

Poet on a Fuzzy Toilet Seat Cover

How inscrutable are the ways of history! Who ever would have imagined that someday our nation's most gifted intellectuals would be beholden to a dirty-necked grammar school drop-out, recently risen from grubby obscurity to become America's foremost pimp and merchandiser of marital aids? But facts are facts, and today such high-minded adepts of *la vie intellectuelle* as Gay Talese and Jann Wenner are inflamed over the enormities being visited upon poor Mr. Larry C. Flynt [pronounced Flint], the driving force behind Leisure Time Products and Hustler Magazine, Inc. Thanks to Mr. Flynt the consciences of poseurs like Talese are again secreting vast charges of moral indignation. Mr. Flynt has given them a heroic cause, and they are thankful. Suddenly, they can experience *l'affaire Dreyfus*, the Sacco and Vanzetti trial, the McCarthy Era, and other horrors too dispiriting to recount. All they had to do was to sign a petition comparing the lower-court conviction of an American millionaire to the imprisonment, torture, and extermination of thousands of Soviet dissidents. They were glad to do it. Opportunities for heroism in post-Nixonian America come so infrequently.

Biographical material on Mr. Flynt will always be scanty. There is little to say about him that is interesting or, for that matter, even uninteresting. He is thirty-four years old, has made a lot of money from dealing in life's seedier merchandise, and recently entered holy wedlock with one Althea Leisure, a cutie whose photographs give evidence that she has a proclivity for spilling food on herself. In less than a decade the profits from his enterprises—profits that would be judged unconscionable were they amassed in any other business—have made him a millionaire. Yet, notwithstanding his mounds of money, Mr. Flynt remains a hopelessly pathetic slob whose trashy life still finds its most precise trope in that peculiar American furnishing, the fuzzy toilet seat cover. In quality of mind and manner he is at one with the likes of Mr. James Earl Ray and Mr. Juan Corona, the convicted killer of 25 farm workers, though in fairness to Mr. Flynt he is more the humanist than either of the above and, as one can easily deduce from the civil libertarian catechism that he orates by rote, he is far less an authoritarian. He fancies himself somewhat of a liberal and at times is capable of ratiocinations reminiscent of Dr. John Kenneth Galbraith at the height of his powers, as when he averred: "Obscenity is like the concept of sin—it defies definition...In a free society nobody should be a judge." On the other hand he is given to pinning

American flags on his leisure suits. And he apparently feels the stirrings of public service, for he has begun a campaign in *Hustler* against the smoking menace, on pages that might otherwise feature a pair of brass knuckles, a whip, or an anus. Soon or late his latent public-spiritedness will doubtless goad him to crusades against prostatitis, venereal disease, and some of those unmentionable kinds of cancer that so frequently vex his cosmopolitan readership. Nevertheless, I suspect that his future is not to be so sunny, for his present sadness suggests something else about him: Mr. Flynt is a born loser. At a booming time when a host of sex barons are freely publishing all ilk of prurient and perverse treasures poor Mr. Flynt has gotten himself convicted of "pandering obscenity and engaging in organized crime." Today he wriggles furiously to avoid seven to twenty-five years residence in an Ohio slammer.

Plastic Darrows

Now I, as a strict civil libertarian, am as grateful to Mr. Flynt for his troubles as is Mr. Talese—but for different reasons. Mr. Talese is grateful for the opportunity to solemnly explicate his idiotic insight into "the connection between the sexual and the political." I am grateful because Mr. Flynt has given Mr. Talese this opportunity. It is extremely useful to have the ethical and intellectual quacks of the land displaying their hollow values and trashy achievements, for it gives serious civil libertarians a chance to identify and reflect on the country's intellectual rot. In most countries there exist congeries of citizens who are threats to freedom and to culture, but in our modern era it is extremely difficult to identify them. They no longer live in the nation's backwaters, but have moved to the cities, taken over many of our cultural institutions, and learned to palm off their quackery as progressive thought and liberal behavior. They exploit decent values for their own gain. What they have done with Flynt is typical of them. They have taken one worthy principle of freedom—freedom of the press—disfigured it, and exploited it for short-term profits. If they continue unchallenged, there will come a time when there will be no freedom of expression nor much freedom of any other sort, for the citizenry will not know what freedom of expression is and the social tumult our quacks will have ushered in will pre-empt the respect for freedom the citizenry once had.

The present war for Mr. Flynt's rights is a farce waged by vicarious civil liber-

tarians. The stage is alive with a mob of plastic Darrows hollering for a plaster Dreiser. No knowledgeable observer doubts for a moment that a court decision or two from now Mr. Flynt will be scot-free and ready for his next boorish misadventure. Serious defenders of civil liberties would never commit the atrocity of comparing a slob like Flynt to Soviet dissidents. Nor would they raise such a fundamentally unimportant matter as "sexual expression" to the level of political and intellectual freedom. For the most part our vicarious civil libertarians are the same meretricious celebrities who provide razzle for the Republic's intellectualoids. Suggestive of their character, Mr. John Dean, the Mary Magdalen of Watergate turned author, is among them. Think of it—an "author" whose best-seller was ghost-written now defends a "dissident" whose dissidence makes him one of the wealthiest and freest publishers in the world! If there were a serious threat to civil liberties in America, you can be sure that this pack of impostors would be over at Elaine's or another of their toney Manhattan salons, primly sipping apéritifs, quoting the late Paul Elmer More and eagerly awaiting the opportunity to stride forth on the pages of the *New York Times* as principled advocates of chaste reading and uplift.

