

IRISH NUNS CONDEMNED; EVIDENCE LACKING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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