

ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE NEW DEAL ERA:
THE CASE OF FATHER COUGHLIN

An Abstract of a Thesis
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Master of Arts

by

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Abstract Directed by Victor Hicken, Ph.D.

This study is a look at the causes, manifestations, and ramifications of racial and religious bigotry in the United States--through the medium of Father Charles E. Coughlin. As a by-product of this study, perhaps one can gain a clearer insight into the workings of a demagogue--a name that clearly fits this famous "radio priest" from Royal Oak, Michigan.

Anti-Semitism has always had its followers in the United States, especially in the Northeast where most Jews live, but elsewhere as well. The great influx of southern and eastern European Jews around the turn of the twentieth century found it difficult to assimilate because of their markedly different cultures--even when they chose to do so. Jews did progress in the United States, but they did so at a time of economic depression and fear of yet another war--conditions that exacerbated tensions rather than abated them.

As an anti-Semitic propagandist, Coughlin was, for a time, second in notoriety only to the German-American Bund. He was an embarrassment to his church, the administration, and the nation at large. His activities helped create anti-Catholic hostility from many areas at a time when the bitter Smith-Hoover campaign of 1928 was all too fresh in the memory of many Americans.

A serious misconception concerning the structure of the Catholic Church manifested itself during Coughlin's time. This was the idea that the Church was rigidly unified to the point that the views of one priest must also be the views of his superiors, including the Pope. American non-Catholics in the 1930's never really understood just who a priest's

superiors were and how much authority they had. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church is about as unified as the Democratic Party. Within the entire hierarchy of the Church, there were but two people who could silence Coughlin--his bishop, and the Pope. This misconception led some Americans to wonder if the Catholic Church were not basically anti-Semitic. Others wondered the same thing about Christianity itself. What little evidence there is on the subject unavoidably leads to the unhappy conclusion that Christian churches, directly or indirectly, have nourished various notions of anti-Semitism. Thus, it is not so surprising that Coughlin and his followers--mainly Catholics but almost all Christians--should have been anti-Semitic.

In the case of Father Coughlin, it would seem that his seminary training may well have nurtured anti-Semitism. His religious training had been rather narrow, and it is reflected in his later writings and speeches. He would always reject as necessarily evil anything or anybody non-Christian.

Americans have been by no means the first people to entertain notions of anti-Semitism. Indeed, everything that Hitler did to the Jews during his reign of terror had been done earlier by Christians--save, of course, mass annihilation, and even at that, there were many blood baths, notably the Russian pogroms. As soon as Christianity had been introduced to Rome, the Church began placing restrictions on Jews. These varied but increased in intensity. The idea was to keep Jews from "contaminating" Christian life. This practice continued through the centuries.

The depression created fertile ground for many demagogues, but

none had more success than Father Coughlin, whose popularity among millions of radio listeners in the early 1930's had been matched by very few men. Coughlin's ambition soon over-reached itself. He renounced Roosevelt in 1936; his handpicked candidate, William Lemke, suffered a resounding defeat at the polls; and Coughlin had to search for a new tactic if he ever again were to match his earlier popularity.

Coughlin's anti-Semitic campaign began in 1937, reached a popularity peak in 1938 and early 1939, then slowly declined until his radio program was forced off the air in 1940, and his magazine was forced from the mails within a few months after Pearl Harbor.

His basic theory about the Jews was deceptively simple. Communism had been the creation of Jews who have worked diligently to spread it everywhere. Nazism was merely a defense mechanism against communism and could never be as bad as communism--the living antichrist. This message Coughlin never tired of reiterating. Some people took the priest seriously and were moved to form groups like the Christian Front. Many ugly incidents were recorded, especially in New York City. Coughlin's forced retirement robbed a mass movement of its leader, but by 1942 the movement had already spent itself.

The chief things to be gained from this study are a greater awareness of the dangers of mass movements, whether they are characterized by racial or religious bigotry coupled with demagoguery or by some other manifestation. It is equally important to know what causes them, for knowledge of their causes is surely half their cure.

This thesis has been read and approved.



Committee Chairman



Committee Member



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10 August 1970
Date

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INTRODUCTION

Out of the hope-shattering crash of 1929 and the ensuing depression emerged many demagogues, pandering their panaceas to a grim, frightened, confused, and angry mass of Americans. These desperate victims of the Great Depression wanted, perhaps even needed, to blame someone or something for their bewildering plight. The demagogues provided them with that--Hoover, Mellon, international bankers, Communists--and then offered the masses simple cures for their poverty. As the Depression continued, new names were added to the list of those to blame. Some demagogues, principally Father Charles E. Coughlin, found in the ever-persecuted Jews an excellent target for their attacks. This study really, then, is a look at the causes, manifestations, and ramifications of racial and religious bigotry in the United States--through the medium of Father Coughlin. As a by-product of this study, perhaps one can gain a clearer insight into the workings of a demagogue.

Jew-baiting was prevalent in the 1920's, but it appears to have reached its peak in the following decade. Between 1933 and 1939, there were approximately one hundred different anti-Semitic organizations functioning at some level in the United States.¹ Nativism in one form or another has always existed among some Americans, but anti-Semitism is usually associated primarily with the Northeast and, to a lesser extent, elsewhere. However, the uncertainties of economic depression and the

¹Oscar and Mary F. Handlin, "Origins of Anti-Semitism in the United States," Race Prejudice and Discrimination, ed. Arnold M. Rose (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 36.

frightening prospect of involvement in yet another tragic global conflict revealed latent prejudices against Jews among many ethnic groups throughout the country.

As an anti-Semite propagandist, Coughlin was, for a time, second in notoriety only to the German-American Bund. He was an embarrassment to his church, the administration, and the nation at large. His activities brought about distinct anti-Catholic grumbling in many areas at a time when the bitter Smith-Hoover campaign of 1928 was all too fresh in the memory of many Americans.

A serious misconception concerning the structure of the Catholic Church manifested itself during Coughlin's time. This was the idea that the Church was rigidly unified to the point that the views of one priest must also be the views of his superiors, including the Pope. American non-Catholics in the 1930's never really understood just who a priest's superiors were and how much authority they had. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church was about as unified as the Democratic Party. Within the entire hierarchy of the Church, there were but two people who could silence Coughlin--his bishop, and the Pope. This misconception led some Americans to wonder if the Catholic Church were not basically anti-Semitic. Others wondered the same thing about Christianity itself.

Jews have had a long history of persecution and discrimination. They had been enslaved in ancient Egypt; Hamon, in Persia, attempted to liquidate them in the fifth century B.C.; and when the Jews, like the early Christians, refused to worship the Roman gods, Tacitus, the Roman historian, referred to the "horrid superstitions of the Jews."²

² Gustavus Myers, History of Bigotry in the United States (New York: Random House, 1943), 434.

One reason for anti-Semitism can be found in the long history of what one might call marginal jobs taken by Jews. They were forced out of many of the more respectable jobs. Banking grew to be disreputable because of usury. (Rothschild became a symbol of cunning.) The Jew in central Europe was forced to collect rubbish or sell cattle--not popular things. They were active in union organizing in America when unions were distrusted. Many had government jobs in the United States at a time when that type of employment was popularly looked upon with distaste. Indeed, it was said by many about the time of World War II that Jews were taking control of government!

One stereotype that was once popular in Europe was that of the "avaricious" Jew. During the early Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church banned all money-lending at interest as usury. Jews banned it among themselves but not among Gentiles. Since lending without interest is risky, Christians soon found themselves borrowing from Jews. Jews were almost forced to become the bankers and practitioners of usury, and they held most of the European credit for a long time. This stereotype is still prevalent in the United States.³

Another stereotype once popular in Europe was that of the "unpatriotic and subversive" Jew. Before the nineteenth century in Europe, Jews were treated strictly as second-class people. During the

³ During the winter of 1935-1936, an American magazine conducted a survey to learn how well represented Jews were in American banking and heavy industry. It was revealed that Jews were not particularly prominent in banking and poorly represented in heavy industry. In fact, the Kuhn-Loeb firm that Coughlin would soon make so famous was quite small compared with many non-Jewish investment houses. See, "Jews In America," Fortune, XIII (February, 1936), 130, 133, 167.

nineteenth century, most Jews were given their political and economic rights by European nations--that is, by those nations that had not already done so, and most had not. Emancipated by those on the left who believed in a strictly secular state and opposed by those on the right who wanted a Christian state, most Jews chose the moderate left. They were still distinct and unassimilated, however, and were under vicious attack from the right. Many were driven to the radical left where they became even more unpopular. The term "unpatriotic and subversive" Jew, then, comes from his association with the radical left, which was not particularly nationalistic in a nationalistic age. The European immigrants to America brought this image with them, but it did not stick nearly as well as the image of the "avaricious" Jew.

The European treatment of the Jews has seldom been good and has often been bad. Indeed, everything that Hitler did to the Jews had been done earlier by Christians--save, of course, mass annihilation, and even at that, there were many blood baths, notably the Russian Pogroms. As soon as Christianity had been introduced to Rome, the Church began placing restrictions on Jews. These varied but increased in intensity. The idea was to keep Jews from "contaminating" Christian life. This practice continued through the centuries.

During the Middle Ages, Christians often became perplexed when they could not distinguish Jews from other Christians. Consequently, laws were passed requiring Jews to wear badges or some other means of identification. Pope Innocent III, early in the thirteenth century, said these laws were "imperative if intermarriage or concubinage was to

be prevented between Christians and non-believers."⁴ A decree of Pope Eugenius IV read, in 1442:

We decree and order that from now on, and for all time, Christians shall not eat or drink with Jews, nor admit them to feasts, nor cohabit with them, nor bathe with them. Christians shall not allow Jews to hold civil honors over Christians, or to exercise public offices in the state.⁵

Persecution of the Jews in Europe continued into the nineteenth century, but during this time they were generally given their civil rights and were at least protected by law.

The earliest Jews to come to North America, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, suffered little discrimination because of their "Jewishness." This condition lasted until about the 1840's. Such things as religious tests still existed, but they were not aimed primarily at Jews.

Conditions worsened in the 1840's with the immigration of many German Jews. Things became still worse in the 1870's, not because of the additional immigrants, but because of the financial improvement of those already in the United States. Some were gaining in wealth and prestige without becoming properly "Americanized"--that is, they were not as well educated, spoke the language not as well, and lacked "polish" generally. When a group of Jews would attempt to join a club or occupy a fashionable resort area, discrimination often resulted.

It must be pointed out, however, that Jews sometimes wanted to be separate from their gentile neighbors. Whether this always occurred as

⁴Louis Wirth, "The Jews as a Race," Rose, ed., op. cit., 451.

⁵Charles Y. Flock and Rodney Stark, Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 147.

the result of initial rebuffs by the gentiles is a question impossible to answer. This probably was the case some, if not much, of the time. It is easy to understand why a minority group (especially a group with a history as rich as that of the Jews) would want to band together--unity against the common foe. It is also not hard to understand why this clannishness might lead to further distrust among the gentiles. This pattern of clannishness, either as a result of outside hostility or as a prevention against the probability of it, has been followed to some extent by a great many minority groups throughout American history.

With the Eastern European influx from 1890-1920, worse trouble developed. When Jews attempted to leave the ghetto for better housing, resistance followed. This new Eastern European immigration was greater in size and more concentrated than before. Earlier Jews were able to spread out more, even westward, but the frontier was now closed. Segregation in housing and education resulted.

Discrimination against Jews continued strongly during the 1920's and 1930's. Second generation Jews often exhibited a remarkable appetite for education. Many colleges quietly went on the quota system. Sometimes this discrimination in colleges was also practiced against Catholics. White collar discrimination became intense by the time of World War I. During the 1930's, it was perhaps worse because of the scarcity of jobs.

A certain type of irrational anti-Semitism has existed even among those Americans who had been far away from the mass immigration--among those who may never have known or seen a Jew. It is what is sometimes called ideological or subjective anti-Semitism. In general, this line of

irrational "thinking" has the Jew as naturally distinct--incapable of joining the melting pot. Because of his distinctiveness, he is also disloyal to his country. Some went further. If he were disloyal, he was an "international Jew," involved in various conspiracies to wreck America's economy, democratic institutions, and morality.⁶ After arriving at this stage, the irrational anti-Semite could easily connect Judaism with communism.

One of the most popular and concrete images among American anti-Semites has been that of the "Shylock." This goes back to the old agrarian unrest of Jackson's time: the battle between those who produced goods and those who produced money. The latter were unproductive in the eyes of many and, therefore, parasitic.

For various reasons, ideological anti-Semitism was never very serious in the United States. First, there was the Puritan identity with ancient Israel; there was the American distaste for central religious authority--personified by Catholics, not Jews; finally, the American emphasis upon the ambitious, hard-working, materialistic man was also a Jewish trait.⁷

Anti-Semitism in the United States would appear to have declined considerably since World War II. Realization of the horror of Hitler's "final solution" no doubt was a factor. But there were other reasons, such as the melting pot. The biggest cause of anti-Semitism appears to

⁶ John Higham, "American Anti-Semitism Historically Reconsidered," Jews In The Mind of America, Charles Herbert Stember, et al. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966), 246-247. For a further discussion of the "international" Jew, see Handlin, in Rose, ed., op. cit., 33-34.

⁷ Higham, op. cit., 249-250.

have been the mass immigration of Eastern European Jews. Discrimination reached its peak against Jews from 1870 to 1920, about the same time as with other groups. Once immigration restrictions were erected, ill-feelings slowly declined, corresponding roughly with the rate of Jewish assimilation into the melting pot. Anti-Catholic prejudice subsided correspondingly. The Jews, like all white ethnic groups, were asked to assimilate but not to rock the boat--that is, not to assimilate too fast. In contrast, the Negro had never been asked to come in. He already had a definite status in American life. All other ethnic groups had to find theirs.

In recent years, perhaps the biggest influence in the decline in American anti-Semitism has been the tremendous impact of the mass media, with its almost indifference to cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.⁸ One example of this decline can be found in the results of a poll sample taken by Charles Stember in 1958 and 1959. Sixty-two per cent of those sampled in 1958 declared themselves willing to elect a Jewish President if he were well-qualified. The number rose to seventy-two per cent the following year. What is more, the seventy-two per cent in 1959 was higher than the number willing to elect a Catholic President in 1958.⁹ While it is true that some national or international event could occur that would arouse wide anti-Semitism in the United States, it is nevertheless true that this particular form of bigotry, while still very much alive, has been disappearing rapidly.

⁸Morton Keller, "Jews and the Character of American Life Since 1930," in Stember, et al., op. cit., 270.

⁹Stember, et al., ibid., 126.

