

FOES BASH CATHOLIC CHURCH

Scandal brings out the worst in some friends, as well as many foes. Some of those organizations associated with the “pro-Church” side are using news reports of clergy sexual abuse as a pretext to raise money (as if they are going to do something constructive with the cash), while a lot of the Church’s foes are going for the jugular. Both are exploitative, though only the latter are motivated by hate.

The letters-to-the editor page in many newspapers, as well as the op-ed page, are rife with anger visited on the Catholic Church by professed ex-Catholics and atheists. For example, Timothy Egan, a self-confessed “somewhat lapsed” Catholic, argues that the Church’s teachings on sexuality “have no connection to the words of Jesus.”

This is the kind of sophomoric comment we might expect from a high school dropout, not an op-ed columnist for the *New York Times*. Perhaps the Jesuit-educated Egan missed last Sunday’s Gospel: Jesus condemned “unchastity,” “adultery,” and “licentiousness,” among other sins.

Garry Wills, another angry ex-Catholic, also fantasizes that Jesus did not advocate sexual reticence. In the pages of the *New York Review of Books*, the former seminarian accused the Church of promoting “sexual sillinesses” by counseling against such things as “gender choice” and “abortion.” Wills thinks it is not silly for a cross-dressing man to conclude that he is a woman, or for a pregnant woman to conclude that she is not carrying a human being.

“Are You an Atheist? How to Leave the Catholic Church.” That is the title of a piece by Andrew Hall on patheos.com. “Common Heathens” is a podcast that is reveling in news stories of old cases of clergy abuse, as is the “Naked Diner Podcast”; both are available on patheos.

Freedom From Religion Foundation, an extremist atheist entity, is begging the public for money so it can get Catholics to quit the Church. American Atheists and the Center for Inquiry have sent out “Action Alerts” targeting the Catholic Church. And Americans United for Separation of Church and State, founded as an expressly anti-Catholic organization, is beating the drums for more investigations of the Church.

This is what we have come to expect. Not one of these persons or media outlets has said a word about current cases of the sexual molestation of minors taking place in venues outside the Catholic Church. It is not the victims of sexual abuse who energize them; it is who the alleged victimizers are.

So why would they specifically go after the Catholic Church and give everyone else a pass? Egan and Wills provide the answer: What animates them is a deep-seated hostility to the teachings of the Church on matters sexual. Their goal is to deny the Biblical source of those teachings—even though the strictures are grounded in Scripture—so that Catholics will push for more relaxed rulings.

Ironically, it is libertinism—the exact opposite of the Church’s teachings—that created the scandal in the first place. But the truth does not matter to ideologues—winning does.