

# Open Letter to Father Curran On Technique

Dorothy Day

*The Catholic Worker*, May 1937, 1, 2.

Summary: Exhorts organizers of an anti-Communist rally to stop inciting hate and violence with inflammatory propaganda. Rather, "Forget the negative idea of "fighting Communism," and concentrate on that of building up the Mystical Body of Christ."

Addressed to the Head of International Catholic Truth Society (DDLW #320).

Addressed to the Head of International Catholic Truth Society

Rev. Dear Father:

We have just returned from a hectic evening at the Hippodrome in New York City, where we witnessed a sight that not only made us fear for the future of the Church in this country, but gave us a serious case of the jitters in regard to the country itself. We address this to you because we understand you were the organizer.

Over 5,000 men and women attended a meeting designed to "fight Communism." At this meeting they listened to the fiery rhetoric of such reactionaries as Matthew Woll and Al Smith. They listened to George Harvey, red-baiting President of Queens Borough, advocate the use of "three feet of rubber hose" on Reds.

---

Speakers

They listened to these men and to others. An analysis of the diatribes gives us nothing constructive and reminds one of nothing so much as the inanities of the Hitler propaganda machine.

Mr. Smith, he of the Liberty League, showed an utter lack of knowledge of Communism, the least a person might have if he is going to fight it. He was plainly fighting windmills. He talked wildly about such things as the poorest men and women "rising to places of greatest distinction." He concurred with Harvey that Communists "should be sent back to the country from which they came." He insinuated that mention of the name of God on our coins was proof that we were a Christian nation. And, of course, interspersed some typical Smith humor, feeble and not very funny, but it went over.

Of Harvey, the less said the better. Suffice to say, he should not have been invited to any affair that called itself Catholic.

---

#### Denials

We are not opposed to a propaganda machine to offset that of the Communist Party. We are not opposed to meetings calculated to arouse Catholics to an appreciation of their religion and the need for defending it. We are all for these things, but we deny that the meeting accomplished them.

We deny that a program of name-calling can ever be successful propaganda. We deny that the arousing of hate in the hearts of Catholics can ever arouse in them an appreciation of Catholicism.

We deny that the Faith can be defended through the use of force, which was the tone set by the meeting.

---

#### Un-Christian

When the meeting was over, the listeners, fired by the inflammatory speeches, came out of the Hippodrome and, as was to be expected, looked about for the enemy. There was a group there (we don't know whether they were Communists or not, we don't care) distributing a paper called "Fag-an-Ballach." They were immediately set upon by the participants of the meeting, their papers confiscated and destroyed, and some of them beaten. This is not hearsay – we saw it. Some of us narrowly escaped the wrath of the rioters ourselves. We were passing out the C.W. We deny that a meeting that arouses such a temper can call itself Catholic. The foundation of our religion is Charity, a virtue that was conspicuously lacking that night.

May we respectfully suggest that, should you decide to hold another meeting for the purpose of fighting Communism, that you proceed on the theory of winning the Communist over to our side instead of driving him further off. Do not invite uninformed representatives of the ruling class like Al Smith, or spokesman for reactionary A. F. of L. officialdom like Woll, or anti-Catholic advocater of Fascism like Harvey. Rather, invite those who are truly representative of the Faith. Those who are above name-calling and rabble-rousing. Make love, not hate, the theme of the meeting. It is more effective, you know. Leave the Catholic War Veterans home; their military band, too. Someone called the military band "the greatest enemy of the human race."

---

Christian

Forget the negative idea of “fighting Communism,” and concentrate on that of building up the Mystical Body of Christ. Then you won’t have to have the Hippodrome surrounded by a solid phalanx of policemen. And the participants will not come out looking for a fight, but rather, seeking to bring the light to the unfortunate ones to whom it was not given.

We had to write this letter. It is not done in the spirit of hostility. Rather it is done with an odd, empty feeling at the pit of our stomach. Why must Christians use the weapons of the enemy? Why not follow the advice of St. Paul rather than that of worldly expediency? “Bless them that persecute you: bless, and curse not.” “Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.”