CHAPTER I

FATHER COUGHLIN: THE RADIO PRIEST

Charles E. Coughlin was born in Hamilton, Ontario in 1891, the only surviving child of Thomas Coughlin, who had been a sailor, a coal shoveler, a wood stoker, and, in Hamilton, the manager of a baking company.¹

Coughlin's entire formal education was spent in various Canadian parochial schools. In 1911, the Basilian Fathers at the University College of Toronto University awarded him a degree in Honor Philosophy. He entered the Basilian novitiate that same year and was ordained in 1916. He was assigned to Assumption College, Sandwich, Ontario where he remained until 1923, teaching philosophy, English, and some high school subjects. While at Assumption, he assisted in a Detroit parish. In 1923, he was assigned to the Diocese of Detroit where he became an assistant in two parishes for short periods and a pastor in a third for one year. In 1926, he was assigned to the newly created parish in Royal Oak, a suburb of Detroit.

Father Coughlin's new parish, The Shrine of the Little Flower, was a poor one, and the young priest looked elsewhere for funds to pay for the church recently built. Hitting upon radio advertising as a possibility, Coughlin contacted a friend who managed radio station WJR in Detroit. Broadcasting through WJR, but from the sanctuary of his

¹For much of the early background on Coughlin, the writer uses Louis B. Ward, Father Charles E. Coughlin: An Authorized Biography (Detroit: Tower Publications, Incorporated, 1933).

church, Coughlin preached sermons for 156 Sundays in a row.

The radio priest's Sunday homilies proved fairly successful in the Detroit area. Donations increased and so did parish membership. As his popularity increased, he would occasionally interject a remark about the political and economic situation. This appeared to have no particular effect, but in the fall of 1929, Coughlin was heard outside the Detroit area for the first time--two new outlets, in Chicago and Cincinnati, being added.

Father Coughlin could not have entered the national arena at a more opportune time to test his unique abilities on the masses. As the first full year of the Great Depression wore on, one saw the flapper era end, financial wizards discredited, larger breadlines, and a growing unemployment list. In this atmosphere, Coughlin's radio discourse of October 30, 1930, took a radically new form. To a national audience (CBS had contracted Coughlin that fall), this interesting new personality denounced "money changers" and "subversive socialism." He blamed the Depression on "international bankers" and "Communists."²

While this speech appears to have been nothing much, the reaction was tremendous. The Radio League of the Little Flower was organized by the end of the year. Within three months of this October broadcast, Coughlin was receiving fifty thousand letters a week. With seventeen CBS stations plus some independents, his listeners were estimated at around ten million by the end of 1930.

²Wallace Stegner, "The Radio Priest And His Flock," The Aspirin Age, ed. Isabel Leighton (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), 234-235.

Coughlin was not a man to turn his back on a good thing. He continued his attacks, centering his attention on the currency system, capitalists, bankers, Communists, and prohibition. Even at this early date, he was not overly concerned with logic. For instance, he had learned to combine bankers and Communists. His popularity soared, nevertheless. In 1931, he delivered a speech entitled, "Hoover Prosperity Means Another War." As a result, he received 1,200,000 letters, most of them favorable. When he announced for Roosevelt in 1932, his listeners were estimated to number between 30,000,000 and 45,000,000.³

During the summer of 1932, he received heavy criticism for the first time. CBS, under pressure from some quarters, announced that his contract would not be renewed unless he gave advanced copies of his speeches to each of its stations. Coughlin refused and was dropped. His demand was great, however; he organized his own network and by 1933 had more stations than ever. Criticism was building, nonetheless. When Coughlin and Al Smith had some heated exchanges in 1933, Commonweal, a noted Catholic magazine, backed Smith, and for the first time, had some cool remarks about the priest.⁴

Signs of success were evident in 1934, however. Royal Oak was the site for a new church and a seven-story tower, with a huge crucifix on one side (all built by non-union labor below union scale). The radio priest was clearly on his way up.

A successful demagogue can sway the masses in several ways.

³Ibid., 235-236.

⁴Ibid., 237-238.

Some of the devices often used are name calling, the use of glittering generalities, the transfer device, testimonials, the plain folks technique, card stacking, and the band wagon approach. Coughlin used them all at one time or another.

Name calling was always a great favorite of the radio priest. No examples are necessary since they occur everywhere.

Coughlin used glittering generalities in his attempt to defeat the Administration's World Court bill of 1935. The priest thundered in pious indignation that he stood by "Washington and Jefferson" rather "than by President Roosevelt and Norman Davis [a Presidential aide] and their modern internationalism."⁵ Congressmen, a majority of whom had previously expressed their willingness to pass the bill, were buried under an avalanche of Coughlin-inspired mail. The bill was defeated.

The transfer device was once used by Coughlin in order for his inflationary ideas to gain respectability. He wanted his flock to associate the crucifix with his economics. He told his listeners in February, 1934, that if they would only ask, they would receive a crucifix to carry with them as a "symbol of credit for all, justice for all and love for all."⁶

His testimonial and card stacking techniques became notorious during his anti-Semitic days between 1937 and 1942. During a radio address in 1938, the priest claimed he was reading from an official British

⁵ Reverend Charles E. Coughlin, A Series of Lectures on Social Justice (Royal Oak, Michigan: The Radio League of the Little Flower, 1935), 123.

⁶ Alfred McClund Lee and Elizabeth Briant Lee, ed., The Fine Art of Propaganda (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 71-72.

White Paper. This was his testimonial. Surely no one would question the validity of anything as imposing as that. He then proceeded to "prove" that Jewish bankers had helped finance the Bolshevik Revolution. In this same address, Coughlin also used the card stacking device efficiently. From this "White Paper," Coughlin quoted a telegram sent by an American Jew. The man had expressed joy over the success of the Russian Revolution. Coughlin failed to tell his audience which revolution was the cause for rejoicing. In fact, the telegram had been sent in March, 1917, at the time of the Kerensky Revolution, not the Bolshevik.⁷

The plain folks device was not Coughlin's best weapon. Although he gloried in being just "a humble priest,"⁸ there really was very little humble or plain about him. The average pastor did not have a huge marble tower with eighty secretaries and between one hundred thousand and one million letters--with money enclosed--addressed to him weekly. He rather emphasized his martyr role, and identified himself with Americanism, democracy, and Christianity--all plain enough for him.⁹

The band wagon approach is common enough to proselytizers of all kinds. Referring to a money bill he had been urging Congress to pass in February, 1935, Coughlin stirred his listeners with this call to arms: "We have something worthwhile to fight for. Alone we are lost! Together we cannot fail!"¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 76-79.

⁸ Coughlin, op. cit., 92.

⁹ Lee and Lee, op. cit., 92.

¹⁰ Coughlin, op. cit., 178.

Father Coughlin's demagogic talents plus his golden voice with the Irish brogue made him a formidable figure in the early 1930's. But it was his championing of President Roosevelt, but not always the New Deal, which probably kept his audience as large as it was.¹¹ Indeed, as early as 1932, Coughlin had coined the phrase, "Roosevelt or Ruin."

The Royal Oak priest clearly tried to identify with Roosevelt in the early years of the New Deal, and this eventually proved somewhat embarrassing to the Administration. Coughlin made frequent trips to Washington in those days; he managed to be seen in photographs talking to the President; and he sent numerous letters and telegrams in which he either offered the President unsolicited advice or offered to defend certain New Deal measures. It is not clear whether the priest was given any early encouragement by the President along these lines, but it is evident that many people actually thought the priest was a spokesman for the Administration. Roosevelt, the master politician, was probably so charmingly unequivocal for a time with Coughlin that the priest may well have thought he was being encouraged. Various Administration memos during this time indicate that the President, by 1934, was earnestly trying to dissociate himself from Coughlin, without losing Coughlin's support in the process.¹²

Perhaps Father Coughlin's first realization that the New Deal was

¹¹James P. Shenton, "The Coughlin Movement and The New Deal," Political Science Quarterly, LXXIII (March, 1958), 353. Shenton concludes that the majority of Coughlin's listeners at this time were pro-Roosevelt and when forced to choose between priest and President, chose Roosevelt.

¹²For a full discussion of Coughlin's "partnership with Roosevelt," see Charles J. Tull, Father Coughlin and The New Deal (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), 23-58.

not his "Deal" came in January, 1934, when President Roosevelt fixed the value of gold and ended populist hopes for the free flow of silver, and inflation. Without inflation, much of what the priest had proposed could never be.

The fireworks began in April, 1934, when Secretary Morgenthau published a list of silver speculators. (President Roosevelt had suggested that he publish it in installments to increase interest.) One of Coughlin's secretaries was on the list for approximately \$25,000. During a radio broadcast, Coughlin lashed back viciously, referring to "the policies of a Hitler, the suggestions of a Mussolini, and the dogma of a Stalin" Not once, however, did he mention Roosevelt's name. ¹³

During the summer of 1934, Father Coughlin spoke of major reforms that he thought necessary, including an overhaul of American political parties. On November 11, 1934, he took a decisive step away from Roosevelt by announcing the formation of his National Union for Social Justice. Before this action, said a noted news analyst of the time, the Royal Oak priest had had an "almost mythical impersonality of being only name, voice, and passion."¹⁴ Now it would be more difficult for him to appear--to anyone--as Roosevelt's spokesman.

The sixteen points of the NUSJ were an attempt to codify what Coughlin had been preaching for some time. The priest insisted that his platform had been taken directly from the Papal encyclicals Rerum Novarum (1891) and Quadragesimo Anno (1931). These encyclicals condemn

¹³William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 24.

¹⁴Raymond G. Swing, "Father Coughlin: The Wonder of Self-Discovery," The Nation, CXXXIX (December 26, 1935), 733.

laissez-faire capitalism, socialism, and communism; they approve of private property in general, but with certain qualifications; they disapprove of strikes and lockouts, and approve of compulsory arbitration; and they would prefer "Christian" trade unions, or at least the elimination of all socialist ideas from the ordinary unions.¹⁵ It is quite possible that Coughlin was also inspired considerably by the Minnesota Farmer-Labor platform,¹⁶ as well as by the writings of Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr., judging by their similarities of expressions and Coughlin's acknowledged use of Lindbergh as a source for many of his economic ideas.¹⁷

Coughlin's sixteen points were:

1. Liberty of conscience and education
2. Living annual wage for those willing to work
3. Nationalization of those public resources too important to be privately held
4. Private ownership of all other property
5. Uphold right of private property but control it for public good
6. Establishment of Government owned Central Bank
7. Congress alone must coin and regulate value of money
8. Central Bank must maintain steady currency value
9. Cost of production plus fair profit for farmer
10. Right of labor to organize, and Government protection of it against the "vested interests of wealth and of intellect"
11. Recall of all non-productive bonds
12. Abolition of tax-exempt bonds
13. Broadening base of taxation according to principles of ownership and capacity to pay
14. Simplification of government leading to reduced taxation
15. Conscription of wealth in case of war
16. Human rights over property rights¹⁸

¹⁵Harold J. Laski, The American Democracy (New York: The Viking Press, 1948), 308.

¹⁶Swing, loc. cit.

¹⁷Harald P. Christensen, "The Political Ideas of Charles A. Lindbergh" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Political Science, State University of Iowa, 1940), 96-97.

¹⁸Coughlin, op. cit., 17-18.

It is possible, as some liberals of the time were suggesting, that some of Coughlin's points smacked of fascism. Governmental control or "protection" of such things as labor unions and the ambiguously mentioned "public resources" are cases in point. Many of these statements, however, are merely high-sounding phrases or pious sentiments, too vague to have any meaning. Coughlin's platform was probably not meant to be a program for fascism, and those liberals of the 1930's who thought otherwise were probably over-reacting. They were, after all, merely products of their environment at a time when Fascist totalitarianism was threatening to sweep Europe and was finding sympathizers in the United States. While liberals sometimes accused the conservatives of finding Communists behind every bush, they in turn were looking for Fascists under every bed.

During the radio season between November, 1934 and March, 1935, Coughlin seemed to be either testing his audience's loyalty to Roosevelt or displaying his own uncertainties. He continually attacked the bankers and some Administration leaders, mainly Wallace, Tugwell, Morgenthau, and Ickes. One thing is certain: Father Coughlin was growing more militant, and by 1935 he was against almost everything the New Deal stood for. But, at the same time, he was marvellously gentle with the President personally.

On December 30, 1934, Coughlin charged that Roosevelt was protecting the bankers from the demands of the people. Yet a week later he praised the President's address to Congress and apologized for F. D. R.'s past sins as "honest experimentation."¹⁹ This was his style throughout

¹⁹Ibid., 105, 111.

the radio season. On February 3, he announced that "the Administration is still engaged in keeping America safe for the Plutocrat's." On March 11, in reply to a General Hugh Johnson attack, he criticized all Roosevelt's advisers, but managed to declare that it was still "Roosevelt or Ruin."²⁰

Perhaps the radio priest had never intended to break with Roosevelt but had been carried away by his own enthusiasm. It is more probable, however, that his vanity was too great to allow him to share the spotlight with anyone. By March, 1935, he was clearly on record as being against Roosevelt's New Deal. He tried valiantly to convince his radio listeners--many of whom would prove to be greater admirers of Roosevelt than of him--that Roosevelt and the New Deal were not inseparable. But this, one suspects, was only a masquerade performed in order to hold intact his listeners until the 1936 campaign.

The year 1935 could justly be called the year of the radicals. They were fairly splitting the air waves. One heard increasingly more not only of Coughlin, but of Huey Long and "Share the Wealth"; one heard of Doctor Townsend and his revolving old age pension plan; and there was Upton Sinclair's plan for instantly making California wealthy again.

What was all the shouting about? H. G. Wells watched, listened, and wrote:

I do not think it is possible to minimize the significance of their voices [demagogues] as an intimation of a wide-spread discontent and discomfort, and of an impatient preparedness for sweeping changes in the great masses of the American population The actual New Deal has not gone far enough

²⁰Ibid., 144, 230.

and fast enough for them, and that is what the shouting is about.²¹

During this year of the demagogues, Coughlin became more daring, no longer wasting breath on old enemies. He occasionally blasted F. D. R. while praising such specimens as Huey Long, Gene Talmadge, and Mussolini. Many magazines labeled him Fascist, and he was condemned by a growing number of Catholic leaders, the most notable being Monsignor John A. Ryan (who had done so several times before). Coughlin insisted, nonetheless, that he was the people's friend and was merely passing along the messages of the Papal encyclicals.²²

After a series of fits and starts in 1935-1936, Coughlin finally decided to form a third party in the late spring of 1936. In the meantime, the President was taking steps to placate the priest. In the spring of 1935, Roosevelt let it be known within the Administration that uncomplimentary speeches about Long and Townsend would be acceptable, but Coughlin was not to be mentioned. He also assigned Frank Murphy the job of reconciling Coughlin to the Administration.²³ Later, the President used Joseph P. Kennedy in the same capacity, but to no avail.²⁴ The radio priest had simply committed himself too far.

