

2017 YEAR IN REVIEW: IRISH NUNS/"MASS GRAVE" HOAX

The following articles appeared in the 2017 April issue of Catalyst.

IRISH NUNS CONDEMNED; EVIDENCE LACKING

Reports that a "mass grave" was found containing the bodies of 800 children outside a home run by Irish nuns recently dominated the news in Ireland and England, and became a big story in the United States as well. As it turns out, the nuns were unfairly condemned by an array of politicians, pundits, and activists.

It was a lie in 2014 and it is a lie in 2017. There is no evidence of a mass grave outside a home for unmarried women operated by nuns in Tuam [pronounced CHEW-um], near Galway, in the 20th century. The hoax recently surfaced, and an obliging media ran with the story as if it were true.

Ireland's Mother and Baby Commission recently completed its inquiry into this issue and released a statement on March 3rd about its findings. The probe was a response to allegations made by a local historian, Catherine Corless, who claimed that 800 babies were buried in a tank outside the former Mother and Baby Home that was operated by the Bon Secours nuns.

The statement issued by the Mother and Baby Commission was disturbing but it never mentioned anything about a mass grave. Having completed a test excavation of the Tuam site, it found "significant quantities of human remains" in most of the underground sewage chambers. "These remains involved a number of individuals with age-at-death ranges from approximately 35 foetal weeks to 2-3 years."

If there were a "mass grave," Katherine Zappone, Minister for

Children and Youth Affairs, would have said so. Yet her statement said nothing about any “mass grave.” Moreover, when the government’s Interim Report was issued in 2016, it also made no mention of a “mass grave.”

The “fake news” about a “mass grave” is oddly enough credited to the same person who says there never was one. His name is Barry Sweeney. In 1975, when Sweeney was 10, he was playing with a friend, Frannie Hopkins, 12, on the grounds where the Home was when they stumbled on a hole with skeletons in it.

Sweeney told the *Irish Times* that “there was no way there were 800 skeletons down that hole. Nothing like that number.” How many were there? “About 20,” he said. He subsequently told the *New York Times* that “People are making out we saw a mass grave. But we can only say what we seen [sic]: maybe 15-20 small skeletons.”

This issue of *Catalyst* contains some of the most important statements that Bill Donohue released to the press in March. He was interviewed by several media outlets in Ireland about this matter, challenging the conventional wisdom.

From the President’s Desk

William A. Donohue

THOSE “EVIL” IRISH NUNS

When it comes to women, men have learned to be careful not to sound sexist or condescending. If they are perceived as such, they will be stigmatized. There is one exception: they can speak about traditional nuns in a vile way with impunity. This is not limited to men. Most importantly, it includes feminists.

It is a sad truism that not a single champion of women’s rights ever defends traditional nuns against vile comments and portrayals. Indeed, it is considered appropriate that those

sisters who are not at war with the Church's teachings on women and sexuality pay a price for their traditionalism.

For example, feminists never protest when these nuns, many of whom are in habit, are cruelly caricatured by Hollywood, artists, academics, and the media. Yet these nuns are precisely the ones who have given of themselves selflessly to the Church.

As this edition of *Catalyst* makes plain, no group of nuns has been more viciously vilified than the Irish nuns of the twentieth century. Even some noted politicians have chimed in, the worst of whom is the pro-abortion Prime Minister of Ireland, Enda Kenny. He is an utter disgrace.

I am an Irish citizen, as well as an American, and was largely raised by my grandparents from Ireland. So this subject hits home. I am not naive: Some Irish nuns were wicked, but to say most were is not only without foundation, it is a gigantic smear. Cardinal John O'Connor once said some priests were evil, but anyone who knew him knew he loved his priests; the bad ones were the exception.

By the way, some professors I have met are lying propagandists who hate America, but it would be wholly unfair to say most are. The difference is that professors can defend themselves, but these days it is very difficult for Irish nuns of the last century—many of whom are sick or deceased—to get a fair hearing. So if we don't stand up for them, who will?

As I indicated, American society is not opposed to stigma, per se. But we are aghast to learn that Irish nuns, and much of Catholic Ireland, stigmatized unwed mothers and their children.

