

SHINING THE LIGHT ON “SPOTLIGHT”

Bill Donohue

The movie “Spotlight” is bound to spark more conversation about the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, much of what the American public knows about this issue is derived from the popular culture, something this film will only abet. Therefore, the time is ripe to revisit what the actual data on this subject reveal.

When the *Boston Globe* sent the nation reeling in 2002 with revelations of priestly sexual abuse, and the attendant cover-up, Catholics were outraged by the level of betrayal. This certainly included the Catholic League. The scandal cannot be denied. What is being denied, however, is the existence of another scandal—the relentless effort to keep the abuse crisis alive, and the deliberate refusal to come to grips with its origins. Both scandals deserve our attention.

Myth: The Scandal Never Ended

When interviewed about the scandal in 2002 by the *New York Times*, I said, “I am not the church’s water boy. I am not here to defend the indefensible.” In the Catholic League’s 2002 *Annual Report*, I even defended the media. “The *Boston Globe*, the *Boston Herald*, and the *New York Times* covered the story with professionalism,” I wrote.

A decade later things had changed. In the Catholic League’s 2011 *Annual Report*, I offered a critical assessment of the media. “In a nutshell,” I said, “what changed was this: in 2011, unlike what happened in 2002, virtually all the stories were about accusations against priests dating back decades, sometimes as long as a half-century ago. Keep in mind that not only were most of the priests old and infirm, many were dead;

thus, only one side of the story could be told. Adding to our anger was the fact that no other institution, religious or secular, was being targeted for old allegations.”

It became clear that by 2011 we were dealing with two scandals, not one. Scandal I was internal—the church-driven scandal. This was the result of indefensible decisions by the clergy: predatory priests and their enabling bishops. Scandal II was external, the result of indefensible cherry-picking of old cases by rapacious lawyers and vindictive victims’ groups. They were aided and abetted by activists, the media, and Hollywood.

Regarding Scandal II, more than cultural elites were involved. “In 2011,” I wrote, “it seemed as if ‘repressed memories’ surfaced with alacrity, but only among those who claimed they were abused by a priest. That there was no similar explosion of ‘repressed memories’ on the part of those who were molested by ministers, rabbis, teachers, psychologists, athletic coaches, and others, made us wonder what was going on.”

The steeple-chasing lawyers and professional victims’ organizations had a vested economic interest in keeping the scandal alive; the former made hundreds of millions and they, in turn, lavishly greased the latter. But it wasn’t money that motivated the media and Hollywood elites to keep the story alive—it was ideology.

To be specific, the Catholic Church has long been the bastion of traditional morality in American society, and if there is anything that the big media outlets and the Hollywood studios loathe, it is being told that they need to put a brake on their libido. So when the scandal came to light, the urge to pounce proved irresistible. The goal was, and still is, to attenuate the moral authority of the Catholic Church. It certainly wasn’t outrage over the sexual abuse of minors that stirred their interest: if that were the case, then many other institutions would have been put under the microscope. But

none were.

There is no conspiracy here. What unfolded is the logical outcome of the ideological leanings of our cultural elites. Unfortunately, "Spotlight" will only add to Scandal II. How so? Just read what those connected with the film are saying.

Tom McCarthy, who co-wrote the script with Josh Singer, said, "I would love for Pope Francis and the cardinals and bishops and priests to see this [film]." Would it make any difference? "I remain pessimistic," he says. "To be honest," he declares, "I expect no reaction at all."

Mark Ruffalo plays a reporter, and, like McCarthy, he says, "I hope the Vatican will use this movie to *begin* to right those wrongs." (My italic.) He is not sanguine about the prospects. Indeed, he has given up on the Church.

The view that the Catholic Church has not even begun to "right those wrongs" is widely shared. Indeed, the impression given to the American people, by both the media and Hollywood—it is repeated nightly by TV talk-show hosts—is that the sexual abuse scandal in the Church never ended. Impressions count: In December 2012, a CBS News survey found that 55 percent of Catholics, and 73 percent of Americans overall, believe that priestly sexual abuse of minors remains a problem. Only 14 percent of Americans believe it is not a problem today.

Commentary by those associated with "Spotlight," as well as movie reviewers and pundits, are feeding this impression. But the data show that the conventional wisdom is wrong. The fact of the matter is that the sexual abuse of minors by priests has long ceased to be an institutional problem. All of these parties—Catholics, the American public, the media, and Hollywood—entertain a view that is not supported by the evidence. "Spotlight" will only add to the propaganda.

In 2002, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) commissioned researchers from the John Jay College of

Criminal Justice to conduct a major study of priestly sexual abuse; it covered the years 1950 to 2002. It found that accusations of the sexual molestation of minors were made against 4,392 priests.

This figure represents 4 percent of all Catholic priests. What was not widely touted is that 43 percent of these allegations (1881) were unsubstantiated. To qualify as “unsubstantiated” the bar was set high: the allegation had to be “proven to be untruthful and fabricated” as a result of a criminal investigation.

In other words, roughly 2 percent of priests were likely guilty of molesting minors. Accusations proven to be false should carry no weight in assessing wrongdoing, yet the fabrications are treated by the media as if they were true. It must also be said that this rate of false accusations is much higher than found in studies of this problem in the general population.

More than half of the accused priests had only one allegation brought against them. Moreover, 3.5 percent accounted for 26 percent of all the victims. As computed by professor Philip Jenkins, an expert on this subject, the John Jay data reveal that “Out of 100,000 priests active in the U.S. in this half-century, a cadre of just 149 individuals—one priest out of every 750—accounted for a quarter of all allegations of clergy abuse.”

These data give the lie to the accusation that during this period the sexual molestation of minors by priests was rampant. It manifestly was not. Even more absurd is the accusation that the problem is still ongoing.

In the last ten years, from 2005 to 2014, an average 8.4 credible accusations were made against priests for molestation that occurred in any one of those years. The data are available online at the USCCB website (see the reports issued

for these years). Considering that roughly 40,000 priests could have had a credible accusation made against them, this means that *almost 100 percent of priests had no such accusation made against them!*

Sadly, I cannot name a single media outlet, including Catholic ones, that even mentioned this, much less emphasized it. The Catholic News Service, paid for by the bishops, should have touted this, but it didn't. This delinquency is what helps to feed the misperception that the Church has not even begun to deal with this problem.

In 2011, researchers from John Jay issued another report, "The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010." While the document was often critical, it commended the Church for its forthrightness in dealing with this problem. "No other institution has undertaken a public study of sexual abuse," the report said, "and as a result, there are no comparable data to those collected by the Catholic Church." Looking at the most recent data, the report found that the "incidence of child sexual abuse has declined in both the Catholic Church and in society in general, though the rate of decline is greater in the Catholic Church in the same time period."

So much for the myth that the Church has not yet "begun" to address this issue. Every study by the John Jay researchers shows that most of the abuse took place between 1965-1985. This is not hard to figure out: the sexual revolution began in the 1960s and fizzled out by the mid-1980s. Libertinism drove the sexual revolution, and it hit the seminaries as well, especially in the 1970s. Matters slowed once AIDS was uncovered in 1981. It took fear—the fear of death—to bring about a much needed reality check.

Myth: Celibacy is the Root Cause

On October 28, 2015, a columnist for the *Boston Globe* wrote an

article about "Spotlight" titled, "Based on a True Story." Similarly, script writer Tom McCarthy said, "We made a commitment to let the facts play."

No one disputes the fact that predatory priests were allowed to run wild in the Boston Archdiocese; the problem was not confined to Boston, but it was the epicenter. That molesting priests were moved around like chess pieces to unsuspecting parishes is also true. Ditto for the cover-up orchestrated by some bishops. This is the very stuff of Scandal I. Where the factual claims dissolve, however, is when the script claims to know what triggered the scandal.

"Spotlight" made its premiere on September 3 at the Venice Film Festival. A review published by the international French news agency, AFP, noted that "in Spotlight's nuanced script, few in the Catholic hierarchy have shown any inclination to address whether the enforced celibacy of priests might be one of the root causes of the problem."

The celibacy myth was debunked by the John Jay 2011 report. "Celibacy has been constant in the Catholic Church since the eleventh century and could not account for the rise and subsequent decline in abuse cases from the 1960s through the 1980s." But if celibacy did not drive the scandal, what did? The John Jay researchers cite the prevalence of sexually immature men who were allowed to enter the seminaries, as well as the effects of the sexual revolution.

There is much truth to this observation, but it is incomplete. Who were these sexually immature men? The popular view, one that is promoted by the movie as well, suggests they were pedophiles. The data, however, prove this to be wrong.

When the word got out that "Spotlight" was going to hit the big screen, Mike Fleming, Jr. got an Exclusive for Deadline Hollywood; his piece appeared on August 8, 2014. The headline boasted that it was a "Boston Priest Pedophile Pic." In his

first sentence, he described the film as “a drama that Tom McCarthy will direct about the *Boston Globe* investigation into pedophile priests.” This narrative is well entrenched in the media, and in the culture at large. Whenever this issue is discussed, it is pitched as a “pedophile” scandal. We can now add “Spotlight’s” contribution to this myth.

One of the most prominent journalists on the *Boston Globe* “Spotlight” team was Kevin Cullen. On February 28, 2004, he wrote a story assessing a report issued by the National Review Board, appointed by the USCCB, on what exactly happened. He quoted the head of the Board’s research committee, well-respected attorney Robert S. Bennett, as saying it was not pedophilia that drove the scandal. “There are no doubt many outstanding priests of a homosexual orientation who live chaste, celibate lives,” he said, “but any evaluation of the causes and context of the current crisis must be cognizant of the fact that more than 80 percent of the abuse at issue was of a homosexual nature.”

Bennett was correct, and Cullen knew it to be true as well. “Of the 10,667 reported victims [in the time period between 1950 and 2002],” Cullen wrote, “81 percent were male, the report said, and more than three-quarters [the exact figure is 78 percent] were postpubescent, meaning the abuse did not meet the clinical definition of pedophilia.” One of Bennett’s colleagues, Dr. Paul McHugh, former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins University, was more explicit. “This behavior was homosexual predation on American Catholic youth,” he said, “yet it is not being discussed.” It never is.

So it is indisputable that the *Boston Globe* “Spotlight” team knew that it was homosexuality, not pedophilia, that drove the scandal. Yet that is not what is being reported today. Indeed, as recently as November 1, 2015, a staff reporter for the *Boston Globe* said the movie was about “the pedophile priest crisis.” This flies in the face of the evidence. In fact, the John Jay 2011 report found that less than 5 percent of the

abusive priests fit the diagnosis of pedophilia, thus concluding that "it is inaccurate to refer to abusers as 'pedophile priests.'"

