

A spot of culture rot—within the church

On a nice day, when I have something to read or write, I like to sit outside and do it while smoking a cigar. So it was, this past Sunday morning.

Directly across a very busy street from our apartment building is a Catholic school, attached to a Catholic church where services were in progress. Remember, it was a Sunday morning.

One of the school's windows was open, and crowded into it was a group of small children, I estimate ten years old or a little less. They were amusing themselves by shouting at people passing by on the sidewalk.

Then they spotted me, some 200 feet away, minding my own business, and started shouting at me. If the language offends you, please note that it is not my language, but theirs. I merely report it.

"Ooh, look, a smoker! Smoking man! He's smoking! Cough-cough—he's trying to kill us with his smoke! Hey, smoker! He must be a homosexual! Hey, homo! Homo man!" And so it went for the better part of ten minutes, during which I judged it best to ignore them.

But it was distressing to hear this erupting from a church building, even while worship services were being held in another part of it. Once upon a time—wow, it was in another century!—I used to teach at a Catholic school. They didn't mind my being a Protestant, and I taught according to the curriculum. Those children whom I had the pleasure to teach never showed the slightest sign of being capable of such behavior. I can't believe it would have occurred to them. They're all grown up now, though. And in the intervening years, our popular culture has coarsened and decayed more than

I would have thought possible.

So here was this abuse pouring out of a church building, and I could only wonder what these children's families and parents had taught them, that they felt entitled to shout really vile insults at an adult.

When I reported the incident on my blog, a reader surprised me, or rather astounded me, by commenting that I was somehow to blame—that I was part of a culture of “doing nothing” that permitted evil to flourish. What he would have advised me to do, he didn't say. Walk up to the window and get into a shouting match with children? Go into the church and interrupt the service? Or just write a letter of complaint to the monsignor of the church, who probably wouldn't have believed a word of it?

I'm a writer. That's my calling. I write about stuff. I don't go banging on people's doors. I haven't provided you with the name and address of the church because I can't believe it's the one and only church in America where children haven't been taught how to behave tolerably. No, this is something that ought to be considered in all the churches—which are, or are supposed to be, ambassadors for Christ.

“Oh, but it served you right!” answers the Pharisee. “Because smoking is a sin!” I don't agree with that, but let's just say it's true. And if it is, does that authorize the children of the church to shout abuse at sinners? In whose evangelism tool kit is that to be found? Besides which, they would thus be authorized to shout abuse at everyone, because everyone, in one way or another, or in many ways, is a sinner.

What do the churches teach these children? What do their families teach them? Or do they just go through the motions on a Sunday, and the rest of the time, leave the teaching up to movies, TV shows, video games, and rap music?

When you can't tell the Christian children apart from the

children of the unbelievers—or the adults, for that matter—what does that say about the churches?

That's what needs to be considered.

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