

NETFLIX FILM ON CHURCH IS SCURRILOUS

Bill Donohue comments on a Netflix documentary series, "The Keepers," that will premiere on May 19:

Netflix is about to air a series that imputes the integrity of the Archdiocese of Baltimore for its handling of a miscreant priest from the 1960s. It relies heavily on conjecture and voodoo psychology. It must: it lacks the evidence to make its case. But it will surely feed the appetite of those ready to believe the worst about the Church.

The series focuses on the unresolved murder of Sister Cathy Cesnik. It invites the audience to consider whether she was killed to cover-up sexual abuse at the high school where she worked, Archbishop Keough in Baltimore.

Was the Archdiocese of Baltimore involved in the cover-up? The film dances around the issue, but the implication is clear. Importantly, there is no evidence to support its thesis, but who cares? The goal is to indict by innuendo.

No one disputes that Father Joseph Maskell sexually molested students at the high school in the 1960s. The question is whether he had anything to do with the murder of the nun. No one knows.

The docu-series relies heavily on the testimony of one woman. She says she was sexually abused by Father Maskell in the late 1960s. She also alleges that he passed her around to cops, businessmen, and local officials, all of whom abused her. She says she told this to Sister Cathy shortly before she disappeared. She also claims that Father Maskell took her to see the nun's body, warning her about her fate should she squeal.

Here are some inconvenient facts that the series fails to acknowledge.

- The alleged victim never said a word to the officials in the Baltimore archdiocese after she was allegedly molested and after the priest allegedly threatened her. She never called the cops, either. Indeed, she never came forward until 1992.
- Sister Cathy's body was found by two hunters at a Baltimore dump on January 3, 1970, almost two months after her last sighting. The Baltimore County Police began its investigation at this time.
- The case remained open and was extremely active through 1977. The police never got a single phone call from witnesses or victims alleging abuse from anyone associated with the Catholic Church.
- Neither the archdiocese nor the cops were made aware of Father Maskell's abusive behavior until 1992. He was immediately removed from ministry for evaluation and treatment.
- The archdiocese reported the allegation to the civil authorities. That is when Father Maskell was investigated by the police.
- In 1994, after two other students subsequently make accusations against the priest, the archdiocese called the cops. Father Maskell was removed from public ministry.
- Detectives are asked to evaluate the charge that Father Maskell took the initial complainant to see Sister Cathy's body, threatening her. They find inconsistencies in her story.
- After a lengthy police interview, Father Maskell is not considered a suspect and is let go. He dies in 2001.

This is obviously a sad story. But there is no evidence that the Archdiocese of Baltimore did anything wrong. Indeed, it did everything right.

Why did the accusing woman who is at the center of this story wait until the 1990s to report what allegedly happened in the 1960s? “Repressed memory,” we are told.

- The American Psychology Association studied this issue and concluded that “Most people who were sexually abused as children remember all or part of what happened to them.”
- The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the Bible of the American Psychiatric Association, does not recognize the scientific validity of “repressed memories.”
- “Researchers at Harvard Medical School concluded that “repressed memory” is a cultural creation having no basis in science.
- In 2012, clinical psychologists and authors from the University of Nevada, Reno, studied the literature on this subject and concluded that “there is a large amount of scientific evidence that clearly shows that repressed memories simply do not exist. Furthermore research studies involving traumatic events that have been verified indicate that people do not forget their trauma. Indeed, traumatic events are actually quite memorable.”

So what would the top brass at Netflix do if they learned of a similar accusation made by a former employee against one of its officials? Would they call the cops? Hopefully, they would. We don’t know. Would they immediately remove the accused from his job—the way the archdiocese did—or would they allow him to continue until the case was resolved? How would they react if I decided to do a movie about them?

Had those behind this Netflix documentary spent more time discussing the script with the Archdiocese of Baltimore before moving forward, they may have dropped it altogether. But they didn’t—they sought very little input. That is why “The Keepers” is so scurrilous: it indicts without evidence.