No one knows, besides Father Coughlin, whether the priest had deliberately planned to support a third party candidate all along. He must have considered the possibility in 1935. At least this would help

²² Stegner, op. cit., 242.

²³ James A. Farley, Jim Farley's Story: The Roosevelt Years (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 472.

²⁴ Harold L. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 472.

explain his desire to avoid personal attacks on the President. On the other hand, regardless of third party considerations, Coughlin's vanity was probably such that he would want to retain his huge audience as long as possible. Because of the priest's erratic behavior in early 1936 and his stated contradictions during this period, there is reason to believe that Coughlin's final decision on a third party was an impulse. In the middle of May, 1936, after the defeat of the second Frazier-Lemke bill, an inflationist measure, Coughlin remarked that this was "the last straw."²⁵ He was ready to act.

On June 19, 1936, Father Coughlin announced the formation of the Union Party. The candidates were to be William Lemke, a North Dakota independent with some ability and respect but little fame, and Thomas C. O'Brien, a political nonentity whose only qualifications seemed to be that he was an Irish Catholic from the urbanized East. Many commentators have concluded that the dynamic radio priest had deliberately picked these quiet and relatively unknown men so he would not have to share the spotlight with anyone. The other side of the coin is that there had been no nationally respected figures who would go near the priest in 1936.

The Union Party was supposed to be a grand alliance of the nation's leading radicals. Coughlin had concluded vague working agreements with not only Lemke and his Farmer-Laborites, but also with Dr. Townsend and his vast following, as well as with that bombastic Baptist minister, the Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith (self-appointed successor to the assassinated Huey Long), and his mythical multitude of "share the

²⁵Edward C. Blackborby, "William Lemke: Agrarian Radical and Union Party Presidential Candidate," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIX (June, 1962), 75.

wealth" followers. (Smith had never been able to obtain the mailing list of Long's followers; therefore, the preacher was never to know who his followers really were.)

The Union Party was largely ignored by the major parties during the 1936 campaign, but Father Coughlin did have some personally revealing things to say that summer. At Dr. Townsend's convention in late July, Coughlin delivered his first speech to the old people in a fairly restrained manner, but he was followed on the platform by Gerald Smith, who proceeded to give a rousing demonstration of first-class demagoguery. Smarting from his humiliation, Coughlin tried again the next day. He spoke slowly, at first, then worked himself up. During a dramatic pause, the priest removed his coat and Roman collar, stepped back and thundered that no one could support "the great betrayer and liar, Franklin D. Roosevelt." He then added, rather unnecessarily, "I mean Franklin Double-Crossing Roosevelt."²⁶ At Coughlin's own National Union convention a few weeks later, he was a bit more restrained. He did say, however, that he would "be instrumental in taking a Communist" from the White House, and he announced to his gathering that if he did not pull nine million votes for Lemke, he would quit broadcasting.²⁷

The rest of the campaign was one of rapid descent for Coughlin. He continued to insult the President--losing more votes in the process; Roosevelt made a Midwestern tour of the drought area, bringing rain with him; Gerald Smith bolted the Union Party in October; and in Coughlin's last campaign speech, in New York, he failed even to mention Lemke's

²⁶"Third Parties," Time (July 27, 1936), 18.

²⁷Leuchtenburg, op. cit., 182.

name. In the election, Lemke received less than 900,000 votes, and Father Coughlin, true to his word, promptly announced his retirement from broadcasting but not from his newly founded newspaper-turned-magazine, Social Justice.

Father Coughlin was defeated because he had given his followers a choice between the President and himself. They did not care to make that choice. He was most popular when he had defended the New Deal. When he began to get really bitter towards the Administration (1934-1935), he lost some supporters. They deserted him completely in 1936 because they could not believe that the President was a "liar." Many concluded, no doubt, that the priest was insincere. A great many Catholics who had been raised with the belief that a priest was someone special now looked upon him with embarrassment. Finally, he had been defeated by the traditional American desire to avoid political extremes.

Father Coughlin's public career after the 1936 campaign is the primary interest of this study so only a resume is necessary here. Compared to Coughlin's past glories, the period between 1937 and 1942 was strictly down hill. He never again came close to reaching such heights of popularity as he had once enjoyed.

The radio priest, contrary to his earlier promises, returned regularly to the air in early 1937--the same day that his loyal supporter and superior, Bishop Gallagher, died. Coughlin's new superior, Archbishop Mooney, made no secret of his antipathy towards his controversial priest. Mooney seemed reluctant to formerly muzzle Coughlin, but he often expressed his views publicly, and in October, 1937, did so over national radio and refused Coughlin's request to answer in a like

manner.

Father Coughlin, through his weekly radio talks and his weekly magazine, began an anti-Semitic campaign somewhat cautiously in 1937. By the summer of 1938, it had become a full scale crusade. Anti-communism, the priest's constant companion, soon merged with anti-Semitism until the confused follower of Coughlin's preaching could only conclude that being a Jew was the same as being a Communist. As war clouds became more ominous, isolationism became more of a rallying cry. When war eventually broke out in Europe, Coughlin's followers were told that Jews, who were apparently Communists, had started the war.

All of this eventually became so obnoxious that even the cautious Archbishop Mooney was moved to act. Coughlin was permanently removed from the air in 1940. The priest continued, however, to spread his beliefs through Social Justice. After Pearl Harbor, the pressure on Coughlin became too great. His magazine was seized by the Postal Department in April, 1942, and Father Coughlin was forced into retirement.

Before seriously looking at Coughlin's anti-Semitism, it might be wise to consider why Coughlin was allowed to become involved in such dubious adventures. The confusion among non-Catholics during the 1930's seemed to center around the Church hierarchy--that is, who had what authority--and the role of the Vatican in local situations.

The Roman Catholic Church, first of all, is not, nor has it ever been, a democratic organization. Each diocese of the Church is administered by a bishop, archbishop, or cardinal, and his only superior is the Pope. In other words, Cardinal O'Connell of Boston had no authority at all over Bishop Gallagher of Detroit, even though O'Connell's title was

more honored than Gallagher's. If, besides the Pope, no one within the Church could properly silence Coughlin besides Bishop Gallagher (who did not wish to), why did not the Pope do it himself? It has often been the custom for the Vatican to intervene directly into Church matters within a given country, especially in Europe, but this has not been the case with the United States.

The Church in America is more independent of Rome than, perhaps, the Church of any other country. Rome has always looked upon the American Church as being something very special. The strong, nationalistic feeling that permeated through the early Protestant settlers of the United States led them to distrust foreigners to some degree and Catholics to a marked degree. Rome probably thought it would be wiser to let the American Church handle its own problems since many non-Catholics of the 1930's viewed Catholic subservience to the Pope as being almost un-American.

Bishop Gallagher, from 1926 until his death early in 1937, was Coughlin's greatest friend and supporter. Coughlin needed his support to shield himself from the rising tide of protest from prominent Catholic clergymen. Early in 1935, the radio priest had been criticized by Cardinal O'Connell, Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago, Monsignor Ryan, and Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen. In answer to this protest, Bishop Gallagher spoke on one of Coughlin's radio programs in April, 1935. "Freely I give him my imprimatur on his written word," said Gallagher of Coughlin, "and freely I give my approval on the spoken word" ²⁸

The Vatican did exercise its influence over Bishop Gallagher

²⁸"Politics," *ibid.*, (April 27, 1935), 6.

somewhat, however. Gallagher, for whatever reason, happened to be sailing for Rome in July, 1936, at the same time that Coughlin was calling the President a "liar" at Dr. Townsend's convention. What exactly the Bishop was told when he arrived in Rome is not clear, but a semi-official Vatican newspaper announced shortly that the Bishop had been told to quiet Coughlin somewhat. The net result was that Coughlin apologized for calling the President a liar. A papal secretary (later, Pope Pius XII) arrived in the United States that summer claiming he was merely on vacation. Perhaps so, but it appeared the Vatican was trying moral suasion with a slight twist of the arm.

The question that is difficult to answer is why Coughlin was not silenced before his anti-Semitic campaign had progressed very far. Archbishop Mooney was no supporter of the priest, and if the Vatican was willing to act in 1936, even in a small way, one wonders why it failed to act decisively later. It seems probable that Mooney and the Vatican treated Coughlin so cautiously until 1940 because they were only too keenly aware of the publicity--some of it adverse--surrounding the attempts in 1936 to rebuke the radio priest. The Roman Catholic Church is nothing if it is not cautious.

CHAPTER II

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF COUGHLIN'S ANTI-SEMITISM

The standard dictionary definition of anti-Semitism is opposition to the Jews. This opposition can take more than one form. Silence and avoidance can be practiced as well as the more truculent discrimination, physical attack, or extermination. Prior to 1937, Coughlin was anti-Jewish but publicly silent about it. It was during that year that his verbal attacks were publicized. Eventually, he tacitly urged or allowed his Christian Fronters to practice physical discrimination.

Judaism is unique in that it is at once a religion and a sub-culture. Anti-Semitism becomes confusing when one considers whether the bias is being directed against the religion or the sub-culture. In the case of Father Coughlin, it was both--although he often denied it. In 1939, for example, he absolved religious Jews but blamed "atheistic Jews who undeniably have fostered and prompted bolshevism in Russia, Spain, Mexico, and America," along with certain "atheistic Gentiles."¹ Two years earlier, however, he had roundly condemned the Jewish religion because it did not teach brotherly love.² Patently, the man was anti-Semitic.

Communism and Judaism were usually bound together in Coughlin's mind. His basic theory about the Jews was simple, and he reiterated it time and again: communism was the realization of Jewish labor; Nazism

¹New York Times, June 5, 1939, p. 4.

²Social Justice, June 28, 1937.

was merely a defense mechanism against Jewish communism; and the Jews wished to spread communism everywhere.³

The Jews he held chiefly responsible for the world's woes were usually religious leaders; he also kept a suspicious eye on large organizations such as the General Jewish Council. In the 1939 radio broadcast mentioned earlier, which was devoted to answering the charges that he was anti-Semitic, he asserted that only they--"certain Jewish leaders and, in particular . . . the General Jewish Council"--had made it necessary for him even to dignify the charges.⁴

Often the priest would fondly assure his listeners that all Jews were not Communists; in fact, he would add, most were not. If they would only come out loudly against communism, he insisted, other Americans would have more reason to feel at ease. So long as the mass of American Jews did not shout their hatred of the dialectic from the rooftops as shrilly as the good priest Coughlin, one could only assume they were being innocently duped by Communists. The implication was that the Communists were the Jewish religious leaders. Yet, this distinction between the Jewish-Communist leaders and their duped Jewish followers tended to lose its clarity in the minds of Coughlin's frustrated followers. His true believers were not interested in subtleties. It was for his critics that the priest baldly insisted that he had never made any "sweeping denunciation of the Jewish people."⁵

³Gustavus Myers, History of Bigotry in the United States (New York: Random House, 1943), 447.

⁴New York Times, June 5, 1939, p. 4.

⁵Ibid.

It is one thing to conclude that Father Coughlin was an anti-Semite; to discover why is another matter. Much has been written about Southern demagogues and their pandering to local prejudices. Southerners have traditionally been suspicious of anyone not white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. The Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith was the product of such an environment. Henry Ford, another popular anti-Semite of the time, was raised in the rural Midwest, an area where people, somewhat like Southerners, were suspicious of anyone "different." In both the South and Midwest, the old "international Jew" concept of the twenties and thirties was popular. These people were Protestant Fundamentalists who thought their way of life was drowning in a sea of aliens. As a result, they often followed the likes of Smith, Gerald Winrod, the KKK, or William Dudley Pelley's Silver Shirts.⁶ What, however, does one make of Father Coughlin, a priest in a church that preaches brotherhood towards all men? How could he have been an anti-Semite?

Proving Coughlin anti-Semitic is not enough in this study; rather, the salient point here is the manner in which he had arrived at this bias. Some possible reasons need exploring.

As noted earlier, Coughlin studied in the Basilian novitiate for about five years. He studied dogmatic and moral theology under the Reverend Albert Du Mouchelle. According to an early Coughlin biographer, Mouchelle:

⁶Oscar and Mary F. Handlin, "Origins of Anti-Semitism in the United States," Race Prejudice and Discrimination, ed. Arnold M. Rose (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 36. For a discussion of the Populist contribution to anti-Semitism, see ibid., 31-32; also Myers, op. cit., 248-250.

unfolded chapter by chapter for his students the history of religion, until he made live again upon the stage of his lecture room the personalities of the Fathers of the Church who, by the sheer force of their spirituality and learning,⁷ beat down one after another the pagan heresies of the past.

It is possible that an overemphasis of "pagan heresies" might have led Mouchelle to treat Jews rather roughly, either by words or implication.

The relationship, if there is any, between Christianity and anti-Semitism is a very interesting one. One recent study concluded that the basis for most anti-Semitism has been Christianity itself. The authors found, through extensive research involving surveys and polls of many kinds, that Christian churches foster anti-Semitism among its members, primarily by the "particularism" found in many churches, or at least among the members. Particularism is the idea among some church members that theirs is the only "true" church. These people are oftentimes the proselytizers, and if their proselytizing is rejected, they quite often react with anger. If the recipients happen to be Jewish, the Christian truculence becomes worse because of the close association of the two religions.⁸

Besides particularism, the old deicide idea adds fuel to the flame. Many Christians, according to this survey, specifically think of Jews when they think of the Crucifixion. The particularists, however, still consider the Jews to be guilty.⁹ Whether Christianity is the basis

⁷Louis B. Ward, Father Charles E. Coughlin: An Authorized Biography (Detroit: Tower Publications, Incorporated, 1933), 14.

⁸Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 208-209.

⁹Ibid.

for most anti-Semitism, as the authors assert, is moot, but it is clear to all but the blind man that a varying amount of unflattering images of the Jews are either created or crystallized by association with Christianity--at least among some people.

Father Coughlin seemed to condemn or, at least, look with suspicion, upon anyone who was not a Christian. (Was he a particularist?) During a radio address on October 25, 1932, he linked Mohammed ("of the bloody sword") with Prohibition. He added that Mohammed and his followers had treated women as if they were "nothing more than toys for men."¹⁰ Coughlin had stressed the above rather than the essential ethical teachings of Mohammed. The priest seemed to have believed in a self-righteous rather than a benevolent God.

On another occasion five years later (alluded to earlier in the chapter), Coughlin was answering one of the numerous charges of anti-Semitism hurled at him. Writing in his magazine, Social Justice, he distinguished between what he called "a Jew, the nationalist, and a Jew, the religionist" He opposed the Brahmin, the Mohammedan, and the Jew because their religions did not teach it was wrong to exploit one's fellow man!¹¹ This is quite a statement, and one wonders how the man could have come to believe it. His narrow religious training might well have influenced his anti-Semitic bias.