The evidence, however, doesn't count. Politics counts. The mere suggestion that homosexual priests accounted for the lion's share of the problem was met with cries of homophobia. This is at the heart of Scandal II. Even the John Jay researchers went on the defensive. Most outrageous was the voice of dissident, so-called progressive, Catholics: It was they who pushed for a relaxation of sexual mores in the seminaries, thus helping to create Scandal I. Then they helped to create Scandal II by refusing to take ownership of the problem they foisted; they blamed "sexual repression" for causing the crisis.

So how did the deniers get around the obvious? Cullen said that "most [of the molested] fell victim to ephebophiles, men who are sexually attracted to adolescent or postpubescent children." But clinically speaking, ephebophilia is a waste-basket term of no scientific value.

Philip Jenkins once bought into this idea but eventually realized that the word "communicates nothing to most well-informed readers. These days I tend rather to speak of these acts as 'homosexuality.'" Jenkins attributes his change of mind to Mary Eberstadt, one of the most courageous students of this issue. "When was the last time you heard the phrase 'ephebophile' applied to a heterosexual man?" In truth, ephebophilia is shorthand for homosexuals who prey on adolescents.

Even those who know better, such as the hierarchy of the Church, are reluctant to mention the devastating role that homosexual priests have played in molesting minors. In April 2002, the cardinals of the United States, along with the leadership of the USCCB and the heads of several offices of the Holy See, issued a Communiqué from the Vatican on this

issue. "Attention was drawn to the fact that almost all the cases involved adolescents and therefore were not cases of true pedophilia" they said. So what were they? They were careful not to drop the dreaded "H" word.

Further proof that the problem is confined mostly to gay priests is provided by Father Michael Peterson, co-founder of St. Luke's Institute, the premier treatment center in the nation for troubled priests. He frankly admits, "We don't see heterosexual pedophiles at all." This suggests that virtually all the priests who abused prepubescent children had a homosexual orientation.

The spin game is intellectually dishonest. When adult men have sex with postpubescent females, the predatory behavior is seen as heterosexual in nature. But when adult men have sex with postpubescent males, the predatory behavior is not seen as homosexual in nature. This isn't science at work—it's politics, pure and simple.

I have said it many times before, and I will say it again: most gay priests are not molesters but most molesting priests have been gay. It gets tiresome, however, to trot this verity out every time I address this issue. That's because it means nothing to elites in the dominant culture. Just whispering about the role gay priests have played in the sexual abuse scandal triggers howls of protest.

There is plenty of evidence that Hollywood has long been a haven for sexual predators, both straight and gay. The same is true of many religious and secular institutions throughout society. But there is little interest in the media and in Tinsel Town to profile them. They have identified the enemy and are quite content to keep pounding away.

There is no doubt that the *Boston Globe* "Spotlight" team deserved a Pulitzer Prize for exposing Scandal I. Regrettably, there will be no Pulitzer for exposing Scandal II.

POPE FRANCIS QUOTES ON KEY ISSUES

Abortion

- "It is God who gives life. Let us respect and love human life, especially vulnerable life in a mother's womb."
- "A pregnant woman isn't carrying a toothbrush in her belly, or a tumor...We are in the presence of a human being."
- "The right to life is the first human right. Abortion is killing someone that cannot defend him or herself."
- On the extension to all priests of the ability to forgive the sin of abortion, the pope said: "Careful, this does not mean trivializing abortion. Abortion is a grave, grave sin. It's the homicide of an innocent. But if there is a sin, it is necessary to facilitate forgiveness."

Amoris Laetitia

- "The temptation is always the uniformity of the rules... take for example the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. When I speak of families in difficulty, I say: 'We must welcome, accompany, discern, integrate...' and then everyone will see open doors. What is actually happening is that people hear others say: 'They can't receive communion,' 'They can't do it:' There lies the temptation of the Church. But 'no,' 'no,' 'no!' This type of prohibition is the same we find with Jesus and the Pharisees. The same! The great within the Church are those who have a vision that goes beyond, those who understand: The missionaries."

Anti-Catholicism

- “The world does not tolerate the divinity of Christ. It doesn’t tolerate the announcement of the Gospel. It does not tolerate the Beatitudes. And we have persecutions: with words, with insults, the things that they said about Christians in the early centuries, the condemnations, imprisonment...But we easily forget. We think of the many Christians, 60 years ago, in the labor camps, in the camps of the Nazis, of the communists: So many of them! For being Christians! And even today...But [people say] ‘today we are better educated and these things no longer exist.’ Yes they do!...They are condemned for having a Bible. They can’t wear a crucifix.”

Catholic Colleges

- “Essential in this regard is the uncompromising witness of Catholic universities to the church’s moral teaching, and the defense of her freedom, precisely in and through her institutions, to uphold that teaching as authoritatively proclaimed by the magisterium of her pastors...Your own identity—as it was intended from the beginning—to defend it, preserve it, carry it forward.”

Catholic Dissidents

- “Those with alternative teachings and doctrines [have] a partial belonging to the church. [They] have one foot outside the church. They rent the church.”
- In 2014, the *Tablet* (U.K.) reported that “The head of pro-reform movement We Are Church in Austria has been excommunicated by Pope Francis for ‘celebrating’ Mass, the Austrian press has reported.”

Catholics and Politics

- “A good Catholic meddles in politics, offering the best of himself, so that those who govern can govern.”

Communism and Christianity

- The pope admitted to having been greatly influenced by a communist female militant, Esther Ballestrino de Careaga, who founded a movement of mothers who denounced the killing of their children by the regime in Argentina. "She taught me to think about political reality, [...] I owe so much to this woman," Pope Francis said. "I was told once: 'But you are a Communist!' No, the Communists are the Christians. It's the others who stole our banner!"

Euthanasia

- "A civilization whose technological advancements do not seek to protect the most vulnerable, from conception until natural death, fails to live up to its responsibility."
- "A just society recognizes the right to life from conception to natural death as paramount."

False Compassion

- "The dominant thinking sometimes suggests a 'false compassion,' that which believes that it is: helpful to women to promote abortion; an act of dignity to obtain euthanasia; a scientific breakthrough to 'produce' a child and to consider it to be a right rather than a gift to welcome; or to use human lives as guinea pigs presumably to save others. Instead, the compassion of the Gospel is that which accompanies in times of need, that is, the compassion of the Good Samaritan, who 'sees,' 'has compassion,' approaches and provides concrete help."

Freedom of Expression (*Charlie Hebdo*)

- "In theory, it may be said that the Gospel says we must turn the other cheek. In theory, we can say that we have

the freedom to express ourselves, and this is important. In theory we are all in agreement, but we are human, and so there is prudence, which is a virtue in human coexistence. I cannot continually provoke or insult someone, because I would risk angering them, I risk receiving a reaction that is not right, not right. But it is human. Therefore, I say that the freedom of expression must take into consideration the reality of humanity, and for this reason I say that we must be prudent. This means we must be polite and prudent, as prudence is the virtue that regulates human relations.”

- “If someone says a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch. It’s normal. It’s normal. You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith of others.”

Gay Marriage

- “Let us not be naive: this is not simply a political struggle, but it is an attempt to destroy God’s plan. It is not just a bill (a mere instrument) but a ‘move’ of the Father of Lies [the Devil] who seeks to confuse and deceive the children of God.”
- “At stake is the identity and survival of the family: father, mother, and children.”
- “At stake are the lives of many children who will be discriminated against in advance, and deprived of their human development given by a father and a mother and willed by God. At stake is the total rejection of God’s law engraved in our hearts.”
- “Marriage between people of the same sex? ‘Marriage’ is a historical word. Always in humanity, and not only within the Church, it’s between a man and a woman... we cannot change that. This is the nature of things. This is how they are. Let’s call them ‘civil unions.’ Let’s not play with the truth. It’s true that behind it there is a gender ideology. In books also, children are

learning that they can choose their own sex. Why is sex, being a woman or a man, a choice and not a fact of nature? This favors this mistake. But let's say things as they are: Marriage is between a man and a woman. This is the precise term. Lets call unions between the same sex 'civil unions'."

Gays

- "If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him?"
- "You have to distinguish between the fact of a person being gay, and the fact of a lobby. The problem isn't the orientation. The problem is making a lobby."

Gender Ideology

- "I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards."
- "The crisis of the family is a social reality. Then there are ideological colonizations of the family, modes and proposals from Europe and also from overseas. The error of the human mind that is gender theory creates a lot of confusion."
- "Gender ideology is demonic!"

Immigration

- "Migrants from Central America and Mexico...who cross the border with the United States under extreme conditions and in pursuit of a hope that in most cases turns out to be vain. They are increasing day by day. This humanitarian emergency requires, as a first urgent measure, these children be welcomed and protected. These measures, however, will not be sufficient, unless they are accompanied by policies that inform people about the

dangers of such a journey, and above all, that promote development in their countries of origin.”

Islam

- Muslims “don’t accept the principle of reciprocity. Some of the Gulf countries are open and help us to build churches. Why are they open? Because the[y] have Filipino, Catholic, Indian workers... the problem in Saudi Arabia is truly a question of mentality. With Islam, anyway, the dialogue is proceeding well, [...] the Imam of Al-Azhar came to visit me. And there will be an encounter: I will go. I believe it would be good for them to have a critical study of the Koran, as we did with our Scriptures. The historical and critical method of interpretation will help them evolve.”

“Just War”

- “Today we have to rethink the concept of ‘just war.’ We have learned in political philosophy that in order to protect yourself you may wage war and consider it just. But can it be defined a ‘just war’? The only just thing is peace... I don’t like to use the term ‘just war.’ We hear people say: ‘I make war because I have no other means to defend myself.’ But no war is just. The only just thing is peace.”

Marriage and the Family

- “Complementarity will take many forms as each man and woman brings his or her distinctive contributions to their marriage and to the formation of their children—his or her personal richness, personal charisma.”
- “Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child’s development and emotional maturity.”

Marxism

- “The Marxist ideology is wrong.”

Moral Destitution

- “*Moral destitution*...consists in slavery to vice and sin. How much pain is caused in families because one of their members—often a young person—is in thrall to alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography!...In such cases moral destitution can be considered impending suicide.”

Pope Francis’ Positions on Sexual Issues

- “The position of the Church. I am a son of the Church.”

Pope Pius XII

- “What worries me regarding this subject is the figure of Pius XII, the Pope that led the Church during World War II. They have said all sorts of things about poor Pius XII. But we need to remember that before he was seen as the great defender of the Jews. He hid many in convents in Rome and in other Italian cities, and also in the residence of Castel Gandolfo. Forty-two babies, children of Jews and other persecuted who sought refuge there were born there, in the Pope’s room, in his own bed. I don’t want to say that Pius XII did not make any mistakes—I myself make many—but one needs to see his role in the context of the time. For example, was it better for him not to speak so that more Jews would not be killed or for him to speak?”

