

NOTHING JUSTIFIES COLLECTIVE GUILT

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How many times have we been told—rightly so—that it is wrong to say that all Jews are like Shylock? Or that it is wrong to cast all blacks as Sambo? Or that it is wrong to say that all gays are promiscuous? Or that it is wrong to brand all Italians as gangsters? Or that it is wrong to portray all Irishmen as drunkards? Or that it is wrong to depict all Chinese as inscrutable? Etc.

You get the drift—stereotypes abound for all demographic groups. The problem is that while they are everywhere condemned, there is one exception: When it comes to Catholic priests, it is okay to paint every last one of them as a predator.

The hypocrisy that marks this issue is unbelievable. Let me give you a few quick examples.

Larry Summers is the president of Harvard University. He ended the last academic year in a storm of controversy. Why? Because he offended radical feminists on campus. His offense? He was pointedly asked, in a closed-door meeting at the National Bureau of Economic Research, to make a provocative comment that would stir discussion. So he opined that perhaps the superior achievements of males in math and science might be grounded in nature. That sure stirred discussion—when the faculty found out about it they voted to censure him.

On his ABC talk-radio show over the summer, Michael Graham commented that “Islam is a terror organization.” What followed was a series of protests from the Council on Islamic-American Relations that resulted in Graham getting canned.

This fall, former Secretary of Education and Drug Czar, Bill Bennett, engaged a caller on his radio show on the subject of abortion. The caller said that if we hadn't aborted so many children, the Social Security fund would not be in so much trouble because many more workers would have been contributing to it. Bennett, who is pro-life, was not comfortable with this less-than-principled response, so he said that by such reasoning we could conjecture that if all black babies were aborted, the crime rate would go down.

Bennett's point—a hypothetical case designed to show how dangerous utilitarian arguments can be—was followed with his explicit comment that such reasoning was “morally reprehensible.” No matter, he was quickly condemned by senators, commentators, editorialists and others. Some wanted him fired and even the White House wouldn't defend him against the smear merchants.

Women, Muslims, African-Americans. Make a remark that can be construed as offensive and all hell breaks loose. And many other groups can be added to this list, as well. But not priests.

Why the exception? It is too easy to say it's anti-Catholicism. Of course, it is that. But what accounts for its enduring legacy? It comes down to this: we deserve it. How do I know this? Because I've been told many times by the bigots, that's why. They constantly bring up every sordid chapter in Catholic history—real and contrived—and throw it in our face. Yet there is not a single group or institution in history that doesn't have its dirty laundry. So why is it fair game to bash us and no one else? It all has to do with what we stand for.

We, and by that I mean Catholics and the Catholic Church, acknowledge that there is an objective moral order that colors all societies, and that every one of us will ultimately be held accountable for our behavior. To say this in a Western society today is heresy. It is so radical as to be offensive.

That's because our elites—the opinion makers in the media, Hollywood, publishing industry and the academy—don't want to be told that it is wrong to yield to our most debased appetites. And so when they learn of priests who fail, they rub it in our face. With delight.

There is no reason why we should take this abuse. Who gave them the right to make us their punching bag simply because some bishops and priests have behaved badly? Besides, it is not the teachings of the Catholic Church that have failed us, it's some of our clergy.

What the Catholic bashers want more than anything else is a world in which every individual makes up his own moral code. They hate us because we're the epitome of what they fear most—a people and an institution that tells them that their world is a world that inexorably leads to degradation, despair and death. Without a moral code grounded in Truth, we assert, there is no way civilization can proceed without morally imploding. What they want they cannot have—a world where subjectivism triumphs and moral anarchy is held in check.

Regrettably, not a few Catholics who are angry at those bishops and priests who caused the scandal have let down their guard, refusing to fight the bigots. Some border on being masochistic. Count me out. I'm angry, too, but I'm not about to let the other side bury us.