

USA TODAY SLAMS CHURCH FOR DEFENDING ITSELF

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on an article posted October 2 on the website of USA TODAY on priestly sexual abuse:

Marisa Kwiatkowski is a young reporter for USA TODAY. Her colleague, John Kelly, is a middle-age reporter. For the sake of argument, let's say they are both much older, in their late sixties. Let's also imagine that they have been accused of sexual misconduct by a cub reporter when they were in their early thirties.

Nothing can be done about their alleged misconduct because the accuser came forward only yesterday, and the claim is beyond the statute of limitations. But a new law is being considered that would suspend the statute of limitations for one year, allowing old cases to be adjudicated. The law, however, only applies to those who work in journalism. If someone was molested by a priest or a rabbi, the new law would not apply.

What would Marisa and John have to say about that? Would they protest, arguing that the law was unjust because it singled out journalists? What if they enlisted the support of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) and it agreed to tap an army of lawyers to fight the bill—wouldn't they feel that was justified? And how would they react if their critics called them every name in the book, branding them and the SPJ "criminals" for skirting punishment for their outrageous behavior?

We all know what they would say. Which is why they are such phonies. The authors have done to the clergy and the Catholic Church what they would find despicable if done to them and their profession.

According to the logic outlined in their 3700-word story, it is callous, if not cruel, for bishops to fight legislation that singles out the Catholic Church under a law that suspends the statute of limitations in cases of sexual abuse. The bishops are supposed to keep their mouths shut, never alerting the faithful to the fact that the law has zero application to those who work outside the Catholic Church.

Obviously, the Catholic Church pushes back against lawmakers who never have the guts to include public school employees—teachers who rape their students—in such legislation. Should it be the only institution in the nation not to defend itself against unjust legislation?

We at the Catholic League have fought hard for decades trying to establish a level playing field, and we apologize to no one for doing so. Guess what happens when we succeed and the public schools are covered? The public school establishment rolls out its big-time lawyers to fight it.

The authors also find it unjust that the Catholic Church complains about adjudicating old cases. Do they have any idea why we have statutes of limitation on the books? Have they ever heard of due process? How can it reasonably be determined if the accused is guilty when the alleged offense took place decades ago?

The reporters think they've hit gold when they "ran 10 of the church's opposition statements—including news releases and letters to government officials and to parishioners—through a language-processing algorithm, searching for commonalities." Guess what their high-tech gimmick found? The Church frequently says that the unjust legislation they are fighting against is "unjust." The sophistry of the reporters is stunning.

The story gets even sillier when we read about some alleged victim who "did not remember being the victim of abuse as a

child...until she was 40.” Really? And why was that? If the reporters were on their game, they would know what a discredited concept the notion of repressed memory is. The scientific literature is near unanimous in concluding that the more heinous the offense, *the less likely it is not to be remembered.*

What makes this USA TODAY story so astonishing is its failure to mention the outstanding report done by USA TODAY in December 2016: it exposed what is going on in the public schools. The title of the report says it all. “Teachers Who Sexually Abuse Students Still Find Classroom Jobs: Despite Decades of Scandals, America’s Schools Still Hide Actions Of Dangerous Educators.”

The story is riveting. “A year-long USA TODAY Network investigation found that education officials put children in harm’s way by covering up evidence of abuse, keeping allegations secret and making it easy for abusive teachers to find jobs elsewhere.” It correctly noted that Congress passed a law in 2015 “requiring states to ban school districts from secretly passing problem teachers to other jurisdictions or face losing federal funds.” And what happened? “But 45 states have not instituted a ban.”

Why didn’t the authors of the USA TODAY story draw on this study? Wouldn’t that have put the issue in context? Or would that have gotten in the way of their narrative?

The Catholic Church has made enormous strides in combating sexual abuse. Indeed, as I have said many times before, there is no institution today, secular or religious, that has *less of a problem with sexual misconduct than the Catholic Church.* But one would never know this by reading this USA TODAY story.

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AMAZON SYNOD FACES REAL DILEMMAS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the upcoming Amazon synod:

The upcoming Amazon Synod of Bishops, October 6-27, has generated a lot of controversy, much of it dealing with the prospect of “married men of virtue” in the Amazon region being ordained as priests. That, and much more, is discussed in the synod’s working document.

There is a larger issue, however, that poses a real dilemma for the Church: how to respect the culture of indigenous peoples while at the same time acknowledging inherent deficiencies in it. An even bigger problem is coming to terms with the logical prescriptions for progress and the anti-modernist vision of the working document on this subject.

Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino notes the working document “seems to consider the Indians or original peoples and culture as the whole of the Amazonian population, not taking into account the urban and *criollas* (white and mixed-race) population of cities and towns.” The Venezuelan cardinal is correct. I would go even further.

Sociologist Steven Goldberg, in his landmark book, *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*, which explained why every society in the history of the world has been ruled by men, noted that there has never been an “Amazonian society.” What exists in the hinterlands of Brazil, and nearby territories, are mostly tribes. It is these tribal peoples that the working document addresses. Who are these people? Are they primitive, at least by our Western standards? The working document finds the terms

“savages” and “primitive” to be an example of “contempt for the people and customs of the Amazon territory.” To be sure, racists have seized on such terms as a way to denigrate the people in this part of the world, but is it accurate to say that such terminology is inherently racist?

I raise this question because many social scientists would find fault with such a dismissive attitude. No anthropologist did more to challenge the conventional wisdom of the noble savage—in the Amazon region—than Napoleon Chagnon. His book, *Yanomami: The Fierce People*, detailed how incredibly violent these Indians were. “Yanomami life was one of ‘incessant warfare,’” he said. In fact, “men who killed were more highly esteemed and had more wives and children than men who did not.”

Despite politically motivated attempts to smear his reputation, Chagnon was elected to the National Academy of Scientists in 2012.

In short, there is nothing noble about savages—quite the opposite. This must be said because the working document offers a romanticized portrait of the indigenous people of the Amazon region. Over and over again we learn how “connected” they are to each other and to nature, and how corrupt the developed world is. Consider the following excerpts.

- “A contemplative, attentive and respectful look at their brothers and sisters, and also at nature—the brother tree, the sister flower, the sisters birds, the brothers fish, and even the smallest sisters like ants, larvae, fungi or insects—allows the Amazonian communities to discover how everything is connected....”
- “The care of life [that they exhibit] is opposed to the throwaway culture, to the culture of exploitation, oppression and *lying*.” (My italic.)
- “Everything is shared; private spaces, so typical of modernity, are minimal. Life proceeds on a communal path

where tasks and responsibilities are distributed and shared for the sake of the common good. There is no place for the idea of an individual detached from the community or its territory.”

- “The Amazon cosmovision and the Christian worldview are both in crisis due to the imposition of mercantilism, secularization, the throwaway culture, and idolatry of money.”
- “The original peoples of the Amazon have much to teach us.”
- “The invasion of huge so-called ‘development’ projects which actually destroy both lands and peoples” is decried, citing “hydroelectric projects” that cause much “pain.”
- Also denounced are the “agents of the techno-economic model,” and “infrastructural mega-projects like hydroelectric dams and international highways.”

According to this portrait, it would be better for these people not to adopt the ways of the developed nations. Yet even the authors of the working document call attention to the backward ways of the people in this region. “Inefficiency of health/sanitation services” are noted. There is also a “Lack of quality in education and dropping out of school.” The public authorities are cited for responding slowly to developing “infrastructure and the promotion of employment.”

This is the dilemma for the bishops: How can the well being of the indigenous peoples be improved if modern methods are rejected? Take health care. This is how current conditions are described in the working document. “Health care of the inhabitants involves detailed knowledge of medicinal plants and other traditional elements that are part of the healing process.”

Should such quaint practices be encouraged or would it be more humane to introduce them to modern medicine? Why is it considered respectful to allow them to live in the dark ages

when they don't have to? Can sanitation services be expected to improve, and can infrastructure be built, if there is an animus to the "techno-economic model" and "international highways"? No matter, it seems the authors of the working document have made up their minds.

"Faced with these new diseases, inhabitants are forced to buy medicines from pharmaceutical companies using the same plants from the Amazon. Once marketed, these same drugs are beyond their financial reach for reasons that include patenting of drugs and overpricing. Therefore, it is proposed to value traditional medicine, the wisdom of the elders and indigenous rituals, and at the same time to facilitate access to medicines that cure new diseases."

If the contradictions evident in this observation have to be explained, then the situation is hopeless.

It is striking to read some of the suggestions by well-educated persons from the West. "Reject alliance with the dominant culture and with political and economic power in order to promote the cultures and rights of indigenous people, of the poor and of the territory."

If that is what these people want, then so be it. But it must be noted that this is ineluctably a recipe for stagnation and poverty. Moreover, it is a prescription that the authors have clearly rejected for themselves.

I would like to end on a happy note. The working document is not totally against modernity. Toward the end it recommends greater dissemination of the "infrastructure of media, especially radio stations, which are its principal means of communication."

To that end, I would recommend a special collection for the great work of EWTN, the proceeds of which would finance radio outreach in the Amazon region.