Priestly Sexual Abuse

- “On this path, the Church has done much, perhaps more than all others. The Catholic Church is perhaps the only public institution that has moved with transparency and responsibility. No one has done more, and yet the Church is the only one that is being attacked.”

Sin

- “The loose minister washed his hands by simply saying, ‘This is not a sin,’ or something like that.”

Spanking

- “One time, I heard a father in a meeting with married couples say, ‘I sometimes have to smack my children a bit, but never in the face so as not to humiliate them.’ How beautiful! He knows the sense of dignity! He has to punish them but does it justly and moves on.”

Women

- “We cannot forget the irreplaceable role of women in the family. The qualities of gentleness, of particular sensitivity and tenderness, which is abundant in the female soul, represent not only a genuine force for the life of families, for the irradiation of a climate of peace and harmony, but also a reality without which the human vocation would be unfeasible.”
- “They are the strawberries on the cake, but we want more!”

Women Cardinals

- “I don’t know where this idea sprang from. Women in the church must be valued, not clericalized. Whoever thinks of women as cardinals suffers a bit from clericalism.”

Women Priests

- “The Church has spoken and said: ‘No.’ John Paul II said it, but with a definitive formulation. That door is closed.”
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MEDIA GUIDE TO PHONY CATHOLIC GROUPS

To read how these 15 dissident organizations are falsely marketing themselves as truly Catholic entities, click [here](#).

The Noble Legacy of Fr. Serra

To read Bill Donohue's booklet, "The Noble Legacy of Fr. Serra," click [here](#).

CATHOLIC LEAGUE SURVEY OF CATHOLICS

Bill Donohue

Editor's note: Survey research is an area of study pioneered by sociologists. This explains why Bill Donohue made recommendations and crafted some of the questions. He has a Ph.D. in sociology from New York University.

Introduction

Over the summer, the Catholic League commissioned a survey of Catholics. It was undertaken in anticipation of the media surveys that are likely to precede the Holy Father's visit to the United States. In addition to the usual questions, we

probed issues that the media generally ignore. We also dug deeper, seeking a more comprehensive examination of Catholic attitudes and beliefs. Please feel free to distribute our findings to interested parties.

Methodology

In the first week of August 2015, The Polling Company, headed by Kellyanne Conway, conducted a nationwide scientific survey of 1,000 Catholics. They were randomly chosen from telephone sample lists, using both landline and cell phones.

Sampling controls ensured proportional representation of Catholic adults, drawn from such demographic data as age, gender, race and ethnicity, and geographic region. Data were weighted slightly for age and race. The findings are accurate at the 95% confidence interval, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1%

Findings

Role of Catholicism

Respondents were asked about their religious formation; they were given several sources to select from, and could choose from more than one. Childhood lessons were identified by 56% of the sample, while teachings from Catholic schools were cited by 45% of those questioned. What was most striking was the finding that 70% of those who spent 11+ years in Catholic schools cited education as a primary source of Church teachings.

When asked to choose from a list of characteristics about what constitutes a good Catholic life, the majority chose “living an honest and moral life” and “helping your neighbor.” African Americans, 59%, and widowers, 63%, were more likely to choose the latter.

Roughly 68% of Catholics say their commitment towards their

faith has not been altered in any significant way in the recent past. Those who are the most educated tended to feel the most excited about or committed to their Catholic faith; those who rarely attend Mass were the least excited.

A staggering 95% of Catholics say their faith plays a significant role in their everyday lives. When it comes to the impact that their faith has on their political decisions, 69% reported that their Catholicism matters. Nearly half of Catholics, 48%, believe that if more people practiced the teachings of the Catholic Church, our society would be better off. Those who attend Mass more than once a week, 72%, are the most likely to agree with this proposition.

Pope Francis, the Bishops, and the Media

Pope Francis has received much media attention, so almost everyone has an opinion of him. The findings show that 83% of Catholics approve of the overall job that he has done. He gets his highest approval ratings from African Americans, 93%, and those who have a post-graduate education, 92%. Similarly, 79% say that he has changed the Church for the better, drawing more support from women than men.

Catholics would prefer that the bishops stick mostly to internal Church matters; 64% feel this way and only 27% think they should address public policy. But the more a Catholic attends Mass, the more likely he is to say the bishops should speak out more about policy issues.

When it comes to the pope, however, things are different. Indeed, a plurality want to hear his voice: 48% prefer that he speak to public policy matters; 45% say he should address mostly internal Church concerns.

Respondents were asked about their reaction to media coverage of papal events. "During the previous Pope's visit to the United States, Pew Research found that during the week of Pope Benedict's visit, over half of the news coverage on the Pope

focused on the clergy sex abuse scandal. Knowing this, do you think that the media coverage is mostly fair or mostly unfair toward the Catholic Church?"

Nearly six in ten, 58%, said that the media coverage was mostly unfair; 34% said it was mostly fair. Those in the West and Midwest were more likely to say coverage was unfair as compared to those from the South and Northeast.

One of the issues that the Catholic League has been quite critical about over the years is the media habit of including non-Catholics in polls about Catholicism. That is why we had pollsters ask respondents if they had ever heard of a survey that asked non-Jews and non-Muslims if they agree with the teachings of Judaism or Islam. Not surprisingly, 90% said they never heard of such a poll.

Media bias shows up in ways that are independent of papal visits. Pop culture, of course, plays a role in the public's perception of Catholicism. By a margin of 52% to 39%, respondents agreed that "Gay couples receive more respectful/favorable treatment in popular culture like books, TV and movies than do Catholic figures like priests and nuns."

Catholic Church Teachings

The media are obsessed with issues of sexuality when writing about the Catholic Church. Too often, in their surveys, they ask simple "yes or no" questions, thus eliciting information that is not particularly useful. We allowed for a more nuanced approach.

Abortion is one of the most contentious issues of our time. Our survey found that roughly four-out-of-five Catholics at least partly accept the Church's teachings on abortion.

To be specific, respondents were asked if they agree with the Church that "all life is sacred from conception until natural death, and the taking of innocent human life, whether born or

unborn, is morally wrong.”

“I accept part of this teaching but not all” was the response of 39%, and 38% said, “I accept this teaching completely.” Conservatives and those with 11+ years of Catholic education were more likely to subscribe to the Church’s teaching.

When asked to identify themselves as either pro-life or pro-choice, 50% said they were pro-life and 38% said they were pro-choice. But it appears that even among those who say they are pro-choice, few are zealots.

For example, 17% said abortion should be prohibited in all circumstances; 17% said abortion should be legal only to save the life of the mother; and 27% said abortion should only be legal in cases of rape, incest or to save the life of the mother. That’s 61% who are mostly pro-life.

Among those who are pro-choice, only 5% said that abortion should be allowed for any reason and at any time; 4% said any reason was okay but there should be none after the first six months of pregnancy; and 17% said abortion should be legal for any reason, but not after the first three months of pregnancy. That’s 26% who are mostly pro-choice.

Another way of looking at it is to consider how many are happy with current abortion law. In the U.S., abortion is allowed for any reason and at any time; we have the most liberal abortion laws in the world. The survey data yield an impressive finding: if only 5% agree with current law that means that 19 out of 20, or 95%, of Catholics disagree with the status quo.

When it comes to marriage, 58% believe it should be between a man and a woman only; 38% do not agree. Those from the Northeast are the most liberal on this issue; frequent church-goers are the most conservative.

On the subject of women priests, 58% say they agree that the

Church should ordain women as priests; 36% disagree (African Americans and those widowed were the most likely to disagree). Even though a majority are okay with women priests, the data indicate that what is being measured is more of a preference than a demand: just 35% say they agree strongly that women should be priests. Which means that two-thirds either oppose women's ordination or it doesn't mean that much to them.

In fact, this last interpretation of the data may be too generous. It is not at all uncommon for people to be conflicted: on the one hand, they want the Church to change certain teachings; on the other hand, they admire the constancy of Church teachings.

Unfortunately, in the black-and-white world of the media, there is no interest in probing the respondent's conscience. This may make for good commentary, but it lacks a scientific basis.

Here's an analogy I often use when speaking to the media. If asked if I would prefer "God Bless America" to the "Star Spangled Banner" as our national anthem, I would choose the former. That's my preference. But am I going to get exercised about if there is no change? Of course not. Similarly, when Catholics are asked whether they want the Church to change its teachings on certain subjects, they may say yes, but few are prepared to take to the streets over it.

It is because of these concerns that I crafted a question to get right to the heart of this issue.

Respondents were asked if the Catholic Church should "remain true to its principles and not change its positions," or should it "change beliefs and principles to conform to modern customs?" The majority, 52%, agreed that the Church should not change; 38% disagreed. It is likely that some of those who are okay with women priests also admire the steadiness of the Church's teachings. This becomes even more apparent when the

issue of the conflicted Catholic is teased even further.

Here is the actual question, and the responses, that address this issue:

- 31% I differ with the Catholic Church's position on some issues but the Catholic Church shouldn't change its beliefs or positions just because of public opinion
- 28% I agree with most every position the Catholic Church takes and the Catholic Church should remain true to its principles and not change its position
- 26% I differ with the Catholic Church's position on some issues and the Catholic Church should modernize its beliefs by changing its position to reflect current public opinion
- 9% I disagree with most every position the Catholic Church takes and the Catholic Church should absolutely change its positions to reflect modern day beliefs
- 2% None of the above
- 4% Don't know; cannot judge

This data indicate that 6-in-10 Catholics want the Church to stay true to its principles; only 35% want it to conform to modern culture. Again, this suggests that many of those who might differ with the Church on women priests, or some other issue, also prefer a Church that doesn't change with the winds of the dominant culture.

By the way, this is nothing new. In a 1995 survey of Catholics, commissioned by the Catholic League, we asked an almost identical question. It yielded practically the same results.

Religious Liberty

By a healthy 2-1 margin, Catholics support laws that protect

religious liberties. To be exact, 63% oppose compelling private businesses to provide services that violate their religious beliefs; 30% are not opposed. When asked specifically about forcing wedding-related businesses to provide services like taking photos or baking cakes for same-sex marriage if it violates their religious beliefs, 62% say it is mostly unfair; 29% say it is fair.

Similarly, 60% agree that "Religious freedom laws are only meant to protect religious freedom, and the threat of these laws is exaggerated by the media and allies." Only 32% believe that "Religious freedom laws are worrisome and could be used by businesses to discriminate based on sexual orientation."

