

AP STUDY OF ACCUSED PRIESTS DESERVES AN “F”

The Associated Press (AP) study of former priests who were credibly accused of sexual misconduct reeks of duplicity, and worse.

The nine-month investigation found nearly 1,700 “priests and other clergy members that the Roman Catholic Church considers credibly accused of child sexual abuse are living under the radar with little or no supervision from religious authorities or law enforcement...”

It would be more accurate to refer to the victims as minors, not children, since most of them were adolescents (e.g., victims of homosexuality, not pedophilia).

The thrust of the story is that once an accused priest is no longer in ministry, in many cases the Church no longer polices him. This is hardly unique: The AP reporters fail to mention a single institution in the nation, secular or religious, that monitors every former employee who has been accused of sexual misconduct. Importantly, this certainly includes the profession of journalism. But that is where the similarities end.

Unlike the public schools, for example, background checks for all new employees in the Catholic Church are routine. Therefore, the likelihood of the Church employing an accused sex offender is rare. This is not true elsewhere, especially in the public schools. And while in the last century, some bishops moved accused priests to another parish—this is no longer the case—this is still the norm in the public schools. How do we know? Because of studies done by the AP and USA TODAY.

In 2007, AP published a series of articles about sexual

offenses in the public schools. It found that between 2001-2005, 2,570 educators had their teaching credentials revoked because of sexual misconduct. It detailed 1,801 cases of abuse: more than 80 percent of the victims were students, and most of the offenders were public school teachers.

What happened to them? "Most of the abuse never gets reported." What about those who did not get their licenses revoked? They are the "mobile molesters," teachers sent to another school or district, a practice so widespread that it's called "passing the trash."

In 2016, USA TODAY published its own series on abuse in the public schools. It found that "passing the trash" was still the norm: abusive teachers were able to move to new teaching jobs, or to other employment working with youth.

In other words, the molesting teachers not only were not monitored once they left the school, they found teaching jobs elsewhere.

Some might ask, "Haven't some accused priests found employment as public school teachers, and in other professions, including jobs working with young people?" They have. Indeed, the AP story on the Church cites examples of this practice.

But why is this the fault of the Catholic Church? Why is this not the fault of the public school establishment, and other professions, for not doing a background check? Responsible parents do a background check on prospective baby sitters. What's wrong with public school officials?

The USA TODAY report also found that most states (45 of them) refused to abide by a 2015 federal law requiring states to ban secret termination agreements, thus allowing accused molesting teachers to find another job without a problem. As important as anything, the study found that the federal government still "does not maintain a database of teachers who have sexually molested children." By contrast, the Catholic Church keeps a

record on accused priests.

The AP public school study touched on this issue as well. Here is an excerpt from the first of three stories.

“Too often problem teachers are allowed to leave quietly. That can mean future abuse for another student and another school district.” It offered a quote from Charol Shakeshaft, one of the nation’s top experts on this subject. “They might deal with it internally,” she said, “suspending the person or having the person move on. So their license is never investigated.”

The story continued. “Laws in several states require that even an allegation of sexual misconduct be reported to the state departments that oversee teacher licenses. But there’s no consistent enforcement, so such laws are easy to ignore.” Shakeshaft attributes this outcome to school officials feeling embarrassed, wanting to avoid “the fallout from going up against a popular teacher.”

The AP story on the Catholic Church really starts to overheat when it says that “Priests and other church employees being listed on sex offender registries at all is a rarity.” Have the reporters lost their mind? These priests have been accused—they have not been found guilty!

How could they make such an irresponsible comment? There are only two plausible answers: their hatred of the Catholic Church is off the charts, or they are just plain stupid. *No accused person is registered as a sex offender unless he has been convicted.* On this score alone, the AP study on the Church deserves an “F.”

Is Charlie Rose a registered sex offender? How about Harvey Weinstein? Hundreds of such examples could be cited.

If the AP reporters focused their sights on the public schools, or on those in the media and Hollywood, they would

have a whole lot more to chew on than zeroing in on the Catholic Church. But that wouldn't win the applause of their colleagues. It's so much more fun to nail an easy target, even if that target looks good by comparison with others.

Shame on the AP for playing politics with such a serious issue.