People, unless they exercise some intellectual self-restraint, have a tendency to believe what they wish. In Coughlin's case, it is hard to say whether this was a cause or merely a symptom of his anti-

¹⁰Ward, op. cit., 94.

¹¹Social Justice, June 28, 1937, p. 4.

Semitism. Whichever it was, he seemed to think in terms of conspiracies. It is tempting to speculate on his veracity. Demagogues are often insincere, and he was probably no exception, but at times he probably actually believed some of the things he said. Two examples will suffice.

In a 1937 Social Justice article devoted to the political destruction of Roosevelt, Coughlin recalled a book, Kapoot, written in 1932--an election year--by Carveth Wells, the explorer. Coughlin wrote that Wells, while travelling in Russia early in 1932, "saw plastered on every public wall the picture of Franklin D. Roosevelt, even before he was nominated for a candidate on the Democratic ticket. Beneath this picture, in every instance, were printed these words: 'The Next President of the United States.'" ¹² That Roosevelt's picture may have adorned Soviet walls is possible; that it was a conspiracy is nonsense. In a message to his Social Justice Councils two weeks later, the priest wrote: "Do you know that the money masters in this country have key men in all the large cities, with their agents in the smaller cities, to watch closely for any publication that divulges their secret of creating money?" ¹³

Coughlin's conspiratorial notions had their roots prior to 1937. In a little book dealing with money, published in 1936, the priest made no special mention of Jews, but he did cite two interesting sources for his monetary ideas, one Gertrude Coogan and Charles Lindbergh, Sr. ¹⁴

¹² Ibid., August 2, 1937, p. 2.

¹³ Ibid., August 23, 1937, p. 2.

¹⁴ Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, Money! Questions and Answers (Royal Oak, Michigan: Social Justice Publishing Company, 1936).

Always the champion of the lowly farmer, Lindbergh was convinced that sinister bankers manipulated the world's money, thus creating panics and wars--all rebounding to the financial benefit of these malefactors.¹⁵

Coogan was an occasional advisor of Coughlin's on money questions. (She later charged that he had used her ideas without proper acknowledgment of royalties from him.)¹⁶ Her book, published in 1935, had no anti-Semitic innuendoes, but like Lindbergh, whom she also had cited, Coogan credited "international bankers" with powers of which kings and presidents only dream.¹⁷

We have it from Coughlin's official biographer that George LeBlanc, an economic adviser, knew his subject from all angles, including "racial psychology."¹⁸ Another economic adviser of interest here, Representative Louis McFadden, is said to have delivered one of the very few anti-Semitic speeches in the history of the House of Representatives.¹⁹ So well advised had the radio priest been that he was once able to say: "I do not know everything, Only as an economist am I sure."²⁰

¹⁵Shortly after the Civil War, a group of men selfishly planned to manipulate finances in such a way that they would one day rule the world. They succeeded. Charles A. Lindbergh, The Economic Pinch (Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company, 1923), 22. Throughout the book, he talks of the profiteers (big businessmen, bankers, etc.) who scientifically create panics, booms, etc.

¹⁶David H. Bennett, Demagogues in the Depression (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 49.

¹⁷Gertrude M. Coogan, Money Creators (Chicago: Sound Money Press, Inc., 1935), passim.

¹⁸Ward, op. cit., 107.

¹⁹Bennett, op. cit., 49.

²⁰Ibid., 46.

Patently, then, showing why Coughlin chose anti-Semitism in the late 1930's is largely guess work. His narrow seminary training may have led him to feel intolerance toward anything or anybody non-Christian. He also seemed to favor the idea of "conspiracies" rather than other less sensational (and more rational) explanations for major events like World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, or the Great Depression. Most writers who have attempted to determine why he chose anti-Semitism, especially his contemporaries, have merely resorted to undocumented charges and insinuations.²¹ Perhaps the truth is simply that Coughlin had always been anti-Semitic and chose to voice his prejudice publicly only when the Nazis had made anti-Semitism newsworthy. There is no great reason to doubt, for instance, the report that some who knew Coughlin well in the early and mid-thirties considered him to be anti-Jewish with a large anti-Semitic library.²² Furthermore, the disastrous 1936 campaign had definitely hurt his pride and probably his pocketbook as well. A new anti-Semitic campaign, the shrewd priest perhaps reasoned, might well salvage both pride and pocketbook. Indeed, 1938 was one of his best years financially. He collected \$574,416 from a radio audience less than half its former size but apparently more devoted. A January, 1939

²¹ See, for example, John L. Spivak, Shrine of the Silver Dollar (New York: Modern Age Books, 1940), passim. Spivak does give some documentation of an attempt by Coughlin, in 1937, to organize, with Henry Ford's indirect approval, Ford workers outside the U. A. W. Spivak's point is that Coughlin may have done this to gain funds from Ford in order to meet the annual deficit of his magazine. He may also have printed the spurious Protocols of the Elders of Zion in 1938 to attract Ford donations. See pp. 108-119 for this discussion. Spivak's discussion of this, while documented somewhat, is still suspect and illustrates rather well the folly of taking this type of work seriously.

²² Bennett, op. cit., 52.

Gallup poll showed that about seventy per cent of his listeners agreed with him completely.²³

Coughlin was not a Jew-baiter during his early radio days, but if one is to trace the development of it, perhaps it would be wise to look briefly at some of his early comments for possible clues. He had already mentioned Andrew Mellon and J. P. Morgan as "international bankers;" in a series of broadcasts in 1933, devoted to monetary problems, he specifically mentioned the Rothschilds (not mentioning them as Jews, however). It seems they were manipulating the gold market, said the good priest, and were guilty of a particularly low form of usury--charging interest on nonproductive debts.²⁴ In April, 1934, Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau published a list of silver speculators. Included was the name of one of Coughlin's many secretaries. This personal insult was intensified because it came at a time when Coughlin really thought Roosevelt might follow his urging and call for the free coinage of silver. In a radio address, Coughlin struck back at Morgenthau, Wall Street, and "Gentile" silver.²⁵ This is hardly enough to label the priest anti-Semitic, but it is interesting to note that he could make such a distinction as "Gentile" silver as opposed to Jewish gold, or whatever. Occasionally, these subtle allusions would draw some fire--even as early as 1935. The American Jewish Congress, meeting in Philadelphia that year, heard references to the "Fascist, anti-Semitic, anti-democratic ideology

²³Ibid., 280.

²⁴Charles J. Tull, Father Coughlin and the New Deal (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), 35.

²⁵Ibid., 55.

of men like Father Coughlin."²⁶ Following Coughlin's St. Patrick's Day radio address, the prominent Rabbi Wise publicly cautioned the man to exercise more restraint, prompting the priestly reply: "Because I attack a Catholic, should I be called anti-Catholic? Or if I attack a Jew, should I be called anti-Jewish?"²⁷

There was no overt anti-Semitism during the 1936 presidential campaign--at least on Coughlin's part. He did, however, drop a hint occasionally, but his remarks about Jews that year, rather than becoming steadily more biased, instead seemed somewhat contradictory.

It is interesting to note that in 1936 he opposed American participation in the Berlin Olympics because of Hitler's treatment of the Jews.²⁸ Yet, when prodded by reporters at the National Union for Social Justice Convention in August, he remarked that Jews should emulate Christians in loving their neighbors in place of an eye for an eye. Admitting that unjust Christians had forced Jews into money-lending, he then vaguely added that American Jews should stop whatever bad things he thought they were doing and become better citizens. He denied any anti-Semitism on his part.²⁹

During the campaign, Coughlin often talked and wrote of some un-American conspiracy controlling the destiny of Roosevelt and the New Deal.

²⁶ New York Times, March 17, 1935.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Morton Keller, "Jews and the Character of American Life Since 1930," Jews in the Minds of America, Charles Herbert Stember, et al. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1966), 263.

²⁹ Tull, op. cit., 141.

Usually, it was a Communist conspiracy, but often the contradictory Wall Street (international banker) conspiracy would be combined with it. This tactic was not enjoyed solely by Coughlin, however. Also employing it were Lemke, O'Brien, Smith, and even the staid old Dr. Townsend when thoroughly agitated.³⁰

Social Justice displayed no signs of anti-Semitism, either overt or covert, during most of its maiden year--1936. In December, however, an article appeared that was signed by someone with the pseudonym, "Veritas." (Pseudonyms were quite common in that magazine.) Whether Coughlin had written the article himself is not too important since he admitted more than once that he had always controlled the magazine and its contents. If he had not been in agreement with the article, it would not, judging from subsequent articles in it, have been printed.

The article, entitled, "Hitler and Anti-Semitism," begins by lamenting the existence of anti-Semitism. The author gives a rather unusual reason for its appearance in Germany. He suggests that it was forced on the government by the people, rather than the other way around. At the time of Hitler's assumption of power, writes "Veritas," half the real estate in Berlin, Magdeburg, Leipzig, and Dresden was in foreign hands, and three-fourths of this foreign-held real estate was held by Jews (or to use one of Coughlin's pet phrases, "non-German Jews"). "Veritas" fails to explain how these foreign Jews--mainly immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia--could have risen so easily from abject poverty in a strange land to successful capitalists. At any rate, according to

³⁰David O. Powell, "The Union Party of 1936: Campaign Tactics and Issues," Mid-America, XLVI (April, 1964), 133-138.

"Veritas," when Hitler honored his pledge to restore foreign-held property to Germans, the law worked a hardship on Jews only by accident (all Jews, both foreign and German, apparently included)! The results of this restitution supposedly brought an "avalanche" of anti-Semitism from the German people. The author goes on to blame bankers, Jewish in particular, for starting World War I and the Napoleonic Wars. The bankers are, he resoundingly adds, "behind all wars."³¹ With this article, one might say that Coughlin had begun his new crusade.

Revealing his prejudices more and more in 1937, Coughlin, nevertheless, failed to become obsessed by them until 1938. Social Justice began the year 1937 tamely enough. A letter to the editor by the Director of the Anti-Defamation League was even published, without comment. The Director very politely suggested that many inaccuracies, in fact as well as in interpretation, existed in the "Veritas" article, even mentioning twice that he was sure of the integrity of Social Justice.³²

A week later, Coughlin's magazine printed a two-page spread, with eye-catching pictures and large, bold type, entitled, "How Five Brothers Built World Empire Which Controlled The Military and Economic Destinies Of Nations." The article did not mention the word "Jew," but its intent was clear, especially since there seems to be serious doubt--as the letter to the editor in the previous week's edition mentioned--that the Rothschilds were quite that powerful.³³

³¹ Social Justice, December 14, 1936, p. 5.

³² Ibid., January 11, 1937, p. 13.

³³ Ibid., January 18, 1937, pp. 8-9.

In April, the magazine took off its gloves and really got serious. The author of an unsigned article wrote that the U.S. did not go to war in 1917 because of submarines. He purported to be quoting from a document of the German government. "We possess documentary proof today that the war against Germany was decided upon in 1914 by Wilson and his advisers, as well as by the real rulers in Washington--Jewish high finance and business interests, chiefly the bankers."³⁴ Key words, of course, were in the tradition of the yellow press--heavy black print.

As Judaism fared worse and worse in Coughlin's magazine, fascism, not surprisingly, fared better and better. Two minor examples will suffice. A letter to the editor in March, while attacking the cruelty of Communists, cited "World Service," the notorious Nazi propaganda outlet, as its source. The following month, an article dealt with "have" and "have not" nations. The Fascists, it seems, were way behind in modern armaments and would not risk war for "generations to come"; therefore, the democracies ought to stop picking on them.³⁵

In June, there began a series of articles depicting international bankers (Jews) paving the way for the Bolshevik Revolution. Many of these plotters were apparently living on New York's East Side, had embarrassingly Jewish names, and were in touch with Lenin and Trotsky. These same bankers also, we are told, dominated the peacemakers at Versailles and, eventually, the League of Nations. Indeed, Kuhn, Loeb and Company, a mere fraction of the House of Morgan's size, is credited with power

³⁴Ibid., April 26, 1937, p. 6.

³⁵Ibid., March 1, 1937, p. 13, and April 5, p. 7.

that boggles the mind.³⁶

Throughout 1937, Social Justice printed letters of hate from its followers. Germans or people travelling in Germany could never find any discrimination against Jews, and people who had travelled in the Soviet Union could find nobody but Jews in high Party positions.³⁷ Beginning in August and continuing through the rest of the year, there were many letters urging Coughlin to reprint the pernicious Protocols Of Zion--an ominous sign of things to come.³⁸

The following chapter will detail certain Coughlinite excesses in 1938 and 1939, but perhaps a little preview will place the reader in the proper mood. By 1939, Social Justice had become almost farcical. One article dealt with the Communist movement in China and its supposed number one leader, General Ma (Moe Cohen), a Jew! (At no time, was the existence of Mao Tse-tung ever suggested.) In that same issue, a lady from New York wrote: "Do the Rabbis have Communist meetings in the synagogues in Detroit as they do in New York and Brooklyn?"³⁹ Clearly, Coughlin was flirting with fanaticism.

³⁶Ibid., June 7, 1937, pp. 1,3; June 14, p. 11; July 19, p. 5; and September 27, p. 5.

³⁷See, for example, ibid., June 7, 1937, p. 13.

³⁸See, for example, ibid., August 16, 1937, p. 13.

³⁹Ibid., March 20, 1939, pp. 12, 14.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT CRUSADE: 1938-1939

Having found in anti-Semitism an issue that would once again bring Coughlin fame, if not fortune, the Royal Oak pastor pushed it relentlessly, creating in the next two years the national controversies that he had seemed to enjoy so much prior to his political shellacking at the polls in 1936. He pushed Jew-baiting to such an extreme that Nazi Germany saluted him; Coughlin-inspired squads of boys roamed the streets of New York beating up Jews; and those who stayed with the priest and defended him could only be described as incurable anti-Semites.

During the summer and fall of 1938, the readers of Social Justice were entertained with the notorious forgery, The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion, a document purportedly written around the turn of the century by a group, secretly meeting in Prague, which was planning the conquest of the world by "international Jewry." Czarist Russia had made use of it at home and had even circulated it among the Allies during World War I--fruitlessly. The London Times convincingly exposed its fraudulence shortly after that war. Prior to Coughlin, the most notorious bigot to print the Protocols was Henry Ford, but he had at least publicly apologized when he noted the unfavorable public reaction. This the radio priest stubbornly would refuse to do.