Respondents were also questioned about the Health and Human Services mandate. They were asked if they agree or disagree with the federal government forcing Catholic organizations "to pay for health care coverage that covers contraceptive drugs, including those that can destroy a human embryo, even if it is against their religious beliefs?" Fully 68% disagreed; only 27% agreed.

Conclusion

It is entirely legitimate for survey researchers to question Catholics about their religion, probing their beliefs and attitudes. But when non-Catholics are asked to pass judgment on Church teachings and/or no attempt is made to distinguish between practicing Catholics and non-practicing Catholics, the results are ineluctably skewed towards a more critical outcome. This explains why the Catholic League survey was conducted: we sought a more accurate picture of the status of Catholicism today.

Please feel free to distribute the findings to all interested parties.

Bill Maher's History of Anti-Catholicism, 1998-2025

Bill Maher's History of Anti-Catholicism, 1998-2025

CATHOLIC LEAGUE

For Religious and Civil Rights

April 25, 2025, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HBO] On his HBO show Maher discussed how some conservatives were criticizing Pope Francis in the wake of his death. He ran through a litany of things that supposedly conservatives found infuriating about the late-Holy Father. One thing that supposedly got the goat of conservatives, according to Maher, was Pope Francis' "child sex ring took the focus off Hillary's child sex ring." What really stood out on Maher's list were his loutish remarks about the Eucharist. Maher went on to say that another thing that Pope Francis did to raise the ire of conservatives was that he advocated for "men eating another man's body." At that exact moment, on screen appeared an image of Pope Francis consecrating the Eucharist.

April 12, 2024, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HBO] Maher justified the killing of innocent children through abortion. During his show, Maher said that pro-life Americans think that abortion is "murder, and it kind of is. I'm just okay with that. I am." He followed that up by saying, "there [are] 8 billion people in the world, I'm sorry, we won't miss you. That's my position on that."

December 1, 2023, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HBO] Maher did a segment on Christmas that de-legitimized the holiday as a pagan tradition rather than a celebration of the birth of Jesus. He began his segment with a caption at the bottom of

the screen saying "Nativity Scheme" (a mocking play on Nativity Scene). He notes that since this is the first episode that has taken place in December in the show's history—the show usually takes a break in December—it would be appropriate to discuss the season of Christmas. But instead of talking about the true meaning of Christmas, he clarifies that December 25 isn't the actual birth of Jesus, calling it a "crock of sh*t" based on winter festivals celebrated by pagan religions. Maher then admits that while he enjoys the decorations and holiday aspect of Christmas and the memories he had of it growing up, he dismisses the existence of God by saying, "Christmas is fun if you accept that it's just pretend."

November 10, 2023, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0] Maher commented on the utter collapse of public schools and used it to lambast Catholics. During his show, he noted that public schools have declined in academic quality and that Catholic schools have become a better and safer alternative. But while he says positive things about Catholic schools, he still could not resist mocking the Church. He commented that Catholic schools are "completely based on bullsh*t" and joked about opening his own "non-Catholic Catholic school" that will be "without the religion and the molesting."

September 9, 2022, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0] Maher took the opportunity on his show to sneak in a joke about Catholic priests while discussing the popularity of the new *Top Gun* movie. He joked that "somehow 96% of film critics loved *Top Gun* like a Catholic priest loves sleepaway camp."

August 5, 2022, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0] Maher ridiculed the Catholic Church for spending money in support of a pro-life referendum in Kansas. In the monologue for his August 5 show he said that "the Catholic Church spent millions [on the referendum], millions that could have gone on to pay off kids they raped."

February 18, 2022, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0] Maher mocked the Church's decision to invalidate baptisms said by an Arizona priest that said "we baptize" instead of "I baptize."

Regarding the situation Maher said, "nobody gives a f*ck" adding that "out of all the areas for the Church to investigate this is the one you follow through on?"

June 18, 2021, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0] Maher said the following about a recent Supreme Court decision that upheld the religious freedom rights of a Catholic foster care agency: "On the other side of the ledger, the court sided with the Catholic church—big surprise, most of the court is Catholic. They sided with the church who believe it is their right not to work with gay parents to help adopt children. The church says their position has always been very plain, if children want to be around gay adults, they can become altar boys. I kid the church, always with love."

September 25, 2020, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0] Maher went after Supreme Court Nominee Amy Coney Barrett for her Catholicism, describing her as "really, really Catholic."

June 26, 2020, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0] Maher took a joke about adding ice cream music to delivery trucks and turned it into a bigoted attack on priests. In the joke, he said, "New Rule: UPS trucks have to play ice cream music...So let's add the music and bring back memories of that summer day when you and your best friend got ice cream and your priest paid for it and then—okay, maybe not that memory."

May 29, 2020, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0] Maher made a joke about priests on his show on Friday May 29. A picture of a woman praying with a priest in the middle of the street shows up on the screen. Referring to the picture he said, "Ma'am, I don't know what you're confessing to, but this is not safe. Not because of the virus or the priest is in the middle of the street, but because he's within 500 feet of a school."

February 1, 2019, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HBO] Maher was commenting on a recent report that claimed climate change would affect wine production when he made the following remark towards priests: "with no more wine...priests will have to get children in the mood with music."

January 25, 2019, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HBO] In response to the controversy surrounding the Covington Catholic High School students at the March for Life, Bill Maher criticized student Nick Sandmann, calling him "a little prick." He then followed that with a joke about priest sex abuse, saying, "I do not get what Catholic priests see in these kids."

July 8, 2018, "Bill Maher: Live From Oklahoma" [HBO] During a live stand up special, Bill Maher made sure to stereotype and mock the Catholic Church. After calling out Catholic League president Bill Donohue and the Catholic League for their boycott of his show 12 years prior, he followed it up with a crude joke on the Church: "I would say 'Bill [Donohue], I'm no anti-Catholic, I'm anti-child f**king.' Your organization has been caught doing a lot of that. That doesn't make me a bad guy."

November 17, 2017, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HBO] Bill Maher proved once again what a coward he is. He had ample opportunity to discuss the pathologically sick acts of Louis C.K., but just like the week before, he never addressed him by name, opting to make light of his conduct. Maher spoke up about Al Franken, only to say that (despite pictures of Franken molesting a woman) he "doesn't deserve to be lumped in with Roy Moore, or Kevin Spacey, or Harvey Weinstein."

Besides defending his perverted colleagues, Maher found time to stick it to Christians again. Toward the end of his show, he said that "Since this is our last show before Christmas, let's never lose sight of the true meaning of the season. It's not about presents and fruit cake and putting up extra lights

to show you love Jesus more than your neighbor. It's about a teenage virgin getting knocked up by God."

November 10, 2017, "Real Time With Bill Maher," [HBO] For Maher, the allegations against Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore—a Southern Baptist—offered an opportunity to take a shot at Catholics. Criticizing statements by Alabama state auditor Jim Zeigler comparing Moore's alleged behavior to Mary and Joseph and the birth of Jesus, Maher said, "Using Jesus to justify child molestation? I mean, even Catholics went, 'Tried it, doesn't work.'" Then there was Maher's obligatory resort to coarse, vile obscenity. Here was his take on the chastity of the Holy Family: "Joseph and Mary didn't f***, isn't that the whole point of that story?"

October 20, 2017, "Real Time With Bill Maher," [HBO] After a guest, explaining how he has worked with Ku Klux Klan members, converting some of them from their white supremacist views, noted that some of them consider themselves Christians, Maher responded: "It's always great to use logic on psychopathic murderers. That's why religion is dangerous, because it's completely f***king made up, so that anybody can put anything they want on it including horrific s**t." When his guests pointed out that atheist communists had killed millions of people during the twentieth century, Maher replied, "That's a dumb canard....Communism was the religion and Stalin was the god."

August 11, 2017, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HBO]

While interviewing Richard Dawkins Maher made the following statement: "Criticism of religion is not the same thing as bigotry. I went through this with the Catholic Church ten years ago. They wanted to throw me off television, and they were like 'You're anti-Catholic.' I'm not anti-Catholic, I'm anti child-f***ing..."

June 27, 2016, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HBO] Here is what he said on Friday night in front of his compliant guest,

political operative and Roman Catholic Paul Begala: "I see that liberals, they talk about guns—I'm not a gun expert but I see a lot of people talking about guns who don't know s*** about guns. I know a little. It's like when the pope talks about vaginas." "Three weeks later [after the Keebler elves got a Twitter account], look at some of the tweets from this guy @popefrancis: 'at least my big dumb hat gets me p***y.'"

February 1, 2016, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0], Maher equates Isis with Bible: Bill Maher quoted Marco Rubio as saying, "We are clearly called by the Bible to adhere to our civil authorities, but that conflicts with our requirements to adhere to God's rules. So when those two come into conflict, God's rules always win." To which Maher said, "No! That's what ISIS believes."

January 25, 2016, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0], Maher and guest Seth MacFarlane insult Christians:
"...you're so lucky that you do cartoons," Maher told the creator of Fox's "Family Guy," "because the things you get away with in cartoons—I'm so jealous of ..." The example he chose, predictably, was the repugnant Dec. 7, 2014 episode of "Family Guy." Titled, "The 2000-Year-Old-Virgin," it defiled Jesus. "I saw your show, it was a repeat, I know," Maher recounted. "Jesus was f**king Peter's wife, but it was a scam. He was f**king a lot of people's wives—and this was your Christmas show." Maher, MacFarlane and the "Real Time" audience then shared a good laugh.

June 5, 2015, "Real Time with Bill Maher," [HB0], Maher dismisses concerns about anti-Christian discrimination: Maher says Christians have no basis to complain about being defamed or discriminated against because they constitute a majority of the nation. "Seventy percent of the country is Christian, not to mention every president we've ever had," he said. He also said that "conservatives who constantly whine that Christianity is under attack from liberals have to explain why there are over 300,000 churches in the U.S. but only 400 Whole

Foods.”

March 20, 2015, “Real Time with Bill Maher,” [HB0] Maher and guest Gerald Posner discuss Catholics and the Holocaust: Maher used Pope Benedict to mock Jews and the Blessed Mother. He introduced Posner, author of a critical book on the Catholic Church, and joked about priests abusing children. Posner then commented on those who administered the concentration camps, saying that “three-quarters of the Nazis were Catholics. Several were also Lutherans. But the hierarchy was all Catholic.”

January 16, 2015, “Real Time with Bill Maher,” [HB0], Maher curses the pope: After Pope Francis implored us not to insult other people’s religions, Bill Maher responded during his show by saying, “He’s dead to me now. Oh yeah, F*** the Pope.”