Nothing is more revealing about today's vicarious civil libertarians than their biographies. How many defenders of Larry Flynt ever rushed out in the early 1960s to defend the Negro as he struggled in the deep South for some of the most elemental civil liberties? And even more instructive, how many actually journeyed to the deep South to stand with Negro civil rights activists who were getting their heads kicked in during marches and voter drives? How many speak out against the treatment accorded citizens behind the Iron Curtain? How many have parted with their loose nickels and dimes to support these poor souls? Since April of 1974 Alexander Solzhenitsyn has spent at least \$360,000 on the cause of civil liberties in the Soviet Union. How much support does Mr. Talese send?

The sorry fact of the matter is that in America today those bogus civil libertarians who make the noisiest spectacle of themselves on issues of human liberty generally know little about it and could care less. They are either opportunists, poseurs, or ignoramuses. This is true not only in the asinine debate over the First Amendment but also in the hyperbole of civil rights. Those hinds who have monop-

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A. James McAdams

Ordaining the Zeitgeist

*"Our times demand" the ordination of women priests.
Not our faith, but our times.*

There are now women priests in the Episcopal Church of America. To non-Episcopalians, this fact may seem insignificant. But to those in the church, the admission of women to an office once reserved exclusively for males is extraordinary indeed. Some Episcopalians have expressed whole-hearted approval for the change; others have condemned it as heretical. Both sides agree, however, that the new priesthood represents nothing short of a radical break with traditional church practice, a break, furthermore which is likely to have consequences reaching far beyond the religious domain.

When church authorities met this past September at the Minneapolis meeting of the Episcopal General Convention, they were hardly in agreement on the idea of women priests. The ordination of women had been voted down at the Conventions of 1970 and 1973, and church authorities had censured the three retired Bishops who ordained eleven women in Philadelphia in 1974, but the ordination of these women (as well as that of four others in Washington) had set in motion an intensive lobbying effort for an official change. Thus, when the ordination issue was brought to the floor in September, the vote was close. Of the two houses of the Episcopal Church's governing body, the House of Bishops approved the ordination of women with the support of only 60 percent of the prelates. The vote in the House of Deputies (which represents both laity and clergy) was even closer. The laity voted 64 to 49 and the clergy only 60 to 54 to grant final approval to the changed composition of the priesthood. The Convention also took steps to adopt a substantially revised version of the church's Book of Common Prayer, an initiative which, for many Episcopalians, signaled a drastic departure from the communion's doctrinal and liturgical heritage. Keeping close step with its reformist orientation, the Convention also passed a resolution recognizing homosexuals as full members of the church and tacitly acknowledging homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. In fact, the ordination of homosexuals will be the chief topic of the next Episcopal conference in 1979, and there is, in view of the church's current disposition, relatively little doubt that it too will be approved.*

But the ordination of women is by far the most controversial issue confronting Episcopalians, and its acceptance represents nothing short of a revolutionary change in the church's self-conception. The ordination of women is in fact so controversial a measure that it may eventually rip the church apart. On the ecumenical level, the consequences have already proven profound.

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Both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches have condemned the new ordination policy, and the Polish National Catholic Church has severed its ties of intercommunion with the Episcopal Church.

The reasons for this controversy are to a great extent historical. Traditionally, the Episcopal Church has occupied an unusual position among Christian churches in the sense that it has acted as a sort of bridge between "old world" catholic conceptions of faith and dogma, on the one hand, and "new world" Protestant conceptions, on the other. Generally speaking, there are three major types of Episcopalians, "high," "broad," and "low," the first being catholic-minded, and the latter two leaning toward Protestantism. "Low," or evangelical, Episcopalians are split on the ordination issue, and because they are numerically the smallest of the three types, they have exercised the least clout in the debate. Thus, the battle has principally been waged between "broad" and "high" Episcopalians, each of which has a different view of the church.

The "broad" Protestant perspective is primarily organizational and functional; church offices are seen as administrative, pastoral, and oriented to teaching and preaching. In contrast, while the catholic perspective includes all of these functions, it is primarily based on the notion of a ministry of sacrifice, that is, on the representation of Christ's sacrifice for mankind. In the action of the Mass, the catholic priest is the representative of Christ. Because the Christian God chose to become incarnate in male form and because Christ selected only men to number among His Apostles, catholic Episcopalians argue that the priest can only be male. When he is ordained, the priest is recognized as a "Priest in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of God." Only men can take part in the "apostolic succession" which emanates *directly* from Christ, and to put women in the position of acting as Christ's vicars would be to set everything askew.

This catholic view is bolstered through the appeal to sacred Scriptures. Generally, catholics favor literal interpretations of Scriptures, and when they read that "the man is the head of the woman, just as Christ also is the head of the Church" (Ephesians 5:23) and find, furthermore, that "it is a shocking thing that a woman should address the congregation" (I Corinthians 14:35), they are bound to take such teachings seriously. Historically, both this emphasis on Scriptural revelation and the appeal to Christ's

* In fact, an affirmative vote would seem guaranteed, since one avowed lesbian, Ellen Marie Barrett, who believes that "homosexuality is an alternative life-style that can be a good and creative thing," has *already* been ordained. Significantly, her ordination comes also at a time when one Washington, D.C. priest has announced that he will soon "marry" a homosexual couple.