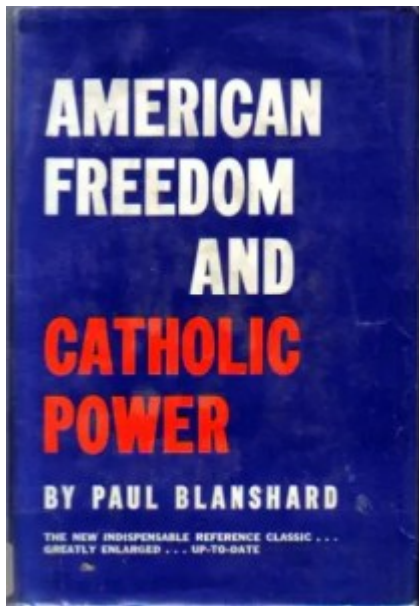


# American Freedom and Catholic Power



This is from a best selling author, Paul Blanshard, who exposed the power the Roman Catholic Church had over American politics in the middle of the 20th century.

Emphasis in underline are mine.

## **Author's Bio:**

Paul Blanshard has had a varied career as lawyer, public official, journalist, and author. Under Mayor Fiorello La Guardia he was head of New York City's Department of Investigations and Accounts. During World War II he was a State Department official in Washington and the Caribbean. Among his books are Communism, Democracy, and Catholic Power (1951), The Irish and Catholic Power: An American Interpretation (1953), and The Right to Read: The Battle Against Censorship (1955).

The first edition of American Freedom and Catholic Power, published in **1949**, went into twenty-six printings for a total of 240,000 copies.

## **Chapter I Personal Prologue: The Duty to Speak**

Probably no phase of our life is in greater need of candid discussion than the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to American institutions, and certainly no important factor in our life has been more consistently neglected by responsible writers. The Catholic issue is not an easy subject to discuss objectively; most Americans have automatically accepted their attitudes on the subject from their parents, and they do not want those attitudes disturbed. They are Catholic\* or they are not Catholic. If they are Catholic, they tend to view their own Church with favor, and its critics with suspicion. If they are not Catholic, they tend to reverse the process and view all distinctively Catholic policies with doubt. Both American Catholics and American non-Catholics tend to leave the discussion of religious

differences to denominational bigots; and many Americans have never had an opportunity to hear a reasoned and temperate discussion of the place of Catholic power in our national life.

\* I have used the word "Catholic" to describe the Roman Catholic Church in this volume, and I have capitalized "Church" when referring to the Roman Catholic Church as a courtesy to the Catholic people, who adopt this mode of expression. I am well aware that other churches have a claim to the word "Catholic," but I prefer the ordinary colloquial usage.

The policy of mutual silence about religious differences is a reasonable policy in matters of personal faith; but when it comes to matters of political, medical, and educational principle, silence may be directly contrary to public welfare. When a church enters the arena of controversial social policy and attempts to control the judgment of its own people (and of other people) on foreign affairs, social hygiene, public education, and modern science, it must be reckoned with as an organ of political and cultural power. It is in that sense that I shall discuss Catholic power in this book. The Catholic problem as I see it is not primarily a religious problem: it is an institutional and political problem. It is a matter of the use and abuse of power by an organization that is not only a church but a state within a state, a state above a state, and a foreign-controlled society within American society.

There is no doubt that the American Catholic hierarchy has entered the political arena, and that it is becoming more and more aggressive in extending the frontiers of Catholic authority into the fields of medicine, education, and foreign policy. In the name of religion, the hierarchy tells Catholic doctors, nurses, judges, teachers, and legislators what they can and cannot do in many of the controversial phases of their professional conduct. It segregates Catholic children from the rest of the community in a separate school system and censors the cultural diet of these children. It uses the political power of some thirty-five million official American Catholics to bring American foreign policy into line with Vatican temporal interests.

These things should be talked about freely because they are too important to be ignored. Yet it must be admitted that millions of Americans are afraid to talk about them frankly and openly. Part of the reluctance to speak comes from fear, fear of Catholic reprisals. As we shall see in this book, the Catholic hierarchy in this country has great power as a pressure group, and no editor, politician, publisher, merchant, or motion-picture producer can express defiance openly—or publicize documented facts—without risking his future.