The Protocols provided a handy means by which Coughlin could codify his many hates. He wanted the world to know, he said, that there was a master plan to destroy Christian civilization. He called for the "mass of Jews" to oppose the "Jew money changers." Finally, he insisted

that Jews must oppose communism as much as they had been opposing
fascism.¹

The first printing of the Protocols in Coughlin's magazine caused something of a stir. The following week the priest stated the argument he would use many times thereafter. The book might not have been written by Jewish leaders, but it had been written before the turn of the century, and the events since transpired have more or less followed the general pattern outlined in the Protocols. "Is this accident, prophecy, or plot?" he asked.²

Before quoting from the Protocols, Coughlin would always write a lengthy article, getting off his chest whatever pent-up prejudices he desired that week, regardless of whether it had anything to do with the particular article being printed. One week he began by noting that most Jews were very nice and opposed to both fascism and communism. He then went right on to say that Jews disliked fascism more than communism because the Nazis were persecuting the Jews, while Jews in Russia were "cultivated, honored, protected and elevated to the loftiest positions." At the same time, "more Christians have been slaughtered in Russia since 1917 than there are Jews in the entire world"³ Thus, Coughlin had turned apparent sympathy for Jews into hints that Jews had been persecuting Christians--a subtlety that he practiced well.

As a prelude to printing the fourth Protocol, Coughlin proceeded to embrace the notion that successful Jews "tend to control a country

¹Social Justice, July 18, 1938, p. 5.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., August 15, 1938, p. 5.

internationally by the wealth which they gather; when they are unsuccessful, they easily become the leaders and disseminators of international revolutionary doctrines; and sometimes they mix up the two methods of having their way." ⁴ This was a clever mixture of stereotypes--the "avaricious" and the "subversive" Jew. He did admit during that same article, however, that most Jews were "guiltless of the social sin of exploitation and concentration of wealth. Nevertheless," he added, "because Jews reject Christ, it is impossible for them to accept his doctrines of spiritual brotherhood in the light in which Christians accept it." ⁵

Once Coughlin cited some personal instances from 1936 as illustrations of how the Protocols were allegedly coming true. The three major radio networks, NBC, CBS, and Mutual, had all refused his requests that year for radio time. Coughlin noted that William Paley and Jules Sarnoff, presidents of CBS and NBC, respectively, were Jews. He did not say that Mutual was headed by a Jew, but Mutual's key station, WOR in Newark, was owned by a man named Strauss, a Jew. This clearly meant, according to Coughlin, that Jews would not allow him to combat communism. ⁶

Coughlin's sense of history was unassailable by reason. His basic tenents, that Jews had a great influence on the Communist Party, and millions of Soviet Christians had been murdered by Jewish Communists--these could not be denied, according to the radio priest, and they led to some fairly chilling conclusions. Until the "modern Jewish world"

⁴ Ibid., August 22, 1938, p. 5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., September 12, 1938, p. 5.

condemns Soviet communism on behalf of Christianity, he warned, "it will be difficult for Christians to exercise anything but lethargy towards the persecuted Jew."⁷ Another time he added even more bluntly: "What are Christians supposed to think of the Jews who come begging to them for assistance against Hitlerism?"⁸ According to Coughlin, then, Hitler's subsequent murder of six million Jews was only just compensation for that unfortunate people's past "crimes." Out of the July heat of 1938 emerged a full blown fanatic.

It is interesting to note the contrast between Coughlin's writing that summer and that of the man whom he held in such esteem, Pope Pius XI. Pius wrote on July 28, 1938:

We regard racism and exaggerated nationalism as barriers raised between man and man, between people and people, between nation and nation All men are, above all, members of the same great kind. They all belong to the single great family of the living. Humankind is therefore a single, universal, catholic race.⁹

On this issue at least, the distance between the shepherd and one member of his flock had surely lengthened over the years.

Playing with summer time forgeries was merely a rehearsal for the radio priest. His big stage was the radio, and the first performance devoted solely to "international Jewry" began on November 20, 1938. Nothing really new was said on this day and on the Sundays to follow that had not already been printed in his magazine, but there is a greater shock in hearing something nasty than in seeing it in print. Also,

⁷Ibid., August 29, 1938, p. 5.

⁸Ibid., August 8, 1938, p. 19.

⁹ Alfred McClung Lee, and Elizabeth Briant Lee, ed., The Fine Art of Propaganda (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 42.

Coughlin's radio audience was many times larger than his magazine circulation (and included more critics).

Coughlin began his November 20th address by expressing sympathy for the plight of Jews in Germany, although his method was rather dehumanizing. He made constant references to "foreign-born Jews," "foreign-citizen Jews," "German citizen Jews," "German citizen Jewish bankers," and "German citizen Rabbis." He concluded one paragraph studded with these references with a neat little twist:

While it is true that foreign-citizen Jews resident in Germany were disparaged and expelled, it is likewise true that many social impediments were placed in the pathway of Catholics and Protestants by the Nazi government--impediments which are revolting to our American concepts of liberty.¹⁰

With this one little sentence, Coughlin was able to say that it was unfortunate that Jews in Germany were suffering, but Christians were suffering too, and because of this, he implied, Jews really had little to complain about--at least no more than Christians.

After his expressions of sympathy for the Jews, Coughlin began, with an air of objectivity, to examine the reasons for the Nazi hostility. The priest's explanation seems to have left his listeners to conclude that the Jews were receiving what they deserved. According to Coughlin, the Germans believed that German Communists were mainly Jews; thus, Nazism was merely the result of a Jewish-Communist threat. At this point, Coughlin was only repeating what he thought Germans believed. He then asked his audience if the German charges were true. Without ever saying whether the Germans were right or wrong, Coughlin proceeded to

¹⁰Social Justice, November 28, 1938, p. 7.

volunteer certain "evidence" damning Jews the world over.¹¹

The source for Coughlin's evidence was, although the priest did not admit it during his first broadcast, a book called, The Mystical Body of Christ in the Modern World, by an Irishman named Dennis Fahey. Had Coughlin revealed immediately that he was reading from just another book rather than official government documents, perhaps his audience would have been less impressed.

At any rate, Coughlin claimed to be quoting from the September 10, 1920 issue of The American Hebrew. Supposedly written by a Jew, the article purportedly said that the "Russian-Jewish Revolution" had been "largely the outcome of Jewish thinking, of Jewish discontent, of Jewish effort to reconstruct."¹² He also made it clear that it had been the Bolshevik Revolution he was referring to. The actual article from that magazine was not written by a Jew and did not refer to the Bolshevik Revolution. It instead gave Jews much credit for the overthrow of the Czar.¹³ Apparently, the priest had deliberately changed the wording or, more precisely, had relied on Fahey, who had taken liberty with the article.

Many other charges were made in this and subsequent addresses, and, lest it be confusing, they will be dealt with on a topical basis rather than a chronological one. The White Paper was used week after week with new things being added and old ones being qualified, making continuity difficult.

¹¹ John A. Ryan, "Anti-Semitism in the Air," Commonweal, XXIX (December 30, 1938), 260.

¹² Ibid., p. 10.

¹³ Lee and Lee, op. cit., 38-39; also see, Myers, op. cit., 447-448.

It had been Coughlin's contention that the Jewish banking house of Kuhn, Loeb and Company had helped finance the Bolshevik Revolution. One piece of evidence was a certain "Section 8" of this British White Paper. It linked Kuhn, Loeb with Jewish banking houses throughout the world--all of whom had had, supposedly, a strong influence on the course of Bolshevism. Various people scurried to investigate Coughlin's charges. The White Paper, it was soon discovered, was a part of a book called, A Collection of Reports on Bolshevism in Russia, and could be obtained in many large libraries. The book contained no "Section 8." Coughlin's friends countered that the original White Paper had a "Section 8" which categorically stated that Jews had organized the Bolshevik Revolution. Their contention was that three weeks after it had been published, it was withdrawn and an abridged edition, without mention of Jews and communism, was eventually substituted. Fahey had somehow managed to secure an original copy. It was speculated that powerful Jewish interests had forced the British government to withdraw the original.¹⁴

This same "Section 8" referred to two telegrams. The first was from Secretary of State Lansing to some prominent American Jews, including at least one member of Kuhn, Loeb and Company. The gist of the telegram was that Lansing had feared that German and Russian socialists were conspiring to bring about a separate peace. Lansing hoped to convince the Russians to fight on. He, therefore, asked certain American Jews to send

¹⁴Father Coughlin's Friends, An Answer to Father Coughlin's Critics (Royal Oak, Michigan: The Radio League of the Little Flower, 1940), 37.

telegrams urging the Russians to do so.¹⁵ Jacob Schiff, a member of Kuhn, Loeb and Company, accordingly, sent a telegram to a group of Russians meeting to celebrate the victory of the Kerensky forces in March, 1917. He had said merely that he was sorry he could not attend, and he also rejoiced in the fall of the Czar.¹⁶ Coughlin, either deliberately or innocently, led his listeners to believe that Secretary Lansing and prominent American Jews had been active in the Bolshevik movement. Coughlin had not mentioned to his listeners that the telegrams had been sent shortly after Kerensky attained power, and that they had nothing to do with communism. In fact, Coughlin had specifically mentioned them in connection with communism.

In one speech, Coughlin charged that Lenin had a quasi cabinet of twenty-five members in 1917 and that twenty-four of these men were Jews. A week later, Coughlin mentioned another Soviet body in 1917 that had fifty-nine members, fifty-six of whom were supposedly Jews. The Director of the Nonsectarian Anti-Nazi League promptly denied that any such Soviet bodies had ever existed.¹⁷ Coughlin's list had come from Fahey's book, which had taken it from a London weekly paper--the Patriot, which had taken it from the Documentation Catholique--a French newspaper, which had taken it from the American Secret Service, which, apparently, had never existed.¹⁸

¹⁵ American Jewish Committee, Father Coughlin: His "Facts" and Arguments (New York: General Jewish Council, 1939), 23-24.

¹⁶ Lee and Lee, op. cit., 84-99.

¹⁷ New York Times, November 21, 1938, p. 7.

¹⁸ Ryan, loc. cit., 260.

Coughlin's speeches had caused a sensation, and denials were prompt and plentiful. The United States Secret Service reported, after an investigation, that it was unable to verify either the existence of an American Secret Service in 1919 or any document resembling that which Coughlin had been discussing. Kerensky said he had received no Jewish help; Trotsky denied knowing a Jacob Schiff or having received any important sum of money from him; and Kuhn, Loeb and Company denied having had financial dealings "with any government in Russia."¹⁹

The whole episode is another example of the conspiratorial nature of Coughlin's mind. The "Section 8" that the priest had relied upon may well have once existed, but that does not mean it had ever been a reliable document. There is no reason to believe that any American Secret Service had ever been connected with it, but some group with an axe to grind might have written the report. If the British did, in fact, remove such a document from print, it may well have been because they had discovered it to be untrue. Coughlin, nevertheless, seems to have believed it all. The fact that it was implausible may have made him even more willing to believe it.

This type of thinking also appealed to many other people. Coughlin's followers in 1938 and 1939 were not as numerous as those that had followed him prior to his break with Roosevelt. They came from different places, and they were slightly different in other ways, too. They were, however, blindly loyal, and when their leader came under fire over the Jewish question, they came solidly to his support.

Coughlin's followers were, first of all, rather insecure people,

¹⁹New York Times, November 29, 1938, p. 20.

usually lower class Catholics, and they came from the urban areas of the Midwest and East.²⁰ Anti-communism was an attraction for them as was anti-Semitism.

Catholics in Europe as well as the United States, had found it difficult to picture fascism as being as evil as communism. Communism was anti-Christ; nothing could be as bad as that. American Catholics had been deeply moved by the persecution of the Church in Mexico and Russia. Catholic opinion was especially enflamed during the Spanish Civil War. One just had to be for Franco because, after all, he was a Catholic fighting godless communism. American Catholics seemed to view themselves as more of a minority group than they actually were; thus, they tended to over-react in a way similar to that of some blacks today.²¹

In Brooklyn, a Coughlinite bastion, the Irish were bitter against Jews for very mundane reasons. Having arrived in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century, most of the Irish were only lower middle class in the late 1930's. Most of the Jews had arrived between 1890 and 1917 or later and were already lower middle class or better. Patrick Scanlan of the Brooklyn Tablet, a Catholic anti-Semitic paper, crystallized the problem when he wrote a challenge to The Voice, a Catholic paper combatting anti-Semitism: "Why do they not assail the discrimination against the Germans, Italians, Irish and other races of

²⁰Oscar and Mary F. Handlin, "Origins of Anti-Semitism in the United States," Race Prejudice and Discrimination, ed. Arnold M. Rose (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 36-37.

²¹For a further discussion of this interesting subject, see, David J. O'Brien, "American Catholics and Anti-Semitism in the 1930's," The Catholic World, CCIV (February, 1967), 270-275.

New York who are being reduced to the most inconspicuous places?"²²

Minority consciousness and self-righteousness, then, seemed to characterize American Catholics of the 1930's. It made them too sensitive of outside criticism. (In the 1960's, the Church has often been criticized, but Catholics accept it much better.) This sensitivity led to a certain degree of blindness, an unwillingness to face a horrible fact--many Catholics were bigots.

Father Coughlin attempted to make concrete use of his new following in July, 1938. In his magazine, he called for the creation of a Christian Front: "A Christian Front which will not fear to be called 'anti-Semitic,' because it knows the term 'anti-Semitic' is only another pet phrase of castigation in Communism's glossary of attack." He then added, and this is significant because it again suggests a Communist conspiracy in the Roosevelt Administration: "A Christian Front that will be for America at Washington--not against America from Moscow!"²³

The Front was slow in organizing, but in 1939 it made the news often. Reports circulated that summer that New York's Irish policemen were acting rather kindly toward Christian Fronters who held illegal street meetings, occasionally incited violence, and distributed anti-Semitic literature whenever possible. Mayor LaGuardia, who had no love for the Fronters, issued a prompt denial and apparently ordered the police to make arrests. There were 233 arrests made in 1939 of Christian Fronters or other anti-Semitic groups claiming to be inspired by Coughlin.²⁴

²²Ibid., 276.

²³Social Justice, July 25, 1938, p. 23.

²⁴New York Times, July 21, 1939, p. 5; and Myers, op. cit., 462.

Two New York Christian Fronters were arrested in September, 1939. One said he "wished to see Jewish blood flow all over America." Another said he "would like to see every Jew in the United States hanged," and with "\$100,000 from Hitler," he would "show the damned Jews."²⁵

The most celebrated case occurred in New York in January, 1940, when eighteen Fronters were arrested for conspiring to overthrow the government. Although they were subsequently acquitted, the case is of interest for other reasons. It is, first of all, important to note Coughlin's influence among these Christian Fronters and the dangers inherent in preaching distrust (if not hate) to an already unstable group. Secondly, it is interesting to note the less than forthright position Coughlin took regarding John Cassidy, the leader of the arrested group.

The priest was playing with fire when he directed this message to his Christian Fronters in August, 1939:

If the enemies of our Americanism and Christianity have been successful in building up a following of millions of propagandized supporters, is it not right for us to organize a counter-force to forefend their attacks?²⁶

This message, as well as others like it, was obviously an influence on the arrested group, as illustrated by the comments made by John Cassidy, the leader, during arraignment:

I'll tell you what I have to say. And it's this and it goes for the Christian Front. Get it right: Long live Christ the King! Down with communism! That's my message. And get it right.²⁷

Coughlin had given some insecure and frustrated individuals a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ New York Times, August 21, 1939, p. 6.

