

SLEIGHT OF HAND

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The collectivization of guilt, and the individualization of merit, is a common media trick, especially when covering Catholics. For example, if there is a wayward cop, and he is Catholic, look for the reporter to cite his religious status. "Patrick McGillicudy, a former altar boy, was arraigned today on charges of police brutality." What you will never see is, "Patrick McGillicudy, a former altar boy, risked his life today to save a woman from her assailant."

Choosing when to play the identity card tells us a great deal about the kind of bias being nurtured. So does the refusal to do so. Recently, Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor was interviewed on "The View" about her life. As readers of this journal know, the ABC show is not exactly Catholic friendly. But the ladies treated the judge well, making plain her many accomplishments. By anyone's lights, Sotomayor is clearly a Catholic success story. Too bad the audience didn't learn that.

Viewers were told that the Puerto Rican judge grew up in the Bronx, and that she survived the projects (the low-income tenements). She made her way to Yale and eventually to Princeton Law School. What was not mentioned was her apprenticeship—Catholic schools. The blame goes to the panel, and to Sotomayor herself: she attended a Catholic elementary school and a noted Catholic high school, Cardinal Spellman. But this never came up.

To mention her Catholic school training would have interfered with the desired narrative: the gals on "The View" called her "super smart," and she responded by saying, "I'm stubborn." You get the point: her success was purely the result of her own individual talents and characteristics, not the Catholic

schools that developed her attributes. This was as deliberate as it was deceitful.

Another sleight of hand was evident when a woman from NETWORK contacted us; it is an organization of radical nuns. In a news release I wrote about President Obama and Vice President Biden, I mentioned how the vice president met with about 20 religious leaders, and that the only Catholic cited in the press was Sr. Marjorie Clark. The following paragraph that I wrote did not sit well with the organization:

“Sr. Clark is one of seven ‘nuns on the bus’ who campaigned for President Obama last fall: only two nuns made the entire trip. She belongs to NETWORK, a dissident group of elderly nuns who are known for never siding with the pro-life community. Indeed, this group is so radical that its founder, Sr. Marjorie Tuite, was threatened with expulsion from her order after she signed a pro-abortion petition in the 1980s.”

That was on May 7. Two days later, I received an email from Stephanie Niedringhaus at the organization. “Your most recent criticism of Sister Marge Clark included numerous inaccuracies. Because you have mentioned our organization and staff before, I would invite you to do some basic fact-checking before spreading erroneous information about us in the future. I hope we can agree that truth is always the best way to go.”

My response, offered by one of my staff members at my request, said, “In reply to your email, Mr. Donohue does not respond to generalities; you need to be specific.” Her response: “My message was quite specific. I’m asking him to check his facts in the future. Thanks for your courteous response.”

Self-delusion is often a reflection of a large ego. But in this case, it was simply a sleight of hand. Then there is Tom Moran. He is the editorial page editor of the *Star-Ledger* who first demanded that Newark Archbishop John Myers resign. I

retaliated by demanding that he and the rest of the board resign. After getting blasted with angry emails from our side, he asked if I would agree to be interviewed by him for the newspaper. I agreed.

We talked for about a half hour on May 6th, and at times it got quite contentious, though it ended cordially. I looked for the story but it never ran. Over a week later, he explained why. "By the way, I never printed a transcript of our conversation. It turned out to be a very tough one to boil down to a short piece, and I gave up."

The travesty of justice in Philadelphia, given much coverage in the following pages, involves many guilty parties. The grand jury reports contain more than 20 factual errors, misrepresentations we are trying to rectify. That they have been allowed to stand, effectively smearing the reputations of innocent priests, is unconscionable.

When the media want a story to catch, they are very good at getting the word out. The obverse is also true. The media blackout on the bishops' conference's annual report on clergy abuse is a case in point. Because this problem is all but non-existent anymore, the media decided there was nothing to report.

While there is much to criticize about the media, I would be lying if I said most of my encounters with reporters and commentators have been bad. Most have been fair.

In any event, the good news is that the mainstream media no longer have a monopoly on disseminating the news. We're happy to play our role in making sure that monopoly never returns.