But fear will not entirely explain the current silence on the Catholic issue. Some of the reluctance of Americans to speak is due to a misunderstanding of the nature of tolerance. Tolerance should mean complete charity toward men of all races and creeds, complete open-mindedness toward all ideas, and complete willingness to allow peaceful expression of conflicting views. This is what most Americans think they mean when they say that they believe in tolerance.

When they come to apply tolerance to the world of religion, however, they often forget its affirmative implications and fall back on the negative cliché, "You should never criticize another man's religion." Now, that

innocent-sounding doctrine, born of the noblest sentiments, is full of danger to the democratic way of life. It ignores the duty of every good citizen to stand for the truth in every field of thought. It fails to take account of the fact that a large part of what men call religion is also politics, social hygiene, and economics. Silence about "another man's religion" may mean acquiescence in second-rate medicine, inferior education, and anti-democratic government.

I believe that every American—Catholic and non-Catholic— has a duty to speak on the Catholic question, because the issues involved go to the heart of our culture and our citizenship. Plain speaking on this question involves many risks of bitterness, misunderstanding, and even fanaticism, but the risks of silence are even greater. Any critic of the policies of the Catholic hierarchy must steel himself to being called "anti-Catholic," because it is part of the hierarchy's strategy of defense to place that brand upon all its opponents; and any critic must also reconcile himself to being called an enemy of the Catholic people, because the hierarchy constantly identifies its clerical ambitions with the supposed wishes of its people.

It is important, therefore, to distinguish between the American Catholic people and their Roman-controlled priests. The Catholic people of the United States fight and die for the same concept of freedom as do other true Americans; they believe in the same fundamental ideals of democracy. Their record of loyal service to our country in time of war is second to none. If they controlled their own Church, the Catholic problem would soon disappear because, in the atmosphere of American freedom, they would adjust their Church's policies to American realities.

Unfortunately, the Catholic people of the United States are not citizens but subjects in their own religious commonwealth. The secular as well as the religious policies of their Church are made in Rome by an organization that is alien in spirit and control. The American Catholic people themselves have no representatives of their own choosing either in their own local hierarchy or in the Roman high command; and they are compelled by the very nature of their Church's authoritarian structure to accept nonreligious as well as religious policies that have been imposed upon them from abroad.

It is for this reason that I am addressing Catholics fully as much as non-Catholics in this book. American freedom is your freedom, and any curtailment of that freedom by clerical power is an even more serious matter for you than it is for non-Catholics. I know that many Catholics are as deeply disturbed as I am about the social policies of their Church's rulers; and they are finding it increasingly difficult to reconcile their convictions as American democrats with the philosophy of their priests, their hierarchy, and their Pope.

Some readers who accept every fact that I have recorded in these pages may still question the wisdom of discussing these matters in public at the present time, because of the critical international situation which finds the United States pitted against Communist power. These critics would keep silent about the anti-democratic program of the Vatican until the present crisis is resolved, because they regard the Catholic Church, with all its faults, as a

necessary bulwark against militant Communism. I respect the sincerity of this view, and I share with most Americans the conviction that Communist aggression must be met with determined resistance. But I do not believe that fear of one authoritarian power justifies compromise with another, especially when the compromise may be used to strengthen clerical fascism in many countries. Certainly in this country the acceptance of any form of authoritarian control weakens the democratic spirit; and one encroachment upon the democratic way of life may be used as a precedent for others. In the long run, the capacity to defend American democracy against a Communist dictatorship must be based upon a free culture, and I believe that the facts that I have marshaled in these pages demonstrate the impossibility of reconciling a free culture with the present policies of the Vatican.

I have tried in this book to put down plain facts about the Catholic question, facts that every American should know. The method of treatment is self-evident. It is not a history but a contemporary review. It is a book not about the Catholic faith but about the cultural, political, and economic policies of the rulers of the Catholic Church. Wherever possible I have let Catholicism speak for itself. There is a Catholic source for almost every major fact in this book, and the documents, dates, publishers, and official Imprimaturs are all listed, with due acknowledgments, in the Notes in the Appendix.

I have seen many of the things that I describe here, because I am not unfamiliar with Catholic machinations in big-city politics, and because I have lived in Rome and Mexico, and studied Catholic policy first hand in most of the nations of western Europe. But this is not a personal narrative, and I have tried to make it primarily a documentary study.

