

CHEAPENING ANTI-SEMITISM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on an exchange he had with officials from Philly.com:

What is worse than anti-Semitism are bogus charges of it. That is what Philly.com did on August 8. This media outlet is an important source of news in the Philadelphia area, so what it prints must be taken seriously.

It has twice embarrassed itself this week: first, by publishing an article by John Baer that makes not-so-veiled accusations of anti-Semitism, where there is none; and second, by defending him.

Baer was writing about my criticisms of the Pennsylvania grand jury report on six dioceses in the state. One of my complaints is that the Catholic Church was the only institution to merit a grand jury report, though the problem of sexual abuse occurs in every private and public institution where adults interact with minors. Indeed, the public schools in Pennsylvania have one of the worst records in the nation, yet they never come under scrutiny.

Here is what Baer had to say about my criticisms:

A statement from league president Bill Donohue argues Shapiro singled out the church: 'A grand jury report on sexual misconduct in any institution could also serve the prurient interests of the public.'

This is the ever-popular everybody-does-it defense. But crimes are crimes. And crimes committed against children are the worst. Especially when committed by clergy. Then covered up. Why wouldn't any prosecutor always go after the worst?

I suspect among hard-core church supporters there's an ugly undercurrent of, well, you know, Shapiro's Jewish, as is

former Philly DA Lynne Abraham, who released the '05 report. And isn't that a little suspicious?

No. That's a little anti-Semitic.

And as for me? I still hope there's a hell.

Here is my complaint:

Mr. Fitzgerald,

I am copying John Martin on this complaint because I have dealt with him before and found him to be honorable.

My complaint is straightforward. In a column posted today by John Baer on Philly.com, he ends his article ('Looking back, looking ahead at Catholic clergy sex abuse') by accusing me of being 'a little anti-Semitic.' His evidence? I critically mentioned Lynne Abraham and Josh Shapiro in a news release.

I would like an apology and a retraction.

Please check the Catholic League website for several other statements I have made recently about the grand jury report and you will see that I have also mentioned people such as Mark Rozzi, Seth Williams, and Kathleen Kane. According to Baer's logic, that would make me anti-Italian (Rozzi), anti-black (Williams), and anti-Catholic (all three). Indeed, it would make him both anti-Irish and anti-Catholic for simply criticizing me.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bill Donohue
President
Catholic League

Here is his response:

Mr. Donohue,

Thank you for writing. My reply is straightforward as well. First, John Baer is an opinion columnist, with wide latitude to sound off on events with his personal reflections on them. Second and most important, Baer did not in this piece accuse you of anti-Semitism. He accurately quoted a statement you issued on behalf of the Catholic League expressing your opinion that Pennsylvania's attorney general had unfairly singled out the Church for prurient reasons. Later, Baer says he 'suspects' that there may be an 'undercurrent of anti-Semitism' among some of the most intense critics of Attorney General Shapiro. He does not accuse you personally of anything.

I respect your position and have given your complaint serious consideration, but in this case believe that no apology or retraction is necessary.

Respectfully,
Thomas Fitzgerald
Politics and Governing Editor
The Philadelphia

Here is my reply to him:

Mr. Fitzgerald,

You are dancing on the head of a pin. Yes, Baer did not directly accuse me of anti-Semitism but he certainly implied as much. For him to do that to a person who combats discrimination and defamation—and who works cooperatively with Jews—is scurrilous.

By the way, opinion columnists have responsibilities, as well as reporters. If Baer had made an anti-Semitic remark, I am sure he would hear it from you.

I have one last request: Let me know if you discussed this matter with Baer (I am not asking for the contents of the discussion).

Thanks,
Bill Donohue

Anti-Semitism is cheapened when people like Baer make false accusations. It is worsened when people like Fitzgerald defend him.

Contact: tfitzgerald@phillynews.com