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New suspicions about Muslims are old suspicions about Catholics

Joe Ferullo | Sep. 18, 2012 NCR Today

The anti-Muslim video sparking demonstrations throughout the Muslim world has brought out the American political class to defend national values like free speech and religious tolerance. Except that hasn't always been the story, and Catholics know that more than most.

In *The New York Times*, writer Doug Sanders points out [1] that suspicions about American Muslims now echo suspicions held for many decades against Catholics.

The statistics were all there in years past: high Catholic birth rates, resistance to assimilate and, before Vatican II, ancient religious ceremonies spoken in a foreign tongue (Latin).

The anti-Catholic campaign began in earnest in the 19th century, as Catholic immigration to the U.S. rose sharply. But, as Sanders notes, it continued well into the last century. In 1950, a book called *American Freedom and Catholic Power* was still selling almost a quarter-million copies, making the case that the church was out for conquest here at home. But things changed: American Catholics moved into the middle class and into the mainstream. A Catholic became president. Now Catholics are at the highest levels of power; they are the majority on the Supreme Court, something unthinkable back in 1950.

As the latest Muslim controversy exploded across the Middle East, Pope Benedict was in Lebanon [2], where he spoke compellingly about the need for people of different faiths to live in cooperation. He pointed out how Christians have become targets in many nations swept up by the Arab Spring -- but things can get better. They got better here in the United States for Catholics. They will get better for Muslims here, too. And we can only hope the passions unleashed in several Islamic countries will ease, and Christians will again feel at home in these ancient homelands.

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