Have we forgotten what stigma is all about? Its primary function is to sanction unwanted moral attitudes and behaviors, usually in service to something good that we seek to safeguard.

In more conservative times, we spoke about the problem of illegitimacy, but today we speak about unwed mothers and their offspring. That is because we don't want to stigmatize them. The motive is pure enough—we don't seek to punish these women and children, especially knowing that the wayward fathers get off scot free. But let's not get self-righteous. For instance, it is a mistake to think that those who stigmatized these women and children in the past did so because they were evil.

If we want more of some behavior, we reward it. If we want less, we sanction it. The reason unwed mothers and their children were stigmatized is the same reason why cohabitation, adultery, polygamy, and homosexuality were stigmatized: they were seen as challenges to traditional marriage and the two parent family.

If stigmatizing alternatives to monogamy and the two parent family had no effect, then a rational case for condemning the stigmatizers could be made. But it worked. Take the 1950s. Everyone agrees it was a much more conservative time. To the critics of this period, it was a time of sexual repression. What they are reluctant to acknowledge is that it was also a time of great family strength.

Sociologist David Popenoe noted that "greater family stability was achieved in the fifties than at probably any other time in history, with high marriage rates, low unwed birthrates, and low death rates not yet offset by sky-high divorce rates." Importantly, he attributes the very public and influential role that religion played as contributing to this condition. That included stigmatizing alternatives to traditional marriage.

No one doubts that stigmatizing out-of-wedlock births has decreased, but it is also true that this has occasioned a large increase in such births.

So have we gone forward or backwards? It would be nice to live

in a world where stigma was a thing of the past and where dysfunctional behaviors and life-styles were also non-existent. But that is a pipe dream, so we must choose.

The choice has been made: we have become more accepting of deviant sexual behaviors, and in return we have witnessed a spike in family dissolution. Should we pop the champagne?

In other words, let's not hear any more nonsense about "evil" traditional nuns who enforced sanctions against unwanted behaviors. They did so because they wanted to jealously safeguard the gold standard for all children, a stable home run by their mothers and fathers.

Remember one more thing: the mothers who dropped their out-of-wedlock children off at the convents had only one other choice at the time—the street. Thank God they chose the nuns.

"MASS GRAVE" HOAX WIDELY REPORTED

No media outlet has done a more consistently accurate job reporting the "mass grave" story than the New York Times. Not only did it not fall for this bogus story when it first surfaced in 2014, it actually poked holes in it. Its coverage in 2017 has also been flawless. Kudos to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for recently picking up the Times story.

Unlike other Irish sources, the Irish Echo got this story correct.

The BBC fell for the "mass grave" bunk in 2014. Now in 2017, it had covered this story accurately, absent any sensationalistic talk about a "mass grave," until just recently, when it used the term in reporting on comments from Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny.

The *International Business Times* initially ran with the "mass grave" story, but then it offered a very fair account of Bill

Donohue's criticisms of it. It should be commended for its balanced reporting.

Reuters had a mixed record: some stories mentioned the "mass grave" and others did not.

The following media outlets ran at least one story on the "mass grave." No source was worse than AP: two years ago it ran an apology for faulty reporting on this subject, and this year it was just as inaccurate. Worse, its stories have been picked up nationwide by other media outlets, thus spreading the fake news about a "mass grave."

Wire Services

AP

UPI

U.S. Print Media

Time (AP)

Washington Post

Daily News (AP)

New York Post (AP)

Newsday (AP)

USA Today

Chicago Tribune (AP)

Boston Globe

Los Angeles Times (AP)

Wall Street Journal

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (AP)

Atlanta Journal Constitution (AP)

Orange County Register (AP)

Sacramento Bee (AP)

Tampa Bay Times (AP)

Star Tribune (AP)

San Diego Union Tribune

Orlando Sentinel

Providence Journal
Hartford Courant
Salt Lake Tribune
Spokesman Review (AP)
Saginaw News
Christian Science Monitor

U.S. Radio and TV

ABCNewsRadio
CNN
NPR
Voice of America

Online Media

CBSNews.com
FoxNews.com
NBCNews.com
Yahoo News
Irish Central
Inquisitr
Daily Beast
SF Gate (AP)
Christian Times

