

PA GRAND JURY REPORT ONE YEAR LATER

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the Pennsylvania grand jury report on the Catholic Church that was released a year ago:

On August 14, 2018 Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro released a grand jury report on six of the eight Catholic dioceses in the state. News reports said he found evidence of 301 priests who abused more than 1,000 children over a period of 70 years.

As I said at the time, and I will say so again, those reports were thrice false: a) not all the alleged offenders were priests b) most of the alleged victims were not children (they were adolescents) and c) the report was not evidentiary—it was investigative—meaning that the accused priests were not given an opportunity to rebut the charges.

What has happened since the report was released? Of the 301 persons named, two wound up facing criminal charges and were sent to prison. Most of the offenders either had already been thrown out of the priesthood or were dead. Shapiro knew this going into his probe, yet he spent a colossal amount of the taxpayers' money on this gambit, simply to make a name for himself. In doing so he followed in the footsteps of others.

From the beginning, the investigations of the Catholic Church were classic cases of religious profiling. To be exact, never once did Shapiro, or any of his predecessors, conduct an investigation into any other institution, religious or secular. Nor has Shapiro done so in the past year. It is only the Catholic Church these top cops like to pursue.

The first investigation into the sexual abuse of minors in the Catholic Church that was conducted by a Pennsylvania executive

occurred in 2001. It was also the start of the religious profiling probes. Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham was given a specific charge "to investigate the sexual abuse of minors by individuals associated with religious organizations and denominations." She never did. She chose only the Catholic Church: Jews, Muslims, and Protestants were all given a pass. And, of course, the public schools were never of any interest to her.

In 2005, Abraham gave up: not a single priest was prosecuted. That's because she could not prosecute old cases, something she knew from the get-go. In other words, she ripped off the taxpayers, making them pay for her wild goose chase.

In 2011, Abraham's successor, Seth Williams, tried to outdo her. He wanted to bring down the archbishop of Philadelphia, but that didn't work out too well for him. Instead, he brought down himself. In 2017, he was sentenced to five years in prison on multiple counts of bribery, extortion and fraud. He even robbed money set aside to pay for his own mother's nursing home care, using it to fund his lavish lifestyle. He was taken out of court in handcuffs.

Next up was the beginning of the state efforts to get the Catholic Church. In 2014, a grand jury was seated by Attorney General Kathleen Kane. She wanted to bring down the Catholic hierarchy as well. But like Williams, that didn't work out too well for her. Instead, she brought down herself. In 2016, she was sentenced to 10-23 months in prison for committing multiple felonies: she leaked sealed, confidential grand jury documents to the media and then lied under oath. She was taken out of court in handcuffs.

Kane had no legitimate reason to start her probe. Ironically, it all began when a bishop contacted the local authorities about offenses that came to his attention committed by someone under his watch. Had he said nothing, there would have been no grand jury investigation by either Kane or Shapiro. Instead of

commending the bishop, Kane took advantage of his honesty to go after the Catholic Church throughout the state.

In November 2011, Bishop Mark Bartchak, who headed the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, learned of offenses committed by Brother Stephen Baker in the 1990s at Bishop McCort Catholic High School in Johnstown. He immediately notified the authorities. The police never contacted Cambria County District Attorney Kathleen Callihan; once she learned of this case, she decided not to start a grand jury probe. Instead, she asked for a state investigation, handing the matter over to Attorney General Kane.

Now imagine for a moment if a public school superintendent in central Pennsylvania were to turn in a teacher believed to have sexually abused a student. Imagine further that the local district attorney decides to contact the state's attorney general—instead of conducting his own probe—and this leads to an investigation of every school district in the state. And that, in turn, triggers state investigations of the public schools throughout the nation.

This would never happen, not in a million years. To this day, the public school industry is protected in Pennsylvania, even though the Associated Press reported five years ago that the Keystone State ranked No. 2 in teacher sex crimes in the nation. It is also protected in every other state, shielded by the teachers' unions and the politicians they fund.

The politics of sexual abuse is almost as disgusting as sexual abuse. We've been played. This is not about justice—it's about selectively choosing one class of offenders to prosecute. It's called religious profiling. It ought to be as invidious as racial profiling, but obviously it is not.