

Text of Cardinal Spellman's letter to Mrs. Roosevelt, July 21
1949. (New York Times, July 23, 1949)

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

When, on June 23d in your column MY DAY, you aligned yourself with the author and other proponents of the Barden Bill and condemned me for defending Catholic children against those who would deny them their constitutional rights of equality with other American children, you could have acted only from misinformation or prejudice, not from knowledge and understanding.

It is apparent that you did not take the time to read my address delivered at Fordham University; and, in your column of July 15th, you admitted that you did not even carefully read and acquaint yourself with the facts of the Barden Bill -- the now famous, infamous bill that would unjustly discriminate against minority groups of America's children.

Unlike you, Mrs. Roosevelt, I did not make a public statement until I had studied every phase of the Barden Bill; nor did I take issue with a man because his faith differed from mine. We differed, Congressman Barden and I, over the unimpeachable issue of equal benefits and equal rights for all America's children.

I had intended ignoring your personal attack, but as the days passed and in two subsequent columns you continued your anti-Catholic campaign, I became convinced that it was in the interest of all Americans and the cause of justice itself that your misstatements should be challenged in every quarter of our country where they have already spun and spread their web of prejudice. I have received

hundreds of messages from persons of all faiths demanding that I answer you. I am, therefore, not free to ignore you.

You say that you are against religious control of schools which are paid for by taxpayers' money. That is exactly what I, too, oppose. But I am also opposed to any bill that includes children who attend parochial schools for the purpose of receiving funds from the Federal Government while it excludes these same children from the distribution and benefits of the funds allocated.

I believe that if the Federal Government provides a bottle of milk to each child in a public school it should provide milk for all school children. I believe that if Federal funds are used to transport children to public schools they should be used to transport parochial school children. I believe if through the use of Federal funds the children who attend public schools are immunized from contagious diseases that all children should be protected from these diseases.

'Taxation without representation is tyranny' was the cry that roused and rallied our pioneer Americans to fight for justice. Taxation without participation should rouse today's Americans to equal ardor to protest an injustice that would deprive millions of American children of health and safety benefits to which all our children are entitled.

And the Supreme Court of the United States has declared that health and transportation services and the distribution of non-religious textbooks to pupils attending parochial schools do not violate our Constitution.

'The separation of Church and State is extremely important to us who hold to the original traditions of our nation,' you continue. But health and safety benefits and providing standard non-religious textbooks for all American children have nothing to do with the question of separation of Church and State!

I cannot presume upon the press to discuss, analyze or refute each inaccuracy in your columns - for they are manifold. Had you taken an objective, impersonal stand, I could then, in the same impersonal manner, answer you. But you did not. Apparently your attitude of mind precluded you from comprehending issues which you either rigorously defended or flagrantly condemned while ignorant of the facts concerning both the Barden Bill and my own denunciation of it.

American freedom not only permits but encourages differences of opinion and I do not question your right to differ with me. But why I wonder do you repeatedly plead causes that are anti-Catholic? Even ^{little} if you cannot find it within your heart to defend the rights of innocent / children and heroic, helpless men like Cardinal Mindszenty, can you not have the charity not to cast upon them still another stone?

America's Catholic youth helped fight a long and bitter fight to save all Americans from oppression and persecution. Their broken bodies on blood-soaked foreign fields are grim and tragic testimony to this fact. I saw them there - on every fighting front - as equally they shared with their fellow-fighters all the sacrifice, terror and gore of war - as alike they shared the little good and glory that sometimes comes to men as together they fight and win a brutal battle.

Would you deny equality to these Catholic boys who daily stood at the sad threshold of untimely death and suffered martyrdom that you and I and the world of men might live in liberty and peace?

Would you deny their children equal rights and benefits with other sects - rights for which their fathers paid equal taxation with other fathers and fought two bitter wars that all children might forever be free from fear, oppression and religious persecution?

During the war years you visited the hospitals in many countries, as did I. You too saw America's sons - Catholic, Protestant and Jew alike - young, battered, scarred, torn and mutilated, dying in agony that we might learn to live in charity with one another. Then how was it that your own heart was not purged of all prejudices by what you saw these, our sons, suffer?

Now my case is closed. This letter will be released to the public tomorrow after it has been delivered to you by special delivery today. And even though you may again use your columns to attack me and again accuse me of starting a controversy, I shall not again publicly acknowledge you.

For, whatever you may say in the future, your record of anti-Catholicism stands for all to see - a record which you yourself wrote on the pages of history which cannot be recalled - documents of discrimination unworthy of an American mother!

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt
Hyde Park, N. Y.

Sincerely yours,
Francis Cardinal Spellman
Archbishop of New York.

Lehman statement on Cardinal Spellman - Mrs. Roosevelt controversy,
Released July 23, 1949 from summer home in Lake Placid
(New York Times, July 24, 1949.)

"I am deeply shocked at the attack of Cardinal Spellman on Mrs. Roosevelt. I strongly believe, as I have always believed, that in our American democracy every responsible citizen is entitled to express his or her views on public issues without being subjected to the accusation of being against any religion or any race.

The issue is not whether one agrees or disagrees with Mrs. Roosevelt on this or any other public question. The issue is whether Americans are entitled freely to express their views on public questions without being vilified or accused of religious bias.

Mrs. Roosevelt has been a public figure for twenty-five years. Her every act has been a matter of record. In that splendid record I do not know of a single act or word that would in the slightest degree indicate bias or prejudice against any religion or any race.

Her whole life has been dedicated to a constant fight for tolerance and brotherhood of men as children of one God.

She will, I am confident, retain the trust and the affection of all peoples irrespective of creed or race."