U.K. Media

Guardian
Telegraph.co.uk
Daily Mail
Belfast Telegraph
Irish News
Daily Star Online
Daily Mirror
Express
Independent
MailOnline
Scottish Daily Mail

Belfast Telegraph Online
Express Online
Press Association Mediapoint
Sky News

Irish Media

Irish Independent
Irish Mirror
Irish Times
Irish Sun
Newstalk 106-108 fm
Dublin Live
Irish Examiner
thejournal.ie
RTÉ.ie
Galway Bay fm

What is most astonishing about this unprofessional journalism is that it is at odds with the official statements by the government's Mother and Baby Commission and the formal remarks made by government officials. While those accounts mention that "significant quantities of human remains" were found, none mention anything about a "mass grave."

What was uncovered is disturbing enough, but what is being reported is pure hype. The photo that is being shopped about the "mass grave" on the property of the Bon Secours Sisters is a picture of a graveyard. Period. It is not proof of a "mass grave."

The incuriosity of the media suggests a willingness to validate an ideological predilection, one that is not exactly Catholic-friendly. It surely is not a quest for the truth.

WHERE ARE THE "MASS GRAVE" PICTURES?

Irish Central is the most irresponsible of the mass grave theorists in the U.S.

On March 4, it ran the following headline: "Tuam Mass Infant Grave is Confirmed, Now What Are We Going to Do About it?" In fact, no confirmation was given. The article cited the "significant" number account, but offered no proof that the government confirmed the existence of a mass grave.

On March 8, in an article on women's rights, Irish Central said, "Just last week 800 babies were found buried, abandoned in an unmarked grave in Tuam."

This is an out-and-out lie. The bodies of 800 babies were not found. Irish Central literally made this up. It is pure fiction.

Irish Central has a moral obligation to provide pictures of the 800 bodies found in an unmarked grave in Tuam. Where are the pictures? Time to put up or shut up.

WHY THE "MASS GRAVE" STORY IS A HOAX

Almost all of the media in the U.S., England, and Ireland are promoting a fake news account of a "mass grave" containing the remains of nearly 800 children. Here is why we aren't buying it.

- The official statement by the Mother and Baby Commission, issued March 3rd, makes no mention of a "mass grave." Why not? If there were evidence of a mass grave surely that would be the lead story. Instead, it says "significant quantities of human remains" were found in sewage chambers. That is disturbing but it does not support the wild claims of a "mass grave."
- Katherine Zappone TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, issued her formal remarks on March 3rd as well.

She said nothing about any “mass grave.” Why not?

- On July 12, 2016, the government’s Interim Report was issued. It said nothing about any “mass grave.” Why not?
- Catherine Corless is the source of the “mass grave” allegation. In 2012, she wrote about her findings in an article titled, “The Home”; it was published in the Journal of the Old Tuam Society. She made no mention of any “mass grave.” Why not?
- Corless not only failed to mention a “mass grave,” she offered evidence that contradicts her later claim. To wit: “A few local boys came upon a sort of crypt in the ground, and on peering in they saw several small skulls.” She mentioned there was a “little graveyard.” That is not the makings of a mass grave.
- Corless said in 2014, “I am certain there were 796 children in a mass grave.” She offered no evidence, nor did she explain why—just two years earlier—she said there were “several small skulls” in a “little graveyard.”
- The primary source for Corless’ “mass grave” thesis is Barry Sweeney. When he was 10, he and a friend stumbled on a hole with skeletons in it. In 2014, he was asked by the Irish Times to comment on Corless’ claim that there were “800 skeletons down that hole.” He said, “Nothing like that.” How many? “About 20,” he said. He later told the New York Times there were “maybe 15 to 20 small skeletons.” In other words, Corless’ primary source contradicts her account!
- When this story broke in 2014, Ireland’s Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, said the Corless account was “simply not true.”
- The local police said at that time that “there is no confirmation from any source that there are between 750 and 800 bodies present.”

So why did Corless change her story from “several small skulls” found in a “little graveyard” to 800 bodies found in a

“mass grave”? That is what journalists should be probing. They can begin by questioning her relationship with Martin Sixsmith, whom she first met in January 2014. He is the author of a book about Philomena Lee, the woman made famous in the movie, “Philomena.” The lies about her story have been recounted by Bill Donohue in his article, “Philomena Is a Malicious Fraud.”