²⁷ Ibid., January 16, 1940, pp. 1, 3.

cause, and with it there was no telling what they might do unless restrained.

Naturally enough, reporters were very interested in knowing Father Coughlin's reaction to the news that 18 Christian Fronters, with 18 cans of cordit, 12 rifles, 3500 rounds of ammunition, and assorted small arms, had been arrested. The priest reacted by condemning that particular group of Christian Fronters, maintaining, however, that the need for a Christian Front still existed. He said that he had refused to contribute to the group and had returned a \$1,000 check from them on October 25, 1939. While the priest had advocated a Christian Front, he insisted that he did not advocate that Christian Front. He believed, he said, that this group might have been organized by Communists or Bundists because it was their policy to bore "from within to embarrass the real Christians of this nation." He had urged his followers, he said, "to have nothing to do with such organizations."²⁸

Coughlin's position with the Front was indeed ambiguous. A year earlier, in August, 1939, the priest had written: "As a clergyman I do not find it compatible to identify myself with any movement in any way whatsoever." Referring to the organizers of the Front, he said: "I must hold myself disengaged from your organization. I must act in no other capacity toward you than as a friend and counselor, whose privilege it is to address you in your homes each Sunday."²⁹ So far, then, his statement that he had always disavowed the Cassidy group seems plausible.

²⁸Ibid., January 15, 1940, pp. 1, 3.

²⁹Ibid., January 17, 1940, p. 14.

If this is true, it is difficult to find any proof. The evidence instead suggests that Coughlin had supported that group consistently prior to the arrests. In July, 1939, he praised the organization highly, saying, among other things: "Under the leadership of John F. Cassidy of Brooklyn, there are now five central units in operation in the metropolitan district."³⁰ A week earlier, his magazine had also mentioned Cassidy's group favorably. Finally, in the fall of 1939, the priest had addressed, by long distance telephone, a group that had Cassidy as one of its principal speakers. Coughlin may not have been aware that Cassidy was there, but there is no evidence to suggest that Coughlin had ever been concerned about Cassidy's group prior to the arrests.³¹

When readers had become aware of these revelations, Coughlin was again on the spot. Whether the men were guilty or innocent, the priest observed, the newspapers had been unfair, and the whole Front had been placed on trial. He wondered why the FBI was not investigating Communists. Finally, he said, "I take my stand beside the Christian Fronters."³² While the group's acquittal gave Coughlin the last laugh, the question of his ambiguity had remained.

Certain Christian Front groups apparently practiced discrimination through the use of a "Christian Index." The Index consisted of the names of non-Jewish merchants. Its slogan was "Buy Christian." Those wishing to be included, had to pledge that they would buy from Christians only;

³⁰ Social Justice, July 31, 1939, p. 3.

³¹ New York Times, January 17, 1940, p. 14.

³² Ibid., January 22, 1940, p. 1.

to be loyal to others listed in the Index; to work for a "united Christian brotherhood"; to make it worthwhile for Christians to trade in the listed stores; and many other things.³³ If Coughlin had ever been aware of this practice, he never publicly disavowed it.

Coughlin and his followers were often branded Fascists. When Fritz Kuhn, the head of the notorious German-American Bund, testified before the Special Committee on Un-American Activities (the Dies Committee), he stated that among groups the Bund cooperated with were the Christian Front, the Christian Mobilizers, Christian Crusaders, and the Social Justice Society--all Coughlin-inspired groups, the Front, of course, being the most famous. Kuhn added that standard reading matter for Bund members included Coughlin's Social Justice.³⁴ Indeed, Dies himself, a right winger if one has ever lived, all but branded Coughlin a Fascist--although at no time did he mention the priest's name. He wrote that one was a Fascist if he spread anti-Semitism, especially if he used the names of Lenin's spurious cabinet, printed the Protocols of Zion, or garbled quotations from the Talmud--all things that Coughlin had done.³⁵ This, of course, contrary to Dies, did not make the priest a Fascist. The point is that Coughlin was becoming increasingly ostracized, even among staunch right wing anti-Communists like Martin Dies.

By the fall of 1939, Coughlin and his followers had become some-

³³ Reverend William C. Kernan, The Ghost of Royal Oak (New York: Free Speech Forum, 1940), 25.

³⁴ Martin Dies, The Trojan Horse in America (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1940), 310-311.

³⁵ Ibid., 24.

thing of an embarrassment to many Catholics--the Christian Front was overwhelmingly Catholic. In October, 1939, Equality magazine sent an open letter to Archbishop Spellman of New York City, asking him to clarify the position of the Church on Coughlin. The letter said that "the hate-rousing and anti-Semitic activities" of Coughlin's followers could "eventually culminate in a violent, bloody rioting such as the city has never known."³⁶

Spellman apparently did not reply. While it may possibly have been wiser for him to have done so, given the high emotional tension of the time, the official position of the Church had been stated many times previously, Cardinal Mundelein's statement of December, 1938 being the latest. Mundelein, over a national radio hookup, had said:

As an American citizen, Father Coughlin has the right to express his personal views on current events, but he is not authorized to speak for the Catholic Church, nor does he represent the doctrines or sentiments of the Church.³⁷

Father Francis Talbot, editor of America, spoke for many American Catholics when he told a group of Christians and Jews: "If Father Coughlin is a thorn in the side of the Jews, he is also a thorn in the side of the Catholics. If he is arousing anti-Semitism, he also is arousing anti-Catholicism."³⁸

It is an uncomfortable fact that a significant number of Catholic clergymen, including certain members of the hierarchy, had applauded Coughlin's anti-Semitic crusade. This was, indeed, arousing anti-Catholicism. When Protestant churchmen assailed Coughlin, they usually

³⁶ Myers, op. cit., 462-463.

³⁷ Ibid., 443-444.

³⁸ New York Times, June 23, 1939, p. 9.

took pains to separate him from the Catholic Church. But it was very hard for them not to notice the large number of clergymen in Coughlin's camp. It was perhaps inevitable that the Church would eventually become tainted by Coughlin's activities. One of the most telling blows received by the Church came from a group of Methodist ministers meeting in New York City in May, 1940. Their report applauded those Catholic clergymen who had opposed Coughlin and the Front; however, one section criticized the Catholic hierarchy "from whom no word of disavowal has come at those who have blasphemed the name of Christ by making it synonymous with hatred for the Jew." Later in the report, it noted the heavy Catholic membership of the Christian Front and added poignantly that "the Christian Front well merits the title of 'Catholic Klan'"³⁹ Father Coughlin was becoming almost as great a liability for Catholics as he was for Jews.

The radio priest's anti-Semitic crusade had unleashed the fears and uncertainties of many Americans. These emotions were sometimes expressed in violence and intolerance. Norman Thomas, after speaking at a meeting of the American Civil Liberties Union in 1939, was pushed about the streets of Jersey City by Coughlinites. Shortly after this experience, Thomas wrote to Coughlin urging him to repudiate those who would deny free speech to others. If Coughlin did not, in fact, encourage their efforts, wrote Thomas, he certainly did not restrain them:

Now this Jersey City experience was not unique. I myself witnessed the amazing exhibition of your followers at a hearing before the Board of Education in New York City in favor of closing the school houses to discussions of 'controversial issues.' Yet the same crowd pickets radio stations very noisily in your behalf and does it in the name of free speech.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., May 19, 1940, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., June 19, 1939, p. 8.

Coughlin's followers were a dissatisfied lot, unhappy with their present niches in society and very anxious to change things. The leader of any unhappy following is playing with fire, and it is the leader's moral responsibility to see, at the very least, that his followers are not destructive. One of Coughlin's greatest failings is that he had set in motion some potentially dangerous forces and then had failed to properly guide them. Mass movements can be very dangerous.

CHAPTER IV

COUGHLIN AND THE WAR

It was World War II that proved to be the undoing of Father Coughlin. Americans had viewed with uneasiness and then with alarm the growing ambitions of totalitarianism in Europe and Asia, and they were taking sides. An American demagogue given to scurrilous radio attacks on Hitler or Mussolini might well have lasted the duration of the war, but Coughlin, with his pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic sympathies, could not last long against the rising tide of American public opinion.

Friendly associations with Germany had proved to be unpopular for any American during the 1930's, the cases of Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh being the most notable. They had accepted medals from the German government and were roundly criticized at home. So, too, was Father Coughlin when his activities met with friendly receptions in Nazi Germany. After one of the priest's famous speeches in late 1938, a New York Times dispatch from Berlin said: "The German hero in America for the moment is the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin because of his radio speech representing national socialism as a defensive front against bolshevism."¹ For that same series of speeches in late 1938 and early 1939, Coughlin was lavishly praised by the Silver Shirts and the German American Bund--both American Nazi organizations.² Praise from such sources further raised the ire of Americans already convinced that Coughlin had, at best, some dangerous ideas.

¹New York Times, November 27, 1938, p. 46.

²Alfred McClund Lee, and Elizabeth Briant Lee, ed., The Fine Art of Propaganda (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939), 64.

Coughlin had been an isolationist, but his sympathies--even during the war--were with the dictators. As early as 1935, he was feeling sorry for Germany--"unarmed compared to France."³ After the Russo-German non-aggression pact, he stated that "henceforth we must treat communism and nazism alike." But he added: "Have we not learned our lesson that we have no business in recognizing Russia, in preferring Russia to Germany?"⁴ This addition is important. Coughlin often said that he deplored both communism and nazism, but, in fact, he continued to spend the great majority of his time attacking Communists and Jews. This is hardly even-handed treatment.

Elliot Roosevelt, one of the President's sons, illustrated the thinking of many Americans when, in a national radio broadcast, he argued: "I dislike censorship in any form, but even censorship might not be too high a price to pay if it will help insulate us against the anti-Semitic oratory of the radio priest in Royal Oak, Michigan."⁵

Roosevelt voiced these thoughts in July, 1939. It was during this same month that the National Association of Broadcasters proposed a new code that would give air time to anybody who wished to voice something controversial, but air time would not be sold to individuals. Those, like Coughlin, who had something to say could not buy time for controversial subjects. Instead, they would have to appear on interview situations with others--a public forum setup. In October, when the

³ Reverend Charles E. Coughlin, A Series of Lectures on Social Justice (Royal Oak, Michigan: The Radio League of the Little Flower, 1935), 242.

⁴ New York Times, August 28, 1939, p. 9.

⁵ Ibid., July 17, 1939, p. 3.

proposed code was adopted by the Broadcasters at a special meeting, Coughlin's name was mentioned, specifically, several times.⁶

After October, 1939, several stations cancelled Coughlin's broadcast. He negotiated contracts for the 1940 season--to November, 1940--with some stations, but it was becoming more evident that the priest was commanding a sinking ship. More and more people seemed determined to be rid of Coughlin. The newly formed American League to Combat Anti-Semitism was formed in 1939, aimed mainly at Coughlin and the Christian Front. Many pamphlets were printed, and newspaper articles were written. Good-will meetings between Christians and Jews were also encouraged. About this time, the Catholic Lay Apostle Guild was also formed to combat anti-Semitism. The Reverend Walton E. Cole of Toledo told a Boston crowd that contrary to Coughlin's denial of any intent at similarity, he had seen a copy of an old speech by Goebbels, and "other Nazi propaganda literature" in the Social Justice office.⁷

His feelings toward Coughlin were rather strong:

Of all the propagandists now operating in the United States, none is more skilled, more vocal, and more destructive of established American ideals of tolerance and good-will than the verbal magician, Father Charles Coughlin.

Later, he added:

I have indisputable evidence that when Father Coughlin was given authoritative facts which contradicted his distorted statements he not only chose to ignore them, but even repeated his original misstatement of facts.⁸

There is reason to doubt that the Reverend Cole had any

⁶Ibid., October 4, 1939, p. 15.

⁷Ibid., April 24, 1939, p. 5.

⁸Ibid.

"indisputable evidence," but the New York Times printed it, thereby increasing, perhaps, the number of people who regarded Coughlin's position as untenable. Americans would tolerate, in 1939, someone who was an isolationist or who was anti-German, but they would not tolerate someone they thought was a panderer of Nazi literature.

A good indication of Coughlin's ostracism by moderate Americans occurred in 1940. The priest, through Social Justice, had praised Willkie's acceptance speech, and indicated that the Republican was his choice over Roosevelt. Willkie replied crushingly: "If I understand what his beliefs are, I am not only not interested in his support--I don't want it."⁹

The end of Coughlin's broadcasting days came on September 20, 1940. With the new broadcasting code of October, 1939, he had found it difficult to find stations willing to broadcast his speeches, and he had found it increasingly difficult to raise the requisite money. There also seems to have been some pressure from Archbishop Mooney, Coughlin's only superior besides the Pope.¹⁰ The degree of pressure, if any, and its significance is unknown. That Mooney talked to Coughlin about his broadcasting in 1940 seems likely; that Mooney threatened the priest with anything radical or even directly ordered the priest to stop seems much less likely. The Archbishop had tolerated the controversial radio priest since early in 1937 and throughout the stormy season of 1938-1939, and there seems no good reason why his patience should have snapped before

⁹Gustavus Myers, History of Bigotry in the United States (New York: Random House, 1943), 470.

¹⁰Charles J. Tull, Father Coughlin and the New Deal (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965), 226.

the United States had even entered the war--before the question of sedition could be properly raised.

The radio priest did not intend to retire permanently. "I have been retired, temporarily, by those who control circumstances beyond my reach."¹¹ He said that "men powerful in the field of radio and other activities" had forced him to quit. He would not return to the air, he pledged, until the nation would "cease to be warminded."¹² This was one pledge Coughlin was to keep.

There is good reason to question the wisdom or the logic of the National Association of Broadcasters in their attempts to limit discussion of controversial subjects. Their hearts may have been in the right places, but censorship is a very dangerous thing in a democracy. What is interesting, however, is Coughlin's attitude. It had never occurred to him, apparently, that he might be abusing the right of free speech, or that he should be considered a radical. In May, 1939, he said what only a fanatic could possibly say: "Free speech does not imply the right of radicals to employ free speech, and free America does not mean that this nation shall become a haven for world revolutionists."¹³ Like all true believers, he thought himself to be unquestionably right and everyone else wrong.

After Pearl Harbor, Coughlin became increasingly polarized from the main stream of American public opinion. According to him, the war was a conspiracy formed by Roosevelt, the British, and the Jews; the

¹¹ Ibid., 227.

¹² New York Times, September 21, 1940, p. 21.

¹³ Ibid., May 1, 1939, p. 17.