It seemed to me that the only sound approach to the subject was documentary. Personal investigations of Catholic policy in Catholic institutions by a non-Catholic are not practical unless the investigator is prepared to accept what is offered to him without question—although I later discovered that I could directly observe quite a few facts in Catholic institutions in Italy and Ireland. It seemed to me also that a sectarian religious approach to the problem would be undesirable, since I would soon be bogged down in denominational rivalries and my disclosures would be branded as proselyting propaganda. (I am not wholly unqualified to make the religious approach, since I studied theology in my youth and was ordained a minister, but my life has been spent in other professions which have conditioned me for a more non-theological treatment.) Having specialized as a government official and lawyer in the investigation of political corruption, I decided that Catholic clerical policy (not the Catholic religion as such) might profitably be submitted to an equally rigorous factual probe. I was moved to make this decision partly by something which I soon discovered, an astonishing public ignorance of the actual priestly policies and rules which govern the Church, behind its elaborate facade of modern Americanism. I found that many Catholics as well as non-Catholics were abysmally ignorant about the social policy and governmental mechanism of their own authoritarian Church. Here, it seemed to me, was a great and relatively unexplored underworld of medieval policy and practice which had been prettified and camouflaged by clerical

window dressing. It was time for candor. I began my ten years of research.

My first findings saw the light of day in *The Nation*, under the gallant editorship of Freda Kirchwey, where they provoked such a fiery response from Catholic critics that the magazine was banned from the high-school libraries of New York City in June 1948, as "offensive" to the followers of a certain faith. This ban not only provided national publicity but also produced a strong counterattack by free-speech advocates of national prominence. They wanted no suppression of free discussion even when they personally disagreed with my conclusions. The Ad Hoc Committee to Lift the Ban on *The Nation* was headed by Archibald MacLeish, and it included Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and scores of other famous Americans.

Then, while The Nation controversy was still raging, Cardinal Spellman attacked Mrs. Roosevelt, only a few weeks after the publication of this book. In the indignant counterattack on the cardinal, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* was seized upon as the most readily available verbal hand grenade. It soared to the best-seller lists and remained there for about six months. The momentum lasted for several years, carrying the successor volume, *Communism, Democracy and Catholic Power*, to the best-seller lists for many months, and producing a steady demand to this day for the 26 printings of the original volume, here and abroad.

But before these events, the book had been obliged to run a fearful gauntlet in the world of publishing, advertising, and reviewing. Ten leading publishers refused the manuscript, and several of them admitted quite frankly that the sole reason for rejection was the fear of Catholic reprisals against their other publications. America's first newspaper, The New York Times, refused to carry advertising for the book on the ground that it was an attack on the Roman Catholic Church and its clergy, and because its chapter on "Sex, Birth Control, and Eugenics" was "particularly objectionable since it involved highly controversial matter of a religious nature." In New York, Macy's refused for a time to sell the book across the counter, then yielded in the face of public indignation and lifted the ban. (Altman's still preserves the ban on counter sales, as do a few other stores.)

Across the country countless booksellers and librarians were confronted with organized Catholic demands to reject the book, or remove it from display, or stop its circulation after sales had begun. Most of the booksellers and nearly all the public librarians stood firm, and the book soon climbed to the top list of works in library circulation. But it was the fear of organized Catholic boycotts against small newsdealers and booksellers that prevented the publisher and author from issuing a 50-cent paperback edition, which would undoubtedly have added several millions to its circulation. The great distributors of paperback books have warned the publisher that newsstand and drug-store paperback sales are impractical because of potential priestly reprisals against small merchants.

Throughout this fight, Melvin Arnold, then editor and director of the Beacon Press, played a leading role. He welcomed the manuscript when other publishers dared not handle it; he personally supplied invaluable factual additions; and he led the fight in the publishing world for the author's

right to be heard. The vigorous promotion of the book by Edward Darling of the Beacon Press was also an important factor in its success. The judgment of these two men was confirmed when the Beacon Press, partly as a result of its new fighting reputation, assumed a more important place in the publishing industry.

The Catholic counterattack on the book was vigorous and bitter. A leading Catholic columnist headed his reply: "Blanshard the Fascist." The author was called everything in the calendar of contumely except a Communist—that would have cost any financially responsible accuser a heavy assessment in court damages. *America*, ([now online](#)) the Jesuit weekly, ran seven articles by Father George Dunne, S.J., which were later published in pamphlet form. *The Commonweal*, organ of liberal Catholic intellectuals, chimed in with an attack which approximated the tone and accuracy of the yellow diocesan press. *America* discovered that the author operated "on the lowest level of bigotry." *The Commonweal* found that "the book is of no importance." But neither magazine could deny that the author's lifetime record as a liberal crusader and opponent of bigotry, prejudice, and the Ku Klux Klan was as consistent as that of any editor on either masthead.

