

MEDIA BARRAGE ON THE CHURCH; THE QUEST FOR DIRT

The year ended with a barrage of media stories on the Catholic Church, the likes of which we've not seen for some time. What made this flurry of negative stories so different is that they were mostly non-stories. In other words, the media ran articles about clergy sexual abuse that failed to uncover anything new.

There is no new wave of sexual abuse stories bursting on the scene. Knowing this to be true, the media reported on old cases of abuse that dated back to World War II. Obviously, many of the accusers, and the alleged offenders, are dead. So what was the point, other than to shame the Church?

Then there were stories based purely on anecdote. Journalists use anecdotes to embellish a story, to give it a human face, amidst lots of number crunching. But that is not what happened in year-end reporting. The stories went nowhere.

Another round of stories focused on priests who have been laicized for misconduct. The media faulted the Church for not "supervising" ex-priests, as if it had the legal authority to do so.

There were "investigative" reports with Catholics who went before diocesan review boards; these panels are charged with determining whether an allegation is true or not. As with any such probe, we expect to learn of a range of experiences, from satisfactory to unsatisfactory. But not this time. In one major story, only negative comments were reported.

In every instance, we fought back, setting the record straight. We also enlisted the support of those who receive our emails, and they did not hold back. We know because we read what the media outlets said in their defense.

We also did something the media abhor: We investigated them. To be exact, we sought to see how they handled employees who were let go for sexual misconduct. As you might expect, they did not keep tabs on them, much less “supervise” them, yet they were quick to condemn the Church for not policing former priests accused of sexual improprieties.

We checked to see if other religious organizations were subjected to this kind of scrutiny. None were. We checked to see if some secular institutions experienced a barrage of similar media stories. None did.

We have not seen the end of this. There are 15 states that are in the process of investigating the Catholic Church for past instances of wrongdoing, and five others may elect to do so. They will harp on old cases, and make it sound as if nothing has changed.

This needs to be called for what it is—a scam.