Christian have-not nations, Germany and Italy, had been forced into the war by the antichrist have nations; the only major war goal of the United States was the salvation of the British Empire; war taxes were being used to further solidify the already entrenched Roosevelt bureaucracy; Great Britain was rapidly becoming Communistic; Russia, not Germany, had been the aggressor in June, 1941; finally, the Jewish-run Roosevelt Administration would be left to fight Germany without Britain because that country would likely make any deal that would save her empire.¹⁴ This type of writing in Social Justice was causing some anxiety in the White House, as well as within the Justice and Postal Departments.

On September 11, 1941, Lindbergh made his famous anti-Semitic speech in Des Moines. Reaction to this was intense, and opposition to anti-Semitic orators no doubt increased. After Pearl Harbor, it became even worse. There were many attacks on Coughlin and Social Justice--more and more coming from Catholic newspapers.

One of these, the Florida Catholic, was quoted in a New York Times editorial--a portent of things to come:

Social Justice is not a Catholic paper. It does not reflect Catholic views. It does not acknowledge or obey any Catholic authority. Indeed, it has on various occasions made bitter attacks on those authorities. Despite its mock concern for the welfare of our country, despite its peculiar brand of¹⁵ piety, this magazine is both unpatriotic and un-Christian.

The chancellor of the archdiocese of Detroit reaffirmed the contention of the Michigan Catholic--and of Archbishop Mooney--that Coughlin

¹⁴Wallace Stegner, "The Radio Priest and His Flock," The Aspirin Age, ed. Isabel Leighton (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), 254-255.

¹⁵New York Times, March 28, 1942, p. 16.

and Social Justice were on their own. The chancellor "had thought that this was clear to all our readers." He said that for Social Justice to be a Catholic paper it must have the approval of a diocese. This was clearly not the case with Coughlin's magazine. "Moreover," the chancellor added,

for nearly two years back--since Father Coughlin's latest withdrawals from responsibility for Social Justice with the issue of May 27, 1940--no priest of this diocese has been authorized to associate himself in any capacity with its publication or circulation, or to the knowledge of this office has accordingly done so¹⁶

This statement by the chancellor is interesting. To assure his readers that Coughlin had not been authorized to associate with Social Justice is one thing, but for the chancellor to blandly suggest that there was no reasonable evidence to indicate that Coughlin had, in fact, done so seems almost incredible. The implication is strong that if Coughlin were to be stopped, Archbishop Mooney would not initiate such an action.

One of the most active crusaders against Coughlin and Social Justice after Pearl Harbor was a New York weekly called PM. It regularly enclosed a coupon in the form of a petition to Attorney General Biddle, the purpose of which was to force Biddle to take action against the priest. An estimated 43,000 coupons were eventually sent.

Social Justice was temporarily banned from the mails on April 14, 1942. Postmaster General Walker did so after receiving a long letter from Attorney General Biddle saying that it had violated the Espionage Act of 1917 and had been involved in a "sustained and systematic attack on certain of our activities directly related to the war effort as well

¹⁶ Ibid., April 4, 1942, p. 11.

as upon public morale generally."¹⁷ Walker ordered the publishers to appear in Washington on April 29 to show cause why the banning should not be permanent.

Coughlin reacted promptly to Walker's announcement. He denied any affiliation with the magazine and challenged Biddle to allow him to defend Social Justice properly.¹⁸

In his letter, Biddle wrote that he had studied ten major themes broadcast by the Axis powers since December 7, 1941. They showed, said Biddle, "a close relationship of material contained in Social Justice to those themes during approximately the same period." He added:

The themes played upon by Social Justice since our entry into the war, at which time the statute came into operation, are in the main but a continuation and development of those appearing over a long period of time prior to December 7.

In fact, a striking similarity between this publication and Axis propaganda appeared as early as the issue of December 25, 1938, in which whole portions of a speech made on September 13, 1935, by Propaganda Minister Goebbels were published in Social Justice, as an original article with but a few words changed here and there and with no crediting or other identification of the source.¹⁹

Biddle added that had this only occurred once, it might be declared a "careless overstatement," but by constant repetition it has

become evidence of a deliberate and intentional distortion of the truth, and especially so when one considers the probable effect of such publications upon men in the armed services and those subject to selective service or enlistment.

"It becomes clear," he concluded,

¹⁷ Ibid., April 15, 1942, p. 1.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

by an examination of Social Justice since December 7 that the publication has made a substantial contribution to a systematic and unscrupulous attack upon the war effort of our nation, both civilian and military.²⁰

Biddle announced on April 17 that a special grand jury investigating Nazi propaganda and seditious influences would soon investigate who owned and controlled Social Justice.²¹ The grand jury apparently intended to indict Coughlin under the Espionage Act of 1917. Title XII of that act read, in part, that every "matter or thing of any kind" advocating treason, insurrection, or resistance to any law of the United States shall not be carried in the mails nor delivered from any post offices.²²

Since the grand jury had issued subpoenas to those principals believed to be involved, Coughlin's hand was forced. He announced, on April 20, that he had said many times before that he was not the editor, publisher, or owner of the magazine. He would save the grand jury some trouble, however:

I do here and now publicly state that I, . . . alone am responsible for and do control the magazine, its policies and contents. This sole responsibility and control over the policy-making and content of the magazine I have exercised personally and officially by my effective moral and spiritual influence and direction over the editors, publishers and owners of Social Justice.²³

This statement prompted the Archdiocese of Detroit to release a letter from Coughlin to Archbishop Mooney, dated May 16, 1940. Coughlin

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., April 18, 1942, p. 17.

²² Ibid., April 19, 1942, p. 17.

²³ Ibid., April 21, 1942, p. 18.

wrote: "I will not be responsible for Social Justice magazine beyond the issue of the date of May 27, 1940."²⁴

Having already placed a ban on the April 14 issue of Coughlin's magazine, Walker soon announced a ban on the April 20 issue as well. He gave no explanation for his action, but he probably wished to keep it out of circulation before the hearing, originally scheduled for April 29 but later changed to May 4.

Despite Coughlin's admission, previously mentioned, that he had indeed been responsible for the contents of Social Justice during the time under contention, the priest still seemed to have some fight left in him. One of his secretaries released, on April 20, an advance copy of an editorial from the April 27, 1942 issue of Social Justice--which had not yet appeared. The editorial expressed the paper's determination to stay in business until forced to stop by the courts. It added, dramatically, that if the magazine lost its legal fight it would "observe the order literally"--meaning, perhaps, that they meant to barricade the doors.²⁵

The Postmaster General, after reading the advance copy of the April 27 issue, declared that it would not be mailed. It contained "statements clearly within the prohibitions of the Espionage Act," said Walker.²⁶

On May 4, 1942, a hearing was held to consider the possibility of permanently barring the magazine from second-class mailing. Coughlin did

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., April 26, 1942, p. 33.

not appear. Indeed, no one representing the magazine was there. Walker, therefore, ordered it permanently barred from the mail. He received, at this time, a letter from E. Perrin Schwartz, president and editor of Social Justice, announcing that the magazine would no longer be published. Walker also received a telegram from Coughlin which expressed approval of Schwartz's decision to abandon the second-class mailing privilege.²⁷

The question of an indictment by a grand jury on charges of sedition remained, but for various reasons, not entirely clear, it was allowed to drop. It seems probable that President Roosevelt was not anxious, at the beginning of a tragic war, to press sedition charges against a well-known Catholic priest. Archbishop Mooney had said that he was satisfied with Walker's handling of Coughlin. He added:

Regardless, however, of how the matter might have been disposed of, I had a definite and explicit commitment from Father Coughlin on May 1 that, from that date forward, his severance of all connection, whether direct or indirect, with the magazine would be absolute and complete.

He concluded on a firm note--something rather unusual for him: "My understanding with him is sufficiently broad and firm to exclude effectively the recurrence of any such unpleasant situation."²⁸ The whole issue was allowed to fade away.

²⁷ Ibid., May 5, 1942, p. 23.

²⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Father Coughlin's "retirement" had come in stages. First, in 1940, he was removed from the radio, and in 1942 his magazine was barred from the mails. For about a year after this, he roamed the country making speeches only slightly less controversial than those of his more public days. Finally, the priest settled down to being the simple pastor he had always claimed to be. In this respect, Coughlin seems to have differed somewhat with today's priests who have run afoul of their bishops. They, it would appear, are much more likely to leave the Church altogether, castigating the entire religious establishment in the process.

Coughlin was not heard from again nationally until December, 1953, when he addressed a First Friday Club of Catholic laymen in Detroit. He merely urged support of the U. A. W.'s drive for a guaranteed annual income. (He had once said that the C. I. O. and Christianity were incompatible!) The Nation, which was about as Fascist-conscious as Coughlin had been conscious of Communists, wondered if Father Coughlin were not "being brought back into public life for the purpose" of helping Senators McCarthy and McCarran. "Are we now to witness a resumption of social fascism?" it asked.¹ Clearly, many liberals had not forgotten Father Coughlin.

Reporters from Life found Coughlin to have mellowed considerably by 1955. Referring to the 1936 campaign, he said: "It was a horrible

¹"Father Coughlin's Reappearance," The Nation, CLXXVIII (January 2, 1954), 1.

mistake to enter politics." Concerning his remarkable speech at Dr. Townsend's convention: "It was intemperate of me, unbecoming a priest, to call Franklin Roosevelt a liar."² He thought that Archbishop Mooney had only done his duty when he helped stop Social Justice in 1942. Referring to Gerald L. K. Smith, he said: "I was frightened by Smith . . . a professional anti-Semite, an anti-Christian."³

In early 1966, the old priest retired as pastor of the Shrine of the Little Flower. On this occasion, he was asked to make some comments about President Johnson. The answer the old battler gave was remarkable--for him. "We have only one President at a time," he said. "It is my duty to follow."⁴

The notion that the old battler's fighting days had ended proved to be somewhat illusory, however. At age seventy-eight, in December of 1968, it became known that the old priest was writing a book called the Helmet and Sword. The book was not to be about politics or economics--subjects dear to the younger Father Coughlin; instead, it was to deal with the modern Catholic Church.

Shortly before Christmas, 1968, Coughlin had published a short pamphlet which was supposed to be something of an introduction to his forthcoming book. In it, he attacked "loud-mouth clerical advocates of arson, riot and draft card burning." Liberal bishops who seek to "upset Pope Paul" were also assailed. His own superior, Archbishop John F.

²"Calm for a Stormy Priest," Life, XXXIX (November 14, 1955), 119-120.

³Ibid., 120.

⁴New York Times, May 27, 1966, p. 26.

Dearden, was charged with "under the table approval" of dissenting
priests.⁵

Bishops must assume the major responsibility for the moral predicament in which members of the Catholic Church find themselves.

Many of our prelates are amateur social engineers who hide the lamp of their religious commitment under the bushel basket of secular science.

To feed, clothe and house the poor, to agitate for social and civil rights, particularly for the Negro, the Puerto Rican and the migrant Mexican; to dedicate archdiocesan funds for material purposes, have become the objectives of many of these gentlemen.⁶

If Father Coughlin has been disciplined once again for his in-temperate pen, we have no knowledge of it. The Archbishop had no comment. The book, whenever it is published, will be the protests of an angry Catholic conservative--Father Coughlin--against the rising influence of Catholic liberals within the Church. If the old priest is allowed to live long enough, he may once again do battle.

Social reformers have often viewed religious institutions in the United States with suspicion. Large churches--and the Catholic Church is the largest--have found it difficult to react quickly and in a positive manner to changing times. As a result, they have alienated many liberals. The conservatives tend to remain loyal to the churches, but anti-Catholicism has always existed in various degrees among the Protestant conservatives, too.

Because of these factors, Coughlin's emergence on the national

⁵The Catholic Messenger (Davenport, Iowa), December 19, 1968,
p. 2.

⁶Ibid.

scene did the Catholic Church in America a great deal of harm. The Church was thought by many to be a tightly controlled, monolithic structure where the priests did whatever was ordered them by a nebulous "official hierarchy." This misunderstanding of the Church's structure, plus the notion that Coughlin was a creature of this "hierarchy," hurt the position of the Church in America considerably.

Harold Ickes, at various times in his diary, mentioned how the Church, as if it were always acting in unison, would occasionally intervene politically in some matter. He believed that most of the hierarchy, except Cardinal Mundelein of Chicago, were reactionary, and that priests were instructed to actually vote or urge others to vote certain ways. He never actually connected Coughlin with the official Church, but there was a lingering suspicion that the Church was very united and had definite goals.⁷ (The reader will perhaps recall The Nation article mentioned earlier. That magazine saw Coughlin as "being brought back into public life" in 1953--by the hierarchy, one is left to assume.)⁸

In this same vein, a writer for The Nation wrote, shortly before the banning of Social Justice in 1942, that the "Roman Catholic Church is going to be held to account for Coughlin, Curran and company by the American people."⁹ The writer had also referred to the "official hierarchy." The following month Commonweal, a Catholic magazine and a somewhat liberal

⁷Harold L. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes: The Inside Struggle, 1936-1939 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), passim.

⁸"Father Coughlin's Reappearance," loc. cit.

⁹Donald Grant, "Coughlin's New Capital," The Nation, CLIV (March 21, 1942), 335.

one at that, reacted sharply to the anti-clerical, if not anti-Catholic tendencies of the liberal press. The article met the issue squarely:

But deep in the subconscious of many liberals and radicals, unfortunately, lingers the nineteenth century myth of the Catholic Church which would represent it as the necessary enemy of justice and liberty and the rights of humanity.¹⁰

The anti-Catholicism inadvertently stirred by Coughlin and the anti-Semitism deliberately fanned by him have fairly well subsided in the United States, but his importance to the historian remains. It remains because demagoguery and preachers of hate still exist. Father Coughlin led a mass movement. It was not a particularly successful one, but it made plenty of mischief while it existed.

Today there are several mischief-making mass movements (or potential mass movements) in existence. Some of them, especially those on the right, are led by demagogues. It would be helpful, as has been attempted in this study of Father Coughlin, to determine who they are, what they are up to, why they are as they are, and the general complexion of their followers. All of this is difficult to do, but it is important nonetheless.

Extremists, both right and left, are what Richard Hofstadter calls paranoids. In the paranoid style, "the feeling of persecution is central, and it is systematized in grandiose theories of conspiracy." The persecution does not have to be directed against the individual necessarily, but "against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others."¹¹ Certainly Father Coughlin would

¹⁰Michael Williams, "Views and Reviews," Commonweal, XXXV (April 3, 1942), 589-590.

¹¹Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 4.

fall into this category.