It was only after Corless met Sixsmith that her rage against the Catholic Church was evident. Her 2012 journal piece was void of any hatred, but after her encounter with Sixsmith, she turned on the Church. Their hostility to Catholicism has been on display ever since.

The most pernicious aspect of this story is the willingness of the media to be seduced by the most fantastic tales about the Catholic Church, and the profound laziness of reporters to fact check news stories. They are responsible for making this a classic example of fake news.

SO HOW MANY DIED IN IRISH HOMES?

Paul Redmond is chairman of the Coalition of Mother and Baby Home Survivors. He was born in one of the homes in 1964, and was adopted 17 days later. He has become the leading activist involved in the search for answers to what actually happened in these homes.

As with many others associated with this cause, Redmond’s “evidence” is slippery.

- On January 30, 2015, the *Irish Mirror* reported that Redmond claimed he had evidence of 7,000 babies and children who died in homes across Ireland in the last century.
- On March 3, 2017, just as the latest Tuam “mass grave” story was being reported, Redmond told Ireland’s

BreakingNews that “at least 6,000 babies and children” had died in the homes. No one asked him to explain the missing 1,000.

- On March 6, 2017, three days after he cited the 6,000 figure to BreakingNews, he told the same media outlet that 7,000 died in the care of the nuns. No one asked him to explain the additional 1,000.
- On March 7, the *Irish Sun* reported that Redmond said there were 6,000 *women* and children who died in the homes. No one asked him to explain the missing 1,000, nor did they ask why he now included women in his estimate.

Redmond outdid himself on March 3 when he told UPI that “well over 4,000 babies and children” were buried in three of the homes. But where? Redmond said they were buried “in shoeboxes and rags.” No one asked him to prove a thing.

And some wonder why we are so skeptical.

TUAM CRITICS ON ABORTION AND GAY MARRIAGE

The number of human remains found outside the Mother and Baby Home in Tuam does not come close to 800, but that there are any is disturbing. It seems logical to think that those who are truly concerned about these deceased children—some of whom were unborn—would be pro-life. But among the elites, they are not. They are also pro-gay marriage.

What unites the two issues is an expansive view of sexual rights. This vision of freedom is very much interested in the rights of adults, having next to nothing to say about the welfare of children.

There is a third issue relevant to this discussion: attitudes toward the Catholic Church. It is not surprising that those who are screaming the loudest about the “mass graves” also

like to bash the Church.

In the U.S., no one is more exercised about the Tuam story than Niall O'Dowd of Irish Central. "I am personally in favor of same-sex marriage," he says. As for abortion, he says it is a "complex and incredibly emotional issue," and warns of the horrors of banning it.

Now if someone said that racial discrimination was a "complex and incredibly emotional issue," and warned of the horrors of banning it, is there anyone who couldn't figure out what side he was on?

Irish politicians are a genuine disgrace. The Prime Minister, Enda Kenny, is livid over the Tuam story. Does that motivate him to protect life in the womb? Not at all: He champions more exceptions to Ireland's limited abortion ban. When he received an honorary degree at Boston College in 2013, he earned a salute from Planned Parenthood. That speaks volumes. He is also a big proponent of gay marriage, and a reliable critic of the Catholic Church on matters sexual.

Michael D. Higgins is President of Ireland. He gets melodramatic when speaking about Irish nuns. He talks about "dark shadows" that hang over Ireland, "shadows that require us all to summon up yet again a light that might dispel the darkness to which so many women and their children were condemned..." Predictably, he has signed pro-abortion and pro-gay marriage legislation.

Senator Katherine Zappone is one of two leading critics of the Tuam story in the Parliament. She is a pro-abortion American transplant who "married" her girlfriend, an Irish ex-nun, in 2003.

The other member of Parliament leading the charge is Brid Smith. She is strongly pro-abortion and pro-gay marriage, and is one of the nation's most relentless anti-Catholics. She is also a communist.