July 18, 2014, “Real Time with Bill Maher,” [HB0] Maher called the pope a pimp during his “New Rules” segment: “New Rule. The pope is a pimp. I’m serious. I find myself wanting to ask this pope a question I never wanted to ask a pope before: Can I party with you?”

July 11, 2014, “Real Time with Bill Maher,” [HB0]m Maher discussed the Hobby Lobby abortifacient case that the U.S. Supreme Court decided. Here is an excerpt:

- “...but the five Catholic men on the Supreme Court agreed with Hobby Lobby that those women who have pleasure sex should be saddled with a baby.”
- “And those five Catholic men on the Supreme Court, they know that God loves every tiny spec of human life, every single sperm from the moment it leaves the penis, until it tries to sneak into America. Then you’re on your own.”
- “...the five Catholic men on the Supreme Court they decided that, I think, that Catholic doctrine trumps federal law.”

- “I just think that it’s a little suspicious that its five Catholic men, and the Catholics do the thing about ejaculating. They do.”

May 16, 2014, “Real Time with Bill Maher,” [HB0] Maher commented on Pope Francis’ remark that he would baptize aliens: “This week Pope Francis said he would baptize aliens if they came to Earth. I love you, Frank, but that is some Mitt Romney-level crazy pope. I’m pretty sure any beings advanced enough to travel hundreds of light years aren’t that interested in getting sprinkled with magic water. Besides, given the past history of fondling and groping, the last thing the Church needs is a 50-foot-priest with six arms.”

November 22, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HB0], Maher and guest Dan Savage on priests and gay marriage: Maher commented on gay couples who adopt children, alleging that a Hawaiian bishop said these kids had a greater chance of committing suicide. Here is how Savage responded: “That’s total bulls***. He’s confusing children of gay parents with children who are raped by Catholic priests. Sorry, I am just done being lectured about children and their safety by Catholic-f***ing bishops, priests, cardinals.” Shortly thereafter, Savage again remarked about “kiddie-f***ing Catholic priests.”

November 19, 2013, “The Last Word with Lawrence O’Donnell” [MSNBC], on religion: Maher was a guest on the show. While discussing the government shutdown from October and the threat of another shut down, Maher said: “I never understood why people who hate government go into government, that’s why I’m not a priest.”

November 15, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HB0], Maher attacks the Pope: In Maher’s latest rant, he took after the pope, Sarah Palin, and Palin’s daughter, Bristol.

The skit was a series of mock tweets featuring the pope and

Palin.

- Pope: "Listening to you, I'm reconsidering my stance on birth control."
- Palin: "Yeah. How's that sex with teenage boys working out for you?"
- Pope: "I don't know. How'd it work out for your daughter?"

November 1, 2013, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], Maher brands Pope a child rapist: Maher showed a picture of the young boy who approached Pope Francis, and then sat on the pope's chair. Pope Francis welcomed him, but Maher's picture showed the pope's hand on the child's head and Maher said "No, Pope Francis, I thought you were different," implying that the pope is a child rapist.

October 30, 2013, "Piers Morgan Live" [CNN], on religion: Maher was a guest on the show. While discussing the government shutdown, Maher says that "If you hate government, you shouldn't do it. That's why I'm not a priest."

October 25, 2013, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], repeatedly insults and attacks Catholics, Christians and Pope Francis: Maher made reference to German Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst and claimed that Pope Francis "fired the [German] bishop of bling" because he was "getting the altar boys drunk on Cristal"

Later on, Maher's panel of guests consisted of Michael Moore, Al Sharpton, Valarie Plame and Richard Dawkins. According to Maher, liberals are "worried they're going to be called racist if they criticize Muslims."

Sharpton: "There were Christian klansmen that were Christians, KKK members who burned crosses."

Plame: "Yeah, but now there are Christian Dominionists that are just as extreme."

Maher: "This is not just the same. Look, I'm no f**king

Catholic or Christian, but one is herpes [Christians] and one is cancer [Muslims].”

October 9, 2013, “The Arsenio Hall Show” [WPIX], on religion: Maher was a guest on the show. While discussing the government shutdown, Maher said “You should not be in government if you hate government. That is why I am not a priest.”

August 2, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HBO], implies that Pope Francis and all clergy are homosexual:

Maher: “... In other gay news, did you see the pope got drunk again and, ah, I love this pope, he just says what he thinks. He said gay Catholics shouldn’t be marginalized. He said, ‘Who am I to judge them?’ And I think it’s like anybody else, you know, when you get to know gay people, they don’t, you know, come off as gay, they come off as people. You stop being anti-gay. And who has more gay friends and co-workers than a pope?”

Later in the show Maher announced he would be taking a five week vacation and predicted what the headlines will be while he’s off. He displayed several mock headlines including a mockup of the headline, “Pope Francis Moves to Massachusetts Marries Longtime Companion.” Below it was a picture of Pope Francis and an elderly man.

July 19, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HBO], on World Youth Day: “This is World Youth Day for the Catholic Church ... I mean this is a big jamboree – look at that! This is where all the kids in the world get together with priests. What could go wrong?”

July 16, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” blog, on Pope Francis clearing Pope John Paul II for sainthood after a second miracle was confirmed: “I’m sorry, for those believers out there, aren’t these ‘miracle’ tales kind of a tell that this religion is completely full of sh*t?”

June 14, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HBO], on Pope

Francis and the alleged “gay lobby” in the Vatican: Maher implied that Pope Francis is homosexual when he said the following: “The other big story, Pope Francis...This week he said there is a gay network inside the Vatican...They go by the code names cardinals and priests...Hey, Padre, I hate to tell you, there’s also a gay network here, it’s called BRAVO. And this fall they’re presenting the real homosexuals of Vatican City. ‘Whatever, Monsignor, I didn’t come here to make friends’ (gay affectation)...and he has vowed to find out where all this gayness was coming from. And then he gathered up his long white dress, he turned on his bright red heels and he flounced right out of the steam room.”

May 31, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HB0], on Pope Francis, the Church, and priests: The following occurred between host Bill Maher and Paul Rudnick, author of the anti-Christian play, “The Most Fabulous Story Ever Told”:

Maher: “I want to ask you and everybody else about something that happened this week that was important to me because I am an atheist...You know when somebody says something obvious, ‘Oh, is the pope Catholic?’ I think he might not be. I think the Pope might be an atheist. There I said it. Like I think Obama is, because, he said this week, Pope Frank said, ‘The Lord has redeemed all of us, not just Catholics, even the atheists.’ And I was like, I am going to book my flight to heaven right now.”

“And then of course, it’s funny, because, you know, it’s just like politics. The hierarchy at the Vatican was like, ‘What the fuck did this guy just...?’ You could almost see them preparing the poison. You know, it’s like, luckily we’ve got a spare pope. This guy, ixnay on the. You know, one of the key things in this religion and most religions is, ‘Oh, monopoly, only through us.’ Even hippie Jesus said that. ‘Only through me.’ So this guy’s saying everybody gets into heaven. So then they had to walk it back...and the Vatican said – I don’t, do you have it?

Rudnick: "I have it. The Vatican spokesman quickly intervened Father Thomas Rosica said quote, 'People who truly know the Catholic Church cannot be saved if they refuse to enter or remain in her.'"

Maher: "Remain in her?" [sexual innuendo]

Rudnick: "Yeah, presumably without using a condom. You wonder if they ever vet any of their statements."

Maher: "It made me think that, you know, I remember when I was making 'Religulous,' and we talked to a lot of priests. And we found out that a lot of priests really aren't believers. They do it because, no, some of them do it for the sex. That's true, but some of them, I mean, no, there's a lot of good ones, and they do it because it's a way to help people and they know they can't tell the masses that it's all a crock. But they themselves don't believe it. I think Pope Frank – what's his real name?...his Argentinian name...it sounds like a very expensive pair of shoes. He's a sophisticated guy from that era, and I think he's, I'm telling you, I think the Pope's an atheist."

May 10, 2013, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HB0], on priests:
The following exchange occurred between host Bill Maher and actor Zachary Quinto:

Maher: "They have to get right with the idea that more people who are rapists and violent go into the military. I mean, that's sort of understandable. It's a violent organization. Their job is violence..."

Quinto: "Maybe they should have a roundtable with the Catholic Church and try to come to some understanding of how to navigate this."

Maher: "Well, you know, it's funny you say that, but I think the reason why more rapists go into the military is the same reason why predators go into the Catholic Church: it's a place

they know they can get away with it.”

Quinto: “And that hierarchical structure prevents them from really being accountable to anybody.”

Maher: “Right, and they’re protected.”

May 3, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HBO], on Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: During the opening monologue Maher, host Bill Maher referred to the pontifical summer residence at Castel Gandolfo as “Club Ped,” implying that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI is a pedophile.

April 2, 2013, “Jimmy Kimmel Live” [ABC], on teachings of the Catholic Church: Maher was a guest on the show and he called the Bible “a bunch of Bronze Age malarkey.” He stated that Catholic tradition “was not from Jesus or the Bible,” claiming that “most of this stuff” was “made up hundreds of years later by clowns in the Church.” When Kimmel asked Maher whether the Trinity was in the Bible, Maher responded: “No! Neither is Confession. They just pulled this out of their ass in the 12th century.” Referring to Limbo, Maher said “they just shamelessly invent it as they go along.”

March 22, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HBO], on Pope Francis: After labeling the pope a “virgin bachelor,” Maher opined, “What other business could you be in where your company gets caught running a child sex ring since forever and you still keep your customers?”

March 15, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HBO], on Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: After displaying pictures of notable persons holding signs mocking themselves, Maher showed a picture of the pope emeritus holding a sign saying, “Not actually sick...I just hated that f***ing job.”

February 15, 2013, “Real Time with Bill Maher” [HBO], on the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI: “Now...as you all know, this week, Pope Benedict told Vatican Radio—you know, Vatican

Radio, playing the hits from the 8th century, 9th century and today—Benedict told them he was going to resign because the Church needs a fresh, young face, somewhere other than a priest's lap."

"It's okay to let go. No one can fault you for losing faith in an organization that won't even allow women as priests, because, the reasoning goes, Jesus didn't have any female apostles. Yeah, you remember the Last Supper: a total sausage party."

"The fact is that any enterprise that excludes women almost always descends into sexual deviancy. At least at my bathhouse."

"Show me any culture that's traditionally hostile to women, and I will show you a culture that is screwed up. Like the Taliban. Like our military with its enormous rape problem. And like the Catholic Church."

February 11, 2013, "Conan" [TBS], smearing priests: "We found early this year or last year in the Republican primaries when the Republicans made contraception an issue, 98% of Catholics use birth control and the only ones who don't are the priests. They would if altar boys could get pregnant."

