

# NEW YORK TIMES TRIES TO TAG POPE—AGAIN!

In July, the *New York Times* ran a front-page article that attempted to blame Pope Benedict XVI for the sexual abuse scandal. As it did in March, the paper failed to do so.

In the article, we were told that when Joseph Ratzinger (now the pope) was in charge of the Office of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he had authority over sex abuse cases, but never exercised it. It cited as evidence some old instructions dating back to 1922 that Australian Archbishop Philip Edward Wilson “stumbled across” when he was a student in the early 1990s. When he mentioned this 10 years ago at a Vatican meeting, “few people in the room had any idea what [he] was talking about.” In other words, there is no proof that even Ratzinger knew of this alleged authority.

“Bishops had a variety of disciplinary tools at their disposal” when Ratzinger headed the Doctrine of the Faith Office. This is not only true; it undercuts attempts to blame him. We also learned that there were at least a half-dozen offices (besides the one run by Ratzinger) that bishops reported abuse cases to. This is also true, and while it does suggest a bureaucratic problem, this is not the same as moral irresponsibility.

We also learned that Ratzinger was preoccupied with all kinds of issues at the time, which is also true, but it is malicious to say he went after Latin American priests for preaching on behalf of the poor: the few liberation theology priests who were questioned were Marxist sympathizers.

The most accurate summation came from Irish Bishop Eamonn Walsh. At the meeting a decade ago, he said of Ratzinger, “This guy gets it, he’s understanding the situation we’re

facing." Yet he also acknowledged that those in Rome never had firsthand experience with some devious priests, and therefore took the position that the accused was "innocent until proven guilty." Not only is this understandable, from a civil libertarian perspective, it is highly commendable.