That's quite an assembly. The remains of children found in a septic tank from decades ago is an abomination, but children who are killed before birth in 2017 is not nearly as bad. There is no difference between Francis marrying Frances, and Frank marrying Freddie. To top things off, the Church is repressive, especially those "evil" Irish nuns.

No one with any sense would want to get inside these people's heads any further.

DID IRISH NUNS STARVE KIDS TO DEATH?

The insanity over the "mass grave" story in Tuam has now reached a fever pitch. The Irish Prime Minister, Enda Kenny, recently said that the Bon Secours Sisters took the babies of unwed mothers and "sold them, trafficked them [and] starved them."

That is a serious charge, and serious accusations demand serious evidence. He provided none. Kenny offered not one scintilla of evidence to back up his fantastic story. Not surprisingly, he found a kindred soul in the U.S. in Niall O'Dowd of Irish Central; he quoted his remarks with relish the next day.

Here is what Kenny said on March 7: "No nuns broke into our homes to kidnap our children. We gave them up to what we convinced ourselves was the nuns' care." That is all true. But then he goes on to say that the nuns sold the children, trafficked them, and starved them.

The nuns did not sell children to bidders. They placed abandoned and often abused children—abandoned and abused by their mothers and/or fathers—up for adoption. Customarily, as one would expect, the adopting parents would make a donation to the nuns. That's what people do as a demonstration of their gratitude. But from the Kenny-O'Dowd account, they would have

us believe that the nuns ran some kind of auction, selling the kids off to the highest bidder.

Children were “trafficked”? That conjures up images of slave labor. This is a new charge. Kenny and O’Dowd need to share their evidence with the rest of us. Otherwise, we might conclude they are liars.

Children were “starved” to death? This is the most damning of the accusations. Kenny just throws this charge out there hoping it will stick. O’Dowd is more specific, claiming that some of the children in the care of the nuns died of “marasmus,” or malnutrition.

The following explanation of why the children died in the Mother and Baby Home operated by the Bon Secours Sisters was given by an Irish student of this subject.

“For the years 1925-1926, 57 children, aged between one month and three years, (plus two, aged six and eight years) died in the Children’s Home. Of this number, 21 died of measles, other causes were convulsions, gastroenteritis, bronchitis, tuberculosis, meningitis, and pneumonia.”

The researcher also listed other factors. “Other causes of death were as follows: pertussis (otherwise known as whooping cough), anaemia, influenza, nephritis (kidney inflammation), laryngitis, congenital heart disease, enteritis, epilepsy, spinal bifida, chicken pox, general oedema (dropsy), coeliac disease, birth injury, sudden circulatory failure, and fit.”

A total of 22 diseases is cited, but there is no mention of marasmus. Why not? This takes on greater significance when we consider the author of this description: it was none other than Catherine Corless, hero of the “mass grave” fame. It can be found on the last two pages of her 2012 journal article, “The Home.”

Let’s say Corless is wrong about this; perhaps she overlooked

the marasmus. The real issue here is not whether kids died of malnutrition—let's assume they did—the real issue is O'Dowd's intellectual inability to conceive of any reason other than intentional starvation.

Dr. Jacky Jones worked for the Irish health services for 37 years in the field of health education and health promotion. She says that "high infant mortality rates were normal for certain groups of people in Ireland until the 1970s." She further notes that "Children from poor families were four times more likely to die before their first birthday."

Now ask yourself this: Were the children of indigent unmarried mothers in the early twentieth century more likely or less likely to be part of that segment of the population as described by Dr. Jones?

Those children who were dropped off at the convents were not the sons and daughters of the rich. They were the abandoned and often abused offspring of parents who could not, or would not, care for them. That some of the children may have been suffering from malnutrition when they were acquired by the nuns would hardly be surprising, and it is just as unsurprising to think that some died "before their first birthday," as Dr. Jones said.

If this is too hard for O'Dowd to understand, then perhaps he thinks that the reason why more people die in hospitals than in hotels is because hospitals are known for killing people. It would never occur to him that the sick and dying are more likely to check themselves into a hospital than a hotel. Get the point, Niall?

It is malicious to accuse anyone of intentionally starving children to death without proof, and it is even worse when an entire order of nuns is charged with doing so. That is what the Prime Minister of Ireland has done, and that is what the founder of Irish Central has done.