Hofstadter gives a more recent example of this. Three men traveled all the way from Bagdad, Arizona in 1964 to testify against Senator Thomas Dodd's bill which would restrict the purchase of mail-order guns. One said it was "a further attempt by a subversive power to make us part of one world socialistic government." It might "create chaos," and "our enemies" might seize power.¹²

The basic elements of contemporary right wing thought are almost identical with Coughlin's old line. They are:

1. There is a continuing conspiracy reaching its zenith in the New Deal. Its object: an economic stranglehold by the federal government, enroute to socialism and communism.
2. Top government posts are riddled with Communists. American policy (especially foreign) has been dominated by these men since before Pearl Harbor.
3. The whole country is swarming with Communist agents, dominating education, religion, and the mass media. Their object: break down the resistance of loyal Americans.¹³

The only way the paranoid can defeat this conspiracy is with an all-out crusade. He "sees the fate of this conspiracy in apocalyptic terms--he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values." Furthermore, he must have complete victory. Since the enemy is totally evil, there must be no compromise. This leads to fantastic demands, which, when refused, lead to further frustration on the part of the paranoids.¹⁴ (One need only be

¹² Ibid., 5.

¹³ Ibid., 25-26.

¹⁴ Ibid., 29.

reminded of the New Left's now familiar "non-negotiable demands" in order to observe the similarity in behavior between extremists, right and left.) Add to this Eric Hoffer's observation that a fanatic "fears compromise and cannot be persuaded to qualify the certitude and righteousness of his holy cause,"¹⁵ and one has a fairly chilling glimpse at the extremist, past and present.

One should not assume, however, that most extremists are kooks or psychotics. Dr. Robert Coles, a research psychiatrist at Harvard, observes:

I have never met anyone of them that I would ever commit to a mental hospital. None of them have been either homicidal or suicidal or significantly enough psychotic that I could not understand what they were thinking about, given their assumptions. Now I definitely feel that they have their problems, but I can say that about all kinds of people.¹⁶

What are they then? Among other things, according to one political observer, they are "literal-minded" and "have a world-view of things in which all phenomena must be correlated." And like Hoffer, he concludes that "they are convinced of the justness of their cause."¹⁷

Extremists do not seem to be less intelligent than most Americans. Even those to the left of the late Norman Thomas and to the right of William Buckley seem to have as much if not more education as those Americans nearer the center.

Quite often, extremist leaders and their followers have a vested

¹⁵ Eric Hoffer, The True Believer (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 84.

¹⁶ Quoted in George Thayer, The Farther Shores of Politics (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 535-536.

¹⁷ Ibid., 536.

interest in the status quo. If the movement has success, the leader and the movement might lose their reasons for existence; therefore, subconsciously, they hope for failure and are strengthened by it. Being considered outsiders makes them feel better.¹⁸

St. Paul was a classic example of an extremist. A zealous persecutor of Christians, he eventually became a zealous proselytizer for Christianity. There are probably many East German Communists today who were once convinced Nazis. In the United States, both the right and left attract the same kinds of people--"dogmatic, totalitarian, and radical."¹⁹

Most of the right wing organizations in the United States today have charismatic leaders who use demagoguery regularly. The Reverend Gerald L. K. Smith is still active. Other relatively well-known leaders are Dr. Frederick Schwarz and his Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, the Reverend Billy James Hargis and his Christian Crusade, and the Reverend Carl McIntire and his Twentieth Century Reformation Hour. Without these men and their demagogic talents, their organizations would probably collapse, as was the case with the American Nazi Party after the assassination of its feuhrer, George Lincoln Rockwell.

Most of these organizations, individually, claim only small fractions of the American public and, therefore, constitute no clear and present danger to the Republic.²⁰ However, right wing demagoguery was

¹⁸ Ibid., 540

¹⁹ Ibid., 542.

²⁰ One estimate has twenty per cent of the American electorate in the extreme right wing, but this also includes the extreme conservatives like William Buckley. No one seems to know for sure, but perhaps half of these are to the right of Buckley. See Arnold Forster, and Benjamin R. Epstein, Danger on The Right (New York: Random House, 1964), xii.

quite significant in the Goldwater campaign of 1964--not by the Senator himself, but certainly by some of his followers. It was also significant in the Wallace campaign in 1968. The danger does not come from the smallness of individual right or left wing organizations; it comes, rather, from the middle man's reaction to this propaganda--that is, whether he will over-react to the danger from the right or the left. Another danger, less likely but still somewhat worrisome, would be the possibility that enough of these groups might unite long enough to upset the rather delicately balanced electoral machinery. We have seen that Coughlin, Smith, and Townsend failed to do this in 1936. More recently, George Wallace failed to do it in 1968. It can still happen, however.

The left wing organizations in the United States are much more difficult to follow. There seems to be a tendency, especially among leftist students, to shy away from charismatic leaders; consequently, there exists something which might be called collectivized demagoguery--that is, the appeal to the emotions is there, but the great leaders are not. Nevertheless, a study of the individual leaders would be helpful, but much more important would be a study of their followers. This study does not permit such a comprehensive undertaking, but a sketch seems desirable.

The most significant movement in the extreme left in recent years is that large and diverse group of people and organizations known collectively as the New Left. It began among a group of intellectuals on British and then American campuses in the middle 1950's. Today's New Left, however, rejects the intellectualism of these men as well as the very universities that supplied them with their ideas! The right wing,

too, has always been characterized by anti-intellectualism.

The New Left began to show signs of growth after Castro's Cuban victory in 1959. Students wondered if they could change their own worlds. The following year saw the execution of Caryl Chessman, a convicted murderer. The validity of all laws was then called into question. Greensboro, North Carolina was the scene for the first sit-in in 1960, attracting much sympathy from the New Left and some help from it. Also in that year, the House Un-American Activities Committee began investigations into the activities of the New Left in California, culminating in the notorious film, "Operation Abolition." "We are indebted to the Committee for that film," said one member of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). "It showed those big cops clubbing students" ²¹

There were other reasons for the growth of the New Left. McCarthyism was dead or dying, which meant that dissent could once again be tolerated. President Kennedy's youthful appeal gave fresh impetus to the youth, and made them more respectable to older people. Their relative wealth gave them opportunities to develop social consciousness and time for reflection. All of these reasons make the New Left a force to be reckoned with.

Broadly speaking, one may say that those of the New Left reject affluence. Many are of the new rich middle class. Wealth or the desire for it is a meaningless goal for them. They knew their parents' societies were open to them, but they rejected such societies because they were empty, offering little beyond physical comfort. ²² Eric Hoffer concurs in

²¹Thayer, op. cit., 401.

²²Paul Jacobs, and Saul Landau, The New Radicals (New York: Random House, 1966), 11-12.

this by observing that many are called to mass movements who are ambitious and face unlimited opportunities. "There is an excessive readiness for self-sacrifice and united action." He adds that the bored are also attracted. They need to find something creative or useful in their lives.²³

It was mentioned earlier that the New Left has shunned the charismatic leaders like Father Coughlin or the contemporary right wing leaders like the Reverend Billy James Hargis. Tom Hayden, a former president of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), once warned of "maintaining a dependency on fixed leaders, who inevitably develop interests in maintaining the organization (or themselves) and lose touch with the immediate aspirations of the rank and file."²⁴ In other words, such leaders would become a part of the dreaded Establishment. Unlike most of the right wing organizations and many of those in the Old Left, most of the New Left organizations would continue to function fairly effectively if their leaders all disappeared tomorrow.

The SDS is the largest and most loosely structured of all the New Left organizations. Its membership runs the gamut from social democrats of the Norman Thomas variety all the way to the Weathermen--revolutionary anarchists like Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. In the middle lies the vast majority, ready to be swayed.

It is very non-authoritarian from within, unlike most other left and right wing groups. It has no rigid hierarchy or dogma. Its slogan is, "Let the people decide."²⁵ College administrators, apparently, are

²³Hoffer, op. cit., 5, 48. Quotation is on p. 48.

²⁴Jacobs and Landau, op. cit., 31.

²⁵Thayer, op. cit., 410.

not part of "the people." The closest thing it has to a policy was written in 1962:

We seek the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual shares in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation²⁶

The movement will probably be around for awhile because their goals will not be easily accomplished. If the universities were turned over to the students tomorrow, and the Vietnam war ended next week, the SDS would still have plenty to worry about. It is an ambitious and dedicated group.

Those in the New Left are a puzzling group. Not only do they shun charismatic leaders, but they (at least the rank and file) claim to be opposed to "theory" and "ideology." They are in the movement, so they say, because "that's where the action is."²⁷ Yet the themes of these people, whether they be leaders or followers, sound much the same. They speak of the "Military-Industrial Complex," American "imperialism" in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, the "Establishment," and "alienation." At the same time, many quote from no less a leader of an establishment than Mao Tse-tung. It is probably true, however, that these are all slogans, and that the New Left has not yet developed a rigid ideology.

To the New Left, the world is corrupt, vicious, and doomed. Rather than find their own niches in society as most people do or withdraw from it as the beatniks of the 1950's and the expatriates of the 1920's

²⁶ Ibid., 412.

²⁷ Jacobs and Landau, op. cit., 31.

did, they are determined to change it. There is some anarchism in the movement. Some think that power equals corruption or evil; therefore, being powerless is a purifying experience.²⁸

This brings us to their rather puzzling, if not paradoxical, scorn for those who organize and for bureaucracy. One of the things that attracted many younger people to Senator McCarthy's camp in the Presidential primary race of 1968 was his relatively unorganized campaign compared to that of Senator Kennedy. Bureaucracy, in their view, is totalitarian. It grinds a man down. This means man is better off without power since there is no known way one can avoid bureaucracy once he gains power. However, they are aware that the only way they can meet the "enemy" effectively is with strength--an organized body with some bureaucracy. Consequently, the New Left is riddled with overlapping organizations in the best middle class American spirit.

There are many other left wing organizations besides those generally categorized as belonging to the New Left. There is, of course, the Communist Party (CPUSA), a lonely and weary organization that seems to have lost its revolutionary spirit. Since it takes its orders from the Soviet Union, a bureaucratic monstrosity, it has little attraction to members of the New Left.

There are many other Communist organizations, all small but usually loud. There are the various Trotskyist groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, the Young Socialist Alliance, and the Spartacists. The Trotskyists have gained the unenviable position of being hated by nearly everyone, including the New Left.²⁹

²⁸Thayer, op. cit., 403-404.

²⁹Ibid., 390.

It is difficult to say whether more people today are radical right wingers than left wingers, and there seems no good reason why one should have to choose between them, but certainly, at this writing anyhow, radicals on the left have been causing more mischief. A recent example should show how dangerous these people can be. In the spring of 1970, Bobby Seale and several other members of the Black Panther Party were arrested and charged with a brutal murder. The arrests were made in New Haven, home of Yale University. There seemed to be no visible evidence of their rights having been denied them, and the trial date had not yet been set. Yet hundreds and hundreds of radicals descended upon New Haven, demanding that the accused be set free and Yale students strike for the cause. A large number of students did so, leaving the faculty and administration with the alternatives of countenancing the strike or merely recognizing the situation and trying to avoid bloodshed. The faculty chose to countenance the strike.

One member of the Yale faculty who voted with the majority was Alexander M. Bickel. On the pages of the New Republic, a very liberal magazine that finds it difficult to print anything against the New Left, Bickel publicly recanted.

We were spared. But there is cause to be ashamed. We did not return a rational answer to our students, because we were too alone and it was too late. If we had said what is true; that the trial was no crisis, that it was inconceivable not to let it proceed, and that there is no reason to equate the police in Chicago with the courts in New Haven and with the state and federal courts that sit to correct the errors of courts in New Haven; if we had added that the university could continue to function, its members being held to no more than their normal duties . . . and no less--if we had said all that we would have been denounced as rigid, unresponsive, authoritarian; we would have risked riots and destruction,

and been saddled with responsibility for possible police overreaction. That is what it has come to.³⁰

Bickel blames himself and other liberals like him for the existence of the situation.

I suggest we have listened and talked ourselves into the situation we are in. We have listened--quietly, even solemnly, as if it were rational--to incredibly loose talk about the obsolescence and rottenness of our society and all our institutions, and have come to parrot it in order to propitiate a sizable number of young.³¹

The professor continued by saying what too many liberals have not been saying lately:

And destructive nihilism is evil no matter how motivated. These things it is now unfashionable for intellectuals and their audiences to say and hear. What is fashionable is the apocalypse and filthy and violent rhetoric.³²

What, Bickel asks, should be done?

We must restore conditions in which slogans and mass emotions do not drown out and drive out reasoned analysis; in which passionate assertion is not automatically seen as high-minded and presumptively right, while dispassionate judgment is denounced as insensitive and presumptively immoral.³³

Bickel is clearly unimpressed with the New Left argument that we live in a repressive society.

The society is free and open, if flawed and gravely troubled. What repression there is is imposed, as often as not, by the young in the universities, where their pressure for ideological orthodoxy and a kind of emotional solidarity threaten to achieve what Joe McCarthy never did.³⁴

³⁰ Alexander M. Bickel, "The Tolerance of Violence on the Campus," The New Republic, CLXII (June 13, 1970), 16.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 16-17.

³³ Ibid., 17.

³⁴ Ibid.

In a similar vein is a speech delivered on the Senate floor by Senator Margaret Chase Smith in the spring of 1970, twenty years after she had delivered a similar speech attacking the tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy and other militants of the radical right. In 1950 she said that the nation was being divided by "'know nothing, suspect everything' attitudes."

That applies today--but it must be expanded to the people themselves. Twenty years ago it was the anti-intellectuals who were most guilty of 'know nothing' attitudes. Today too many of the militant intellectuals are equally as guilty of 'hear nothing' attitudes, of refusing to listen while demanding communication.³⁵

In 1950 she saw "the great threat from the radical right--the threat of a government of repression."

I speak today because of what I consider to be the great threat from the radical left that advocates and practices violence and defiance of the law--again, the threat of the ultimate result of a reaction of repression.

It is time that the great center of our people--those who reject the violence and unreasonableness of both the extreme right and extreme left--searched their consciences, mustered their moral and physical courage, shed their intimidated silence and declared their consciences.³⁶

This study has been one of racial and religious bigotry in the United States. In that respect, it is highly pertinent today. While anti-Semitism has no national following today, and black-white confrontation is quite serious, American institutions are under assault from the right and the left. In the past, they have always managed to survive--at least in some recognizable form.

³⁵The Times-Democrat (Davenport, Iowa), June 18, 1970, p. 30.

³⁶Ibid.

There are no guarantees that this will always be the case, that every operation will cost little and end happily, but experience does allow the hope that the radicals of the sixties, like those of the thirties, will make their contributions within the system and not only, as they enjoy protesting, in spite of it. It also suggests that those who wish to crush the noisy young people today will tomorrow, when their extravagances have become picturesque memories, live contentedly with the changes they have goaded us into accepting.³⁷

Both the right and the left have something to offer, but the violence and the hate must be rejected. It is here, it would seem, that the lessons from this study of Father Coughlin could best be applied, for Americans must learn to live together.

³⁷Walter Goodman, The Committee (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 165.

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