

PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF CHURCH IS PREDICTABLE

Almost three in four Americans, 73%, think the Catholic Church has a serious problem with sexual predators among its clergy; most Catholics feel the same way. That is the central finding of a new Rasmussen survey. Also, only 15% think the media are overhyping the problem, and 12% are not sure. The perception is as predictable as it is erroneous.

Why wouldn't the public think the Church has a problem with predator priests? That's exactly the perception given by many news outlets today.

Regrettably, most Americans get their news either from brief social media accounts or radio and TV sound bites: what they get are abbreviated stories with sensationalistic headlines. The same is true of newspapers, most of which lack the resources to do in-depth reporting. Add to this clear instances of media bias against the Church, and the picture is complete—molesting priests are on the prowl in 2018.

This false perception grew out of the twin summer scandals of 2018: (a) revelations about Theodore McCarrick's predatory behavior (he was forced to resign as a cardinal), and (b) the Pennsylvania grand jury report on alleged sexual abuse by priests.

Though many news accounts made a passing reference to the dated nature of these cases—most of McCarrick's offenses took place in the 1980s and most of the Pennsylvania allegations occurred decades ago—the impression that Americans were left with is that nothing much has changed since the abuse scandal became a big story in 2002.

In fact, much has changed. The Dallas norms of 2002 established by the bishops have worked: in the past two years

for which we have data, .005% of the clergy have had a credible accusation made against them. Also, thanks to Pope Benedict XVI's 2005 edict on screening out men with "deep-seated homosexual tendencies" from studying for the priesthood, huge strides have been made in busting the network of gay cells in the seminaries. This matters because 8 in 10 of the molesting priests have been homosexuals.

What the public is not told is that Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro has admitted that only two of the 301 accused men mentioned in the grand jury report (not all of whom were priests) could be prosecuted under the statute of limitations today. Two. That's because almost all of the alleged cases occurred in the last century. Yet the public thinks the problem is on-going.

It's not just the media that are responsible for floating a false narrative of the Catholic Church, it's their left-wing friends in Hollywood and the academy. Their goal is to intimidate the clergy from speaking out about moral issues, thus allowing their libertine views on sexuality to triumph.

Joining the agenda-driven enemies of the Church are an astonishing number of conservatives. Angered by the twin scandals, many Catholic conservatives are sounding the alarms, acting as if nothing has changed. There is an odor of self-righteous moralizing present in their quarters, and a liberal dose of lay clericalism to boot: They are going to rescue the Church from degradation.

To be sure, there are some things that must be done. We need to know who knew what and when about McCarrick, and we need assurances that the seminaries are free of the homosexual network today. What we don't need are endless panels and grand jury investigations about what happened decades ago, all of which feed the false public perception that no progress has been made.