October 12, 2012, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], on the vice presidential debate between Congressman Paul Ryan and Vice President Joe Biden: "I have not seen an old Catholic guy give it to a young Catholic guy like that since I was an altar boy."

May 20, 2011, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], on the 2011 John Jay Report on Sex Abuse in the Catholic Church: Maher and his panel of guests discussed the release of the 2011 John Jay Report on Sex Abuse in the Catholic Church. Maher branded all priests as abusers and falsely claimed that the report blamed the 60s for the abuse scandal.

Maher said, "Here is what they found: Not as bad as you think; it magically solved itself one day in 1985... And the Church isn't the problem, celibacy isn't the problem, repressed homosexuality isn't the problem. You know what the problem was? The 60s... I'm not kidding, they said it was the permissive attitude of the 60s."

March 11, 2011, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], on a "Catholics Come Home" ad campaign: "The Catholic Church is changing. We get it. You don't want us touching your kids. Message received. This chart shows alleged inappropriate behavior toward children since 90 AD. (Chart shows arrow going up every year). When we first started keeping records. We are going to bring those numbers down. We are not miracle workers but here is our pledge to you. You bring your kids back to church and there will be a significantly lower chance that he or she will be inappropriately touched—particularly she. And if one of our priests does touch one of your kids, you will dine absolutely free at Long John Silver's. We're the new Catholic Church and we know it's time to roll up our sleeves and pull up our pants."

October 19, 2010, "The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell" [MSNBC], on gay priests: "What's interesting to me is the way conservatives—and I would put the military in this lately in the way they've been talking about it and the Catholic Church talk about gay as if it's something that we really can't resist if it's around us. You know, that's how the Catholic Church talks about it. You know, our priests are not sinning, they're just giving into temptation when they're molesting children and going gay and stuff like that."

September 28, 2010, "Joy Behar Show" [HLN], on having faith: "Religion is all about sticking in fingers in your ears and humming. They don't want to hear what the reality is. They want to believe what they believe. It's—it's not about critical thinking. I mean, faith is the purposeful suspension of critical thinking."

"I don't know if anybody could read the Bible and still want to be a religious person. It is a book that is filled with immorality, wickedness, and then just plain silliness."

September 28, 2010, "Joy Behar Show" [HLN], on the Bible: "But it is a lot of wickedness, there's a lot [of] God acting like a psychopath and just ethnically cleansing people and wiping people out... I was pointing out on the show Friday night the Ten Commandments. You know, this is the ultimate list of the ten things right from God and it doesn't include rape, incest, or genocide. That's ok. That's not on the top ten. But apparently swearing, working on Sunday and building statues to other gods, those are the things that are important."

November 19, 2008, "Tonight Show with Jay Leno" [NBC], on Proposition 8:

Leno: "I don't know how two people getting married will suddenly ruin my marriage. I was told this will ruin my marriage. If two gay people—how? What does it matter to me?"

Maher: "It doesn't matter. And of course it's all coming from religion, which is ironic because Jesus never said anything about homosexuality in the Bible. And, you know, what if Jesus was gay? I am not saying he was. But it wouldn't make him any worse. I mean, it could be. He was a gentle guy, never got married. Every prayer ends with 'ah, men.' I'm just—What? What did I say?"

November 14, 2008, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], on priest saying he would withhold Communion for people who voted for Obama: "A Catholic priest in South Carolina has told his congregation: if you voted for Obama you can't receive Communion. That's right, the cracker won't let you get the cracker. He said supporting Obama constitutes material cooperation with intrinsic evil. Then he proceeds to pass around the plate so everyone could chip in to pay off the child f***ing lawsuits."

April 11, 2008, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], attacking pope as Nazi and accusing him of covering up for molester:

"And, finally, New Rule: Whenever you combine a secretive compound, religion and weirdos in pioneer outfits, there's going to be some child f***ing going on. In fact, whenever a cult leader sets himself up as 'God's infallible wing man' here on earth, lock away the kids."

"Which is why I'd like to tip off law enforcement to an even larger child-abusing religious cult. Its leader also has a compound. And this guy not only operates outside the bounds of the law, but he used to be a Nazi and he wears funny hats. That's right. The pope is coming to America this week, and, ladies, he's single!"

"Now, I know what you're thinking: 'Bill, you can't be saying that the Catholic Church is no better than this creepy Texas cult! For one thing, altar boys can't even get pregnant.'"

"But, really, what tripped up the 'little cult on the prairie' was that they only abused hundreds of kids, not thousands all over the world. Cults get raided. Religions get parades. How does the Catholic Church get away with all of their buggery? VOLUME, VOLUME, VOLUME!"

"If you have a few hundred followers and you let some of them molest children, they call you a cult leader. If you have a billion, they call you 'pope.' "

"It's like if you can't pay your mortgage, you're a deadbeat, but if you can't pay a million mortgages, you're Bear Stearns, and we bail you out. And that's who the Catholic Church is, the Bear Stearns of organized pedophilia. Too big to fail."

"When the—when the current pope was in his previous Vatican job as John Paul's Dick Cheney, he wrote a letter instructing every Catholic bishop to keep the sex abuse of minors secret until the statute of limitations ran out. And that's the Church's attitude: We're here, we're queer, get used to it."

"Which is fine. Far be it from me to criticize religion. But, just remember one thing: if the pope was, instead of a religious figure, merely the CEO of a nationwide chain of daycare centers where thousands of employees had been caught molesting kids and then covering it up, he'd be arrested faster than you can say, 'Who wants to touch Mister Wiggle?' "

February 8, 2008, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], on Mother Teresa: When Maher said, "Mother Teresa, who we found out recently, actually lost her faith," Bob Costas then said Mother Teresa questioned her faith from time to time; she didn't lose it entirely. Maher responded, "Well, but it's Mother Teresa. Kind of like finding out Colonel Sanders doesn't eat chicken."

February 4, 2008, "Larry King Live" [CNN], on being an anti-Catholic bigot: "They accuse me of being a Catholic bigot. First of all, I don't have it out especially for Catholics. I think all religions are koo-koo. Ok? It's not just the Catholics. I'm not a bigot. Just because I wish for the demise of an organization that I think is entirely destructive to the human race, that doesn't make me a bigot. I also wish for [the] demise of Hamas and the KKK."

January 25, 2008, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], on the Virgin Birth: "But I think it is much more likely that there could be space ships from outer space, than what a lot of things people believe. People still believe, you know, excuse me I know I may inject religion into every show but UFOs are a lot more likely than a space god [that] flew down bodily and you know who was the Son of God and you know had sex with a Palestinian woman..."

January 4, 2008, "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" [NBC], attacking religious faith and the Eucharist: "You can't be a rational person six days of the week and put on a suit and make rational decisions and go to work and, on one day of the week, go to a building and think you're drinking the blood of

a 2,000-year-old space god. That doesn't make you a person of faith...That makes you a schizophrenic."

August 17, 2007, "Larry King Live" [CNN], on the release of his movie "Religulous": "It should come out at Easter. I would like it out as soon as the time people are celebrating the space man's flying up to heaven."

May 22, 2007, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], attacking Catholicism, mixing it with homosexual themes: "And it's easy to start a religion! Watch, I'll do it for you: I had a vision last night! A vision! The Blessed Virgin Mary came to me—I don't know how she got past the guards—and she told me it's high time to take the high ground from the Seventh Day Adventists and give it to the 24-hour-party people. And what happens in the confessional stays in the confessional. Gay men, don't say you're life partners; say you're a nunnery of two. 'We weren't having sex, officer, I was performing a very private Mass, here in my car. I was letting my rod and staff comfort him. Take this and eat of it, for this is my roommate Barry. And for all those who believe there is a special place for you in Kevin.'"

April 16, 2007, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], discussing religion and drugs: "Religion is bad, drugs are good." On all religions: "Childish, destructive and nonsense."

April 13, 2007, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], attacking the Eucharist: Maher showed a picture of Keith Richards and said, "New Rule, snorting your father isn't crazy." Then, he showed a picture of a Catholic priest giving Communion and said, "Eating your father, that's crazy."

April 8, 2005, "Real Time with Bill Maher" [HBO], mocking the death of Pope John Paul II: "The Pope may be cold but this crowd is hot."

"The Pope was laid to rest just as he requested, in a pine box with his drum sticks, an Allen Iverson jersey and then Bono

came and poured Jack Daniels on the coffin.”

“People waited in line for 24 hours to see the Pope’s body and when they got to see the Pope they smelled worse than he did.”

“For those who could not make the funeral the Vatican has asked that in lieu of flowers just stop touching your d***.”

“American Catholics say, ‘We love the pope, he should be a saint but he is kind of full of sh*t on everything we believe.’”

“For a church that is so against homosexuals they put on a pageant that you could not believe.”

May 2003, “Bill Maher: Victory Begins at Home,” Maher’s Broadway show:

“What’s the reason for this insanity?” Maher had been discussing Islam. “One word: religion. The Catholics got away with f***ing kids.” When the audience gave a mixed reaction, he said, “Oh come on! Get the rod out of your a**!” He then impersonated an altar boy saying to a priest, “Put some more lotion on, Father,” and said, “Holy lubricant, Father!”

“Don’t regulate drugs: regulate religion. I was raised Catholic and I was not molested. I’m a little insulted. Apparently, I wasn’t attractive enough.”

“The problem is they drill religion into your head when you are very young. Well, when you are four years old you believe in Santa Claus, too. Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, the Virgin Birth, sure! When you’re a priest everyday spewing this bulls*** about the apple and the snake etc. you can see him just saying, ‘Ah, f*** it, just blow me, kid!’”

“It’s so gay, the Church! With the robes and the smoke and kneeling in front of the priest with your mouth open eating God.”

"How does a country get away with keeping half its population in beekeeper suits? I'll tell you how. They say the magic word: religion. It's their *religion*. You say religion, you can get away with anything. The Catholics got away with f***ing kids, for crying out loud!"

June 20, 2002, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], on the canonization of Padre Pio: "Pope John Paul canonized him and the reason it sticks in my craw is because it just seems like they needed a saint badly, because they had a lot of bad P.R. with the whole, you know, we're having sex with kids thing."

June 5, 2002, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], responding to a guest who had said that no one wants to see the Catholic Church go away: "Well, no, I'd love to see the Church go away. And there are lots of people who would."

May 22, 2002, on "Larry King Live" [CNN], on the Catholic Church: "Well, I wasn't raised Jewish. My mother is Jewish. But I never even knew I was half-Jewish until I was a teenager. I was just so frightened about the Catholics and everything that was going on there in the church—and I was never, you know, molested or anything. And I'm a little insulted. I guess they never found me attractive. And that's really their loss."

