" could ever be reconciled.⁷³ "Protestants from many backgrounds felt that the Roman Catholic Church sought political advantage in American life and that the Catholic hierarchy would do anything necessary to secure that advantage," according to historian Lerond Curry's study of interfaith relations in the early 1950s. Ethnic historian Philip Gleason agrees that leading Protestants suspected the church of "pursuing a carefully thought out plan to 'take over' America and subvert the democratic ideals and values that were rooted in its Protestant heritage." Blanshard's books attacking the church along these conspiratorial lines were best-sellers in the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁷⁴

Given the cultural backdrop of Protestant-Catholic tensions in the early 1950s, the McCarthy controversy really was a potential danger to American Catholics because the senator's methods seemed to verify the worst suspicions of church critics. This was precisely what inspired fear in liberal Catholics. "For a goodly number of people," warned Cogley of *The Commonweal*, "McCarthyism brilliantly exemplified what they call the 'Catholic problem.'"⁷⁵ Catholic liberals sensed grave peril for the church in the demands of Catholic conservatives for religious solidarity over the McCarthy issue. *Commonweal's* Frank Gibney warned that given America's strong

73. Lewis Mumford, *The Condition of Man* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1944), 319; Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Scribner's, 1944), 128.

74. Lerond Curry, *Protestant-Catholic Relations in America: World War I through Vatican II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 38; Gleason, *Speaking of Diversity*, 211; John McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928-1960," *Journal of American History* 84 (June 1997): 97-131; Mark S. Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 59-76. For more examples, see Harold E. Fey, "Can Catholicism Win America?" *Christian Century* 61 (29 November 1944): 1378-1380; Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam's speech in *New York Times*, 29 October 1945; W. Russell Bowie, "Protestant Concern Over Catholicism," *American Mercury* 69 (September 1949): 261-273; George N. Shuster, "The Catholic Controversy," *Harper's Magazine* 199 (November 1949): 25-32; and George Huntston Williams, Waldo Beach, and H. Richard Niebuhr, "Issues between Catholics and Protestants at Mid-Century," *Religion in Life* 23 (Spring 1954): 163-205.

75. Cogley, "Two Images of One Man," 233.

Protestant traditions and large Protestant majority, it would be a grave mistake for the Catholic minority to force religion into politics in this manner. Catholic McCarthyites, he wrote, invited

the most dogmatic form of Puritanism . . . that equates religion and patriotism At such a time, it should be the Catholic who is clear in the distinction between the things of the spirit and those of the world. It should be his duty . . . to apply the principles of religion to political matters without hopelessly merging the two.⁷⁶

Given McCarthy's eventual disgrace and repudiation, most Americans apparently came to agree with Catholic liberals that democratic rights must not be subverted for any cause – however noble, righteous, patriotic, or exigent. Perhaps it was the unpopular stand against McCarthy taken by a few Catholic liberals in the early 1950s that finally reassured other Americans that the church was not, in fact, monolithic or hierarchically controlled in politics. By 1960, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., then an advisor to Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, could express confidence in the wake of the McCarthy controversy that the Catholic Church in the United States was "not a disciplined, monolithic movement, but a community of diverse opinion." Perhaps a handful of Catholic editors, by opposing McCarthy, helped make possible the election of the first Catholic president just a few years later.⁷⁷

76. Frank Gibney, "After the Ball," *Commonweal* 60 (3 September 1954): 535. Gibney was also a senior editor for *Newsweek*.

77. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Catholics in America," *New Republic* 142 (21 March 1960): 14. Compare Schlesinger's optimism with the McCarthy-era pessimism of D. W. Brogan, "The Catholic Church in America," *Harper's* 200 (May 1950): 40-50. See also James A. Pike, *A Roman Catholic in the White House* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960); Thomas Carty, *A Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); and Shaun A. Casey, *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon, 1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).