Both *America* and *The Commonweal*, after listing my sins in great detail over a period of many months, refused point blank to carry even the simplest factual advertisement for the book: "You've read Father Dunne's reply to Blanshard; now read the book itself." *The Nation*, of course, gladly carried advertisements for opposing literary works, and Beacon Press, with my warm approval, mailed free of charge to thousands of purchasers, along with the book itself, the Jesuit "exposure." On two occasions the Jesuit critics consented to public debates, and I met them before capacity audiences at the Harvard and Yale Law Schools. Then, suddenly, no priests were "available" for similar platform appearances.

Altogether at least seven books and pamphlets were written by Catholic authors in reply to *American Freedom and Catholic Power*—the titles and names of publishers are contained in the Appendix so that readers may secure them more readily. Unfortunately, no priest or member of the hierarchy has attempted a definitive or complete reply. The most voluminous counterattack, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, which I have analyzed in *My Catholic Critics*, was written without an Imprimatur by a layman and former professor of public speaking at Brooklyn College, James O'Neill. It avoided the most important facts concerning ecclesiastical dictatorship and reaction, and it "liberalized" Catholic law in such an amateurish manner that O'Neill was later severely rebuked for "misleading" and "confused" interpretations of the teachings of his own Church by the most authoritative priestly journal in this country, *The American Ecclesiastical Review*, published by the Catholic University of America.

I regret to say that most of the Catholic analyses of this book, even in the scholarly Catholic journals, were completely unscrupulous. Many of the analysts deliberately withheld from their Catholic readers the most significant portions of my reasoning and of my documented evidence, and then charged me with "quoting out of context." In one sense, of course, every author who quotes briefly from any work must quote "out of context"; that is

to say, he must take out a limited portion of a document unless he intends to reprint the whole. The sole question which involves his integrity is whether the quoted portion is truly representative of the whole in respect to the point which he is making. On this score the scholarly Catholic critics could find little material to argue about. They resorted often to vague general charges that I represented a materialist or atheist point of view, or they asserted that I stood for an all-powerful state that would destroy Catholic rights, all of which maundering is too absurd to dignify with an answer here.

For the first few months most of the great newspapers and magazines refused to review the book—or gave it for literary assassination to professional Catholic reviewers. However, the tide turned as the circulation soared, and indignant letters poured in to newspaper and magazine offices, protesting against the mysterious silence concerning a best-seller. Before the first year had ended, many summaries of the book's contents had appeared in magazines and newspapers. Usually they were cautious, noncommittal, or slyly vindictive. But they were better than silence. It was Samuel Johnson who said once: "I would rather be attacked than unnoticed; for the worst thing you can do to an author is to be silent as to his works."

The thousands of letters I have received from interested readers in this last decade have been overwhelmingly favorable, and the most encouraging fact is that many of them have come from Catholics. It was the late Thomas Sugrue, courageous author of *Strangers in the Earth* and *A Catholic Speaks His Mind*, who assured me that *American Freedom and Catholic Power* told the truth, and that no man needed to apologize for truth. Some of the world's greatest philosophers and scientists stepped forward to render favorable public testimony at critical moments in the campaign of vilification. The book, said John Dewey, was done "with exemplary scholarship, judgment and tact."

One night in 1951, at the end of a crowded meeting in Princeton, a frail old gentleman with towering brow and white, bushy hair stood up in the audience and said: "I wish to express my gratitude to a man who is fighting the abuses of a powerful organization. We are grateful to him for his efforts." For that one brief comment, Albert Einstein was hounded continuously in the Catholic press until his death. He did not waver in his view. In reply to a letter of violent protest from a Catholic devotee, he wrote:

"I am convinced that some political and social activities and practices of the Catholic organizations are detrimental and even dangerous for the community as a whole, here and everywhere. Reading your letter, I cannot help to doubt whether you have really studied Mr. Blanshard's publications.

Einstein's doubt has been verified in my own experience in hundreds of other instances. Probably nine-tenths of the hostile criticism I have received from Catholic correspondents has revealed by internal evidence that the writers had never read a line of this book.

Continued in [How the Hierarchy Works – Chapter 2 of American Freedom and Catholic Power](#)