May 10, 2002, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], on the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church: "So it is in this spirit that I offer this modest proposal that the Catholic Church just drop the pretense and just go gay. Just come out of the confessional. Preach the sermon on the mountain. Embrace it. Let the straight people be Baptists. It's high time you gay Catholics stood up and announced to the world, 'We're here, we're queer, get Eucharist.'"

May 7, 2002, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], on sex abuse settlements: "I am not defending the Church. I have

hated the Church way before anyone else. I have been pounding religion for nine years on this show.”

March 8, 2002, “Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher” [ABC], on the sex abuse problem: “Before puberty, I would say nobody caused me more pain than the Catholics.”

“I apparently was not attractive enough to be hit on [by priests].”

Jason Jones of Human Life International commented that the sex abuse problem was not prevalent in Europe or South America. Maher shot back, “You’re right. In African countries they rape the nuns.”

March 5, 2002, on “Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher” [ABC], on the Eucharist: Kirk Franklin, a black musician, attacked the Eucharist by saying “gotta take the cracker.” To which Maher replied, “Gotta take the cracker from a cracker.”

October 27, 2000, “Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher” [ABC], on Christianity and Halloween: “Christianity is grafted from paganism... It’s all about a man in the sky who’s going to send you in a burning lake of fire if you screw up... Which is the perfect description of religion itself. I mean, what is scarier than drinking the man’s blood every Sunday? That’s not a spooky ritual? ‘Here kids, drink his blood and eat his body.’ Like that’s not pagan? What can be more pagan than that?”

August 9, 2000, “Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher” [ABC], on sex abuse: “Look, it’s a fact of life. Priests, a lot of times, molest boys, okay? They are celibate and it’s a magnet for homosexual pedophiles.”

July 11, 2000, “Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher” [ABC], on celibate priests: “Be fruitful and multiply. What’s more weird than being celibate. There’s nothing more perverted than that.”

March 20, 2000, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], on the Annunciation: Maher commented that the Archangel Gabriel didn't tell Mary she was pregnant with Jesus, he showed her his "horn had turned pink."

March 9, 2000, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], on the celibate priesthood: "Priests are supposed to be celibate. They're not having sex with women... Just with the boys."

March 2, 2000, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], on anti-Catholicism in the wake of George W. Bush speaking at Bob Jones University: "Isn't it amazing that this is an issue in this election? When was the last time you ever heard of a Catholic being bashed? ... But when was the last time someone called you a Papist? I mean really, is this really going on nowadays?"

November 10, 1999, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], on why many people don't go to synagogue or church: "You shouldn't, I don't think, lump the synagogue in with the Church. They operate very differently, OK. The synagogue—and I'm not Jewish, but I was raised Catholic—was never as corrupt as the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church, which is people, not God running it, OK, hugely corrupt, did horrible things through history, maybe...because they were that powerful."

"Catholics practice what they want to practice. They go to see the pope because he is a big celebrity, but they go home and they masturbate, they practice birth control...well they do."

February 4, 1999, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], on the pope and abortion: "The pope had his dress up about the abortion issue."

October 8, 1998, "Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher" [ABC], on the Catholic Church: "But Catholics nowadays are like, you know, 'The pope says we shouldn't do this and this, but we really wanna pick and choose the parts of the religion

that we feel fits us. You know the pope says you shouldn't masturbate or have abortions, but that's fine for him, he's an elderly man, but for us...'”

DISSIDENTS TARGET BISHOP DEWANE

Dissident lay Catholics in Southwest Florida, along with some priests, have declared war on Bishop Frank Dewane. He is the Bishop of Venice and is by all accounts a loyal son of the Church. Which is why they are out to get him. The pattern is a familiar one—we've seen it played out across the nation, especially in the Midwest: Dewane is drawing the ire of Catholic malcontents, and ex-Catholics, because of his orthodoxy. His critics are largely drawn from the ranks of the elderly, and are overrepresented by ex-priests and ex-nuns.

Although the latest assault on Bishop Dewane is the most vicious, he first incurred the wrath of dissidents in 2010 when he temporarily removed a popular priest from ministry. Two years later, this same priest was found guilty of violating his “fiduciary responsibilities to the Parish, his priestly promise to celibacy, and his promise of obedience to his Ordinary.” He was laicized in October 2012.

In 2011, after a Catholic high school teacher was fired, he filed a lawsuit claiming he was terminated after he blew the whistle on a priest who allegedly asked sexual questions of students during Confession. The case was properly thrown out

by a judge.

The current war on Bishop Dewane started in January when ten priests wrote a letter to the Apostolic Nuncio accusing the bishop of governing by “intimidation, the use of fear, shaming, bullying and other non-Christian behaviors.” The letter was made public in May when it was sent to the media.

Without knowing anything more, any neutral observer would conclude that the accusing priests are a disgrace. Why? Not only will they not come forward and let the accused know of their identity, they never sent Dewane a copy of their letter (he learned of it through the media). To make matters worse, these cowardly priests did not provide a scintilla of evidence: no specific examples of Dewane’s alleged “non-Christian” behavior were offered.

Enter Call to Action and Voice of the Faithful, two wholly discredited lay organizations. They have been agitating to censure Dewane. In a ruling that was upheld by the Vatican, members of the former organization were excommunicated in some dioceses; the latter group is a dissident entity that is unwelcomed in most dioceses.

This is a sick environment. Anonymous persons make unsubstantiated accusations in public without publicly identifying the content of their complaints, or privately confronting the accused, and are then embraced by vindictive activists who seek to upend the Catholic Church. Bishop Dewane must have the patience of a saint not to lash out at them.

Dewane subsequently released a statement saying that the priests’ letter “lacks all credibility.” Furthermore, he said that the accusations are “sweeping generalities and are simply false or unfounded.” The statement concluded, “With the general nature of the unfounded complaints in the letter that was released, one has to wonder who is being bullied by whom?”

To answer the charges in the letter, Bishop Dewane convened a

meeting of all the priests in the diocese. Most priests said that their complaining colleagues should have met with the bishop and handled this matter internally. That's what real men do.

Not surprisingly, Call to Action and Voice of the Faithful are so tarnished that their efforts to get Bishop Dewane have gone nowhere. Now, in a state of utter desperation, they are reaching out to Pope Francis, asking him to enter the fray. Characteristically, they have done so in a manner that is completely dishonest.

The letter to the pope is replete with unsubstantiated accusations, and loaded with vitriol. Even more disgraceful, these signatories repair to canon law to assert their rights. Canon law?

These two groups—whose members are drawn from the same pool of yesterday's carping critics—are discounted by the bishops precisely because they are at war with canon law. For them to invoke it as a weapon to be used against Bishop Dewane is reminiscent of the origins of the term chutzpah: before being sentenced for killing his parents, the guilty son pleads with the judge for mercy, arguing how unfair it would be to punish an orphan.

Now Bishop Dewane is being sued by a sue-happy lawyer because a parish volunteer who molested a boy had previously molested another boy on church property; the parents say the diocese did nothing about it.

However, the current offense (a) did not take place on church property or in the diocese (b) neither the diocese nor the parish received a complaint about it (c) a public request for all alleged victims to come forward yielded no complainant against this man (d) the accused was no longer a volunteer when he was arrested, and (e) all volunteers must submit to a federal and state background check and fingerprinting, and

nothing about the accused was discovered at that time.

Anyone who thinks this legal battle is unrelated to the other ones is living in a state of denial. Bishop Dewane is being defamed by some very malicious people. The Catholic League is happy to defend him and urges him to stand his ground.

THE QUEST TO SCALP A BISHOP

This is a special report which was originally published in the September 2014 issue of Catalyst.

The Catholic Church has many enemies these days, some of whom are ex-Catholics who left the Church a long time ago. They are joined by the disaffected, those who pretend (even convincing themselves) that they are Catholics in good standing. Most of these malcontents are lay men and women, but some are priests, and a few are nuns. All of them are animated by a strong rejection of the Church's teachings on sexuality. Because they have the support of the secular media, they comprise a formidable group.

What motivates them today is the debased desire to take down a bishop. Not any bishop: They want to drop a bishop who is an outspoken defender of the faith. They really get excited when they learn of a diocese that was riddled with dissidents and is now almost dissident free.

Geopolitics is at work, as well. While they will work overtime to disable a bishop anywhere in the nation, they prefer to scalp a bishop from the Mid-West. Why? Because that's where many of them live. It's also because it is easier for activists to dominate the news in mid-size cities, as opposed to larger ones where it is much more difficult. Their attacks

are orchestrated and well-coordinated: lawyers feed the activists and they feed the media.

Cardinal Raymond Burke, formerly the Archbishop of St. Louis and now the prefect of the Vatican's highest court, has drawn the enmity of Mid-Western dissidents for years. He is despised because of his denunciations of Catholic public figures who reject the Church's teachings that bear on public policy issues. Burke's critics have no problem with the Nancy Pelosis who continually claim their Catholic status while doing everything they can to undermine the Church. They have a problem with him.

New York Archbishop Timothy Cardinal Dolan hails from St. Louis and was the Milwaukee archbishop before coming to the Big Apple. He is hated because he cleaned up after his disgraced predecessor, Archbishop Rembert Weakland. Though Weakland embarrassed himself and the Church, he is still revered in left-wing Catholic quarters. He is liked because his views are similar to theirs.

They tried to take Dolan down because he moved the perpetual care fund, which was part of the regular archdiocesan accounts, to a cemetery trust fund. It did not matter that he was following the advice of his Financial Council; what mattered was that his enemies could play fast-and-loose with a contrived controversy. When Dolan moved to New York, they stayed on his trail. Terence McKiernan, the founder of BishopAccountability, pledged a few years ago to "stick it" to Dolan, and has accused him of "keeping the lid on 55 priests." Several attempts by me challenging McKiernan to release the names have failed. It's a lie and he knows it.

When Bishop John Myers of Peoria took over the Newark archdiocese, his enemies followed him. They went wild when it was learned that a priest was not being properly supervised after he had an encounter with a teenager 12 years earlier; he grabbed the boy while wrestling with him (in front of the

boy's mother). In fact, what was really bothering his critics were Myers' strong positions on sexuality. The editorial page editor of the *Newark Star-Ledger*, an angry ex-Catholic, specifically took umbrage with Myers for his defense of "marriage and life."

