

SEXUAL ABUSE EXTENDS BEYOND THE CHURCH

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on sexual misconduct as a society-wide problem:

Sexual misconduct is a ubiquitous phenomenon, sparing no institution. Moreover, it is hardly unique to our age. Yet by reading news stories, as well as commentaries by pundits, this would not be so evident. These sources would have us believe that the Catholic Church is the worst offender. There is no evidence to support this claim.

The latest media source to float this invidious myth is the *Philadelphia Inquirer*; its editorial of November 19 is scurrilous.

After indicting the bishops—all the bishops—it makes a comment that simply cannot be defended. “Yes, there have been sexual-abuse scandals at other institutions,” it says, “including public schools, universities, other religious organizations, the media, politics, and Hollywood. But nowhere has the abuse been as widespread and accountability so disregarded.”

How in the world could any newspaper, or for that matter any social scientist, make such a statement? Where are the comparative data?

For example, there is no national databank that collects and publishes sexual abuse by public school teachers or administrators. Worse, calls for such a repository *always go unanswered*: the educational establishment and the teachers’ unions see to that. And the media routinely give them a pass.

The only data we have on the public schools come from journalists at the Associated Press and *USA Today*. What they found, in 2007 and 2016, respectively, is astounding: sexual

abuse of elementary and secondary students is widespread. Even more outrageous, accountability is lacking. “Passing the trash”—moving molesting teachers from one school district to another—*is still going on* (in the past, some bishops were guilty of moving offending priests to other parishes, but that is no longer tolerated).

Fortunately, some stories manage to get published. We know from a research institute at Georgetown University that 42 teachers in Pennsylvania lost their license to educate because of sexual misconduct in 2017. Consider that the Pennsylvania grand jury report on the Catholic Church noted mostly cases from the last century, yet no one is interested in a grand jury for the Pennsylvania public schools.

During the 2017-18 academic year, there were 429 cases of sexual misconduct reported in the Texas public schools, a jump of 42% from the previous year. In 2015, 65 teachers in *one* Los Angeles school district were in “teacher jail” for accusations of sexual misconduct or harassment.

While it is hard to say which city has the worst problem, it appears that few would be able to rival Chicago—sexual abuse of students is systemic.

Yes, we have seen universities implicated as well. Again, we don’t have a databank that records instances of sexual misconduct the way the Catholic Church does, but we know from one such school, Michigan State University, that there were 1,168 such reports that took place during the 2017-18 academic year; this was up from 718 the previous academic year. The *Lansing State Journal* said, “It’s a 63% increase year over year and a more than a four-fold increase from the 2014-15 academic year.”

Regarding other religious organizations, the collection of data on this subject is very spotty. Unlike a hierarchal institution like the Catholic Church, most religious

institutions have no centralized mechanism that compiles evidence of sexual abuse. So we are left with anecdotal information.

In July, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* ran a front-page story on sexual abuse in non-Catholic religious organizations. "Some people assume this is a Catholic problem," said Pastor Jimmy Hinton, a Church of Christ minister from Somerset, Pennsylvania. "It's not, not at all. There are plenty of Protestant and nondenominational churches that cover-up abuse and knowingly pass abusers from church to church, or quietly dismiss a known abuser and don't bother to check up on the abuser and don't know where they settled."

Similarly, anyone who reads the Jewish newspapers knows that the sexual abuse of minors is a big problem, especially among Orthodox Jewish rabbis. The cover-up is incredible: they have their own rabbinical courts that try these cases, sidestepping the civil and criminal courts. If the Catholic Church held its own canonical courts—bypassing the authorities—it would be the lead story in every media outlet nationwide.

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial mentions the media, as well it should. CBS, NBC, and Fox News, in particular, have been ravaged with serial abusers at the highest level, and nothing was done about it until recently.

Politics is cited as well. Where do we begin? There have been so many predators, and so little accountability by the leadership in the Republican and Democratic parties, it is mind-boggling.

Ditto for Hollywood. From Harvey Weinstein to Louis C.K., sexual misconduct has been rampant in Tinseltown for decades. We still don't have a good accounting of all the kids who have been raped.

The editorial should have mentioned the medical profession as well. In 2016, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* found that

more than 2,400 doctors from every state have been sanctioned for sexually abusing their patients. But in more than half the cases, state medical boards, which oversee physician licenses, allowed more than half these doctors to keep their licenses, even in instances where the accusations were deemed to be true.

What the newspaper found was disturbing. "Rapes by OB/GYNS, seductions by psychiatrists, fondling by anesthesiologists and ophthalmologists, and molestations by pediatricians and radiologists." Whom did they violate? "Victims were babies. Adolescents. Women in their 80s. Drug addicts and jail inmates. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse."

The editorial never mentioned the tech sector. More than 20,000 Google workers staged a walkout across the globe on November 8 to protest the way it treats sexual misconduct. A senior executive received a \$90 million exit package *after he was credibly accused of sexual misconduct*. Forced arbitration, confidentiality agreements, and a general lack of transparency figured prominently in the protest.

But there will be no editorial in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* blasting these segments of society.

Nor will there be any nationwide push to demand that the Human Resources department in every organization in the nation be required to collect data on sexual offenses, or that a databank be established—especially in the public sector—to track accusations and their disposition.

Why the disinterest? This isn't about protecting the innocent—if that were true no institution would be spared intense scrutiny—it's about "getting the Church."

Why? Because the name of the game is to enervate the moral voice of the Catholic Church, paving the way for greater sexual freedom. This is clueless beyond belief: the emancipation of the id has never led to a greater exercise of

liberty; rather, it has led to more sexual misconduct, the very problem the Church's critics say they want to check.

Contact Sandra Shea, managing editor, opinion:
sshea@phillynews.com