Bishop Robert Finn of Kansas City-St. Joseph inherited a mess made by dissidents and cleaned it up. That made him a target. His enemies seized on the antics of a disturbed priest who took crotch-shot pictures of kids. It is important to note that the review board was contacted, the authorities were notified, and an independent investigation was ordered. But because much more offensive photos were later taken, Finn was found guilty of one misdemeanor for not reporting suspected child abuse. Had he done nothing, no one would have known about the priest because there was no complainant. No matter, they wanted his head and are still after him.

St. Louis Archbishop Robert Carlson was recently the victim of a campaign by anti-Catholics who tried to frame him. Their goal was to promote the pernicious idea that he did not know that child abuse was against the law. It failed, but what counts is that they tried. Because Carlson fought back, and because he rejects the libertine ideas of his critics, they sought to bring him down.

No one has endured a more vicious assault on his character than John Nienstedt, Archbishop of St. Paul and Minneapolis. Before examining his case, it is time to disclose who the principal players are in this quest to scalp a bishop.

Attorney Jeffrey Anderson, the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP), and the *National Catholic Reporter* are leading the charge. Anderson is from St. Paul, SNAP honcho David Clohessy lives in St. Louis, and the *Reporter's* home is Kansas City, Missouri. All of them find a sympathetic ear with the media.

The *Kansas City Star*, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* are their biggest fans. Outside of the Mid-West, they have friends at the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, National Public Radio and *Commonweal* magazine; the latter has become increasingly strident.

Anderson is a tiny man with a big ego. A recovering alcoholic, he once described himself as a “dedicated atheist.” His goal, he has admitted, is to “sue the s*** out of them” [the Catholic Church]. He has made good on his pledge; he is one of the richest lawyers in the nation. While he likes to sue Mid-Western bishops, the big prize for him remains the pope; several attempts to implicate the Vatican have failed.

In August, SNAP gave Anderson an award for his work. Or was it for his money? It is a matter of record that Anderson has lavishly greased Clohessy’s efforts. David Clohessy, who indicts bishops for not reporting the slightest boundary violation to the authorities, never called the cops when he learned that his brother, a priest, was accused of molesting a minor. He also admits to lying to the media, though that has cost him nothing.

Four years after the *National Catholic Reporter* was launched, it came under attack by its Ordinary, Bishop Charles Herman Helmsing, for its “poisonous character” and attacks on the Church. He said the paper had no right to claim the title “Catholic,” a view that is not uncommon among many bishops today. Indeed, some experts maintain that the use of “Catholic” in its title is canonically illicit. The *Reporter* does not support the Church’s teachings on sexuality, and it gives voice to those seeking to undermine the Church’s hierarchy.

These are the main protagonists in the war on bishops, and they are the ones who have Archbishop Nienstedt in their sights. Along with Minnesota Public Radio and other media outlets, their pursuit of a bishop’s scalp is so transparent

that no objective observer could conclude otherwise.

Nienstedt got off on the wrong foot with these people when he took over from Bishop Raymond Lucker in New Ulm. He inherited a cadre of committed *National Catholic Reporter* types and moved with dispatch to restore order. There was much to clean up. Consider that Lucker wrote a book prodding the Church to change its teachings on 15 issues, including homosexuality. When he learned of a priest who had molested a minor, Father Francis Markey, Lucker moved him to another parish and school. Markey was a drug addict and a homosexual who preyed on teenage boys. By contrast, it took Nienstedt to discipline another miscreant priest soon after he took over from Lucker; he placed him on administrative leave without faculties.

Not surprisingly, Lucker liked the dissident priest character in the ABC-TV show "Nothing Sacred." Indeed, he loved the show so much that he signed a newspaper ad in the late 1990s condemning me for boycotting the show's sponsors. Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, who attends SNAP conferences, also signed the letter. Cardinal Roger Mahony also liked the show: He gave the actor who played Father Ray an award. No media outlet worshipped the show more than the *Reporter*. When we killed the show, a dissident Brooklyn nun held a prayer vigil commemorating her loss.

Bishop Lucker is relevant to the Nienstedt story because those out to get the archbishop never showed any interest in sacking his predecessor. As long as a bishop adopts the right positions, as defined by left-wing haters and angry ex-Catholics, he will get a pass, no matter what his record is. This is the real cover-up.

If there were two triggers that ignited the assault on Nienstedt it was his public defense of marriage, properly understood, and his criticism of the pro-homosexual film, "Brokeback Mountain." Had he said nothing about a ballot initiative recognizing the right of two men to marry, and had

he been equally agnostic on the gay cowboy movie, he never would have been targeted by the Church's enemies.

It is against this backdrop that, out-of-the-blue, Nienstedt was accused of touching a boy's behind when posing for a group photo; the archbishop stepped down and called for an investigation. No other leader, religious or secular, would ever do so. Of course, he was exonerated. Then came more accusations, dating back many years ago, that he engaged in improper behavior with seminarians and priests (an ex-priest surfaced charging that Nienstedt once touched his neck). Again, the archbishop called for a probe, this time hiring a respected law firm.

From my perspective, there were two disturbed priests, both homosexuals, who should have been treated differently; their acting out occurred before Nienstedt took over. Red flags were ignored, and in one case, the fact that the priest was a homosexual actually redounded to his favor (they didn't want to out him). One of these two offending priests was permanently removed from ministry in the fall 2012, and the other was put on a leave of absence in the spring 2013 (he is not involved in ministry pending the completion of an investigation).

In October 2013, Nienstedt said, "There are no offending priests in active ministry in our archdiocese." This was disputed by Jennifer Haselberger, a canon lawyer who resigned from the archdiocese earlier that year. As it turned out, Nienstedt did not lie, but neither was he accurate. He did not know that two priests who had been accused of "boundary violations" were still in ministry. Their inappropriate behavior was not criminal and did not involve sexual abuse. Still, their status became a source of controversy. Two months later they agreed to a leave of absence; this was subsequent to a review by a Los Angeles firm, hired by the archdiocese, to see if there were any active clergy members in ministry with allegations against them.

In 2014, Nienstedt learned of an accused priest who escaped supervision. Though the priest was told not to celebrate Mass, he occasionally did so on weekends. He retired in 1998, and was the subject of allegations made against him in the 1980s about inappropriate behavior dating back to the early 1960s. As soon as Archbishop Nienstedt found out about this priest's violation of trust, he had his faculties removed.

These constitute missteps, but they hardly justify the hysterical reaction against Nienstedt that has taken place. Media reports would have us believe that Nienstedt was involved in a major cover-up of known child molesters. This is patently false and a disservice to a great man. No, his big sin is his orthodoxy, not his decision-making. It is he who has been victimized: anonymous accusers, angry former employees, and a cadre of militants, are out to level him.

Haselberger is the darling of *Commonweal*, Minnesota Public Radio, and SNAP; she spoke at the latter's conference in August. It is a source of great irony that she was suspended by the archdiocese for failing to deal expeditiously with a complaint, yet her signature complaint against the archdiocese is that it didn't move expeditiously to deal with accused priests.

Over the summer, Haselberger submitted an affidavit to Anderson claiming to have endured "months of harassment, threats, and intimidation"; she pledged to provide examples. In fact, she provided not a single example of being threatened by anyone, and the examples that she offered of being harassed and intimidated are so weak they only work to undermine her credibility. Moreover, even she admits to at least 17 occasions where her version of events differed with that of her co-workers.

A week before Haselberger gave her affidavit, *Commonweal* printed a lengthy article detailing what she told them: the archbishop was under investigation for inappropriate sexual

conduct with seminarians and former priests. Nienstedt announced the investigation on the same day, July 1, claiming innocence. She leaked this information after having learned of it from the law firm that was conducting an investigation, a probe initiated by Nienstedt.

Exactly one week after Haselberger's uncontested affidavit was taken, Minnesota Public Radio aired a documentary that featured all the familiar players, complete with piped-in melodramatic music. For an outlet that prides itself on objectivity, it was nothing but a left-wing hit job. That teed things up for Anderson, who conveniently released Haselberger's statement the next day. The day after that, Laurie Goodstein published her story in the *New York Times*, and two days later her newspaper published a scathing editorial on Nienstedt. On the same day, July 18, two journalists, one from the *National Catholic Reporter*, called for the archbishop to resign. This set the tone for Minnesota newspapers which then called for him to resign.

We decided to do a little investigating of our own: I asked the staff to research the internal policies that these media outlets have on employee misconduct, including violations of the law. A senior PR person from the *Star Tribune* initially got back to us saying we would hear from someone in the editorial office. But no one ever contacted us.

The *St. Cloud Times* is a Gannett paper, and the parent company has a policy on what to do when an employee learns of "violations of the law or Company policy." It says nothing about reporting law violations to the authorities; all they need to do is report illegalities to their supervisor. The *New York Times* is the most shameless of them all.

The *Times* has a Business Ethics Policy that if adopted by the bishops would lead to calls for their mass resignation. "Any employee who becomes aware of any conduct that he or she believes to be prohibited by this Policy *or a violation of the*

law...is expected to promptly report the facts forming the basis of that belief or knowledge to any supervisor of the legal department.” (My italics.) In other words, crimes of sexual harassment need not be reported to the authorities. Now what if a false accusation is made against a fellow employee? They are subject “to discipline up to and including termination.” The bishops should adopt this policy.

If this isn't hypocritical enough, consider that the former head honcho of the BBC, Mark Thompson, was made president and CEO of the *New York Times* after it was disclosed that he was told of a cover-up: a scheduled BBC documentary on BBC icon and serial child rapist Jimmy Savile was spiked for political reasons. Thompson wanted nothing to stop his quest to land the coveted *Times* job, so he played dumb. But we subsequently learned that he knew all about the decision to nix the film.

Nienstedt has tried to reach out to the media to tell his side of the story, but what interests them is not his account, it is his sexuality. To be exact, they want to know what he does in bed, and with whom: three media outlets questioned him about his sexual behavior. He told the *Star Tribune*, “No, I'm not gay. And I'm not anti-gay.” When asked by the *Pioneer Press* if he had had sex with men since becoming archbishop, he said, “No. Not even before.” A homosexual reporter for KMSP, Fox 9 Minneapolis, also asked the archbishop about his sexuality.

Those out to get Nienstedt cannot be shamed, but they can be stopped. Unfortunately, too many Catholic activists and writers who know he is being railroaded have gone mute. This must end. We cannot stand by and watch these anti-Catholic zealots carry the day.

FR. MACRAE'S 20 YEARS IN PRISON



Next week marks the 20th anniversary of Father Gordon MacRae's unjust prison sentence. What happened to him is unbelievable. My account of his ordeal was posted today on his website, www.thesestonewalls.com. To read it, click [here](#).

IRELAND'S "MASS GRAVE" HYSTERIA

To read Bill Donohue's special report exposing Ireland's (Tuam) "mass grave" hoax, click [here](#).