

FLORIDA CBS AFFILIATE MISLEADS VIEWERS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a story that recently aired on a CBS affiliate in Florida:

On January 3, the CBS affiliate in St. Petersburg, Florida, WTSP, posted on its website a news story that read, "Former Sarasota Bishop Charged with Sexually Battering Child." It was about a former bishop at the Westcoast Center for Human Development in Sarasota; he was arrested and charged with battering a child.

We have no problem with that story. But we do have a problem with a similar story on this bishop that was posted the next day. It was titled, "'It's Disheartening': Former Catholic Church Abuse Victim Says Local Bishop Could Have More Victims."

In fact, there was no Catholic bishop charged with sexual abuse—it was the same Protestant bishop mentioned in the first story. The story began by stating that this bishop was "behind bars." Then—out of nowhere—it says that sexual abuse is happening across the country, citing a man who says he was abused 50 years ago by a Catholic priest.

The headline was totally dishonest. Furthermore, mentioning that a Catholic priest victimized someone a half-century ago was as gratuitous as it was scurrilous.

Something broke down. How could this CBS affiliate get it right the first day and then take cheap shots at the Catholic Church the next day—in a story unrelated to the bishop?

It would be like doing a story on a current reporter from a Sarasota newspaper charged with sexual misconduct, and then adding a story about a former WTSP reporter who was accused of

a sexual offense 50 years ago, mentioning WTSP in the headline!

This was not a mistake. It was deliberate.

Contact Kelly Frank, Director of Content: kfrank@wtsp.com

WHAT'S GOING ON AT THE ASSOCIATED PRESS?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the latest attack by the Associated Press (AP) on the Catholic Church:

Something is going on at AP that needs to stop. There is a concerted effort on the part of this American wire service to smear the Catholic Church. This is the third time in the past three months that AP has *unfairly* slammed the Church on the subject of clergy sexual abuse.

In October, AP was critical of the Church for not keeping tabs on priests removed from ministry—as if other institutions monitor the behavior of their former sex offenders. In November, it published anecdotal stories—with no summary evidence—of some Catholics who were unhappy with their diocese for the way it investigated cases of alleged abuse.

Never once did it report that this problem is almost non-existent in the Catholic Church today: the stories are all about dead priests or those who were kicked out of the priesthood. Now it is back again, with another installment of its “investigation.”

“Church Offers Little Outreach to Minority Victims of Priests.” That is the title of the story it released over the

weekend. AP put three reporters on this non-story: they could not come up with one statistic to prove their point that somehow the Church treats minority victims different from non-minority victims.

Even the anecdotes the reporters roll out don't support their thesis. No one claimed that he was treated differently because of his minority status. Didn't an editor catch this? Embarrassing.

It begins with a lie: the reporters say "the church has done little to identify and reach sexual abuse victims." It must be thinking about the public schools. In fact, no institution has established independent compensation programs for alleged victims, asking them to come forward with their story, other than the Catholic Church; many dioceses have followed the lead of the Archdiocese of New York.

The reporters follow up with an accusation that is hollow. They claim that there is no "concerted outreach" to minority victims. That's right. Like every institution in the nation, the Church does not employ bean counters, or play identity politics, in its handling of sexual misconduct.

If AP is unhappy with the Catholic Church for not collecting data on the racial and ethnic profile of alleged victims, perhaps it can open its own books to the public showing how it keeps racial and ethnic data on its miscreants.

Then the story gets worse. It quotes some professor from Case Western Reserve University, Brian Clites, who is supposedly an expert on this subject (I never heard of him). He says the Church has a practice of shipping predator priests to poor minority neighborhoods. What evidence did this "leading scholar on clergy sexual abuse" provide? None. It was his unsupported opinion.

As it turns out, there is a reason why no one knows who this guy is. Clites is not a "leading scholar" of anything. He has

never published a book on any subject. Type his name in the Amazon search engine under “books” and up pops, “Did you mean brian clothes?”

That’s how well known this “leading scholar” is. Oh, yes, there is a listing for him at Case Western and it says he is working on his first book (about alleged victims). Didn’t an editor catch this? Embarrassing.

There is something sinister going on at AP. It is cherry picking the Catholic Church, turning up nothing but old cases of abuse and inane “findings” like the one it just published.

Maybe the managing editor can explain what their game is.

Contact Brian Carovillano: bcarovillano@ap.org

PLAYING FAVORITES WITH TWO POPES

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on reaction to Pope Francis’ altercation with a woman on New Year’s Eve as he walked a line of greeters:

The pope slapped an Asian woman twice on the hand and walked away in a fit of anger. That much is indisputable. Why he did it and what it means is a matter of debate. The Vatican attributed his reaction to being grabbed by the woman as she sought to shake his hand, causing “a shooting pain.”

The larger issue here is the way many in the media treated the pope’s reaction, and how they typically respond when the source of controversy is Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Benedict is rarely given the benefit of doubt when a controversy

arises.

Claire Giangravé wrote a piece for Religion News Service noting the Holy Father apologized for “being grumpy.” The Vatican never indicated that he was grumpy on New Year’s Eve, or that he reacts intemperately when he is.

AFP, the French news agency, blamed the pope’s bodyguards—they should have been more vigilant.

Several commentators blamed the woman.

Dave Armstrong at Patheos said her reaching out to him with both arms was “shocking and staggering.”

International Business Times said the pope’s violent reaction was very “human.”

The Guardian said “the woman would not let go and in a gesture that appeared to cause him pain, he slapped at her hand before pulling his hand free.”

John Allen at Crux blamed the Asian woman as well. He said “it was the grasping woman rather than the pope” who was guilty. He also blamed the pope’s ethnicity, saying “the revelation that an 83-year-old Argentinean male has a temper wasn’t exactly a thunderclap.”

Why is it okay for those on the Left, who are the masters of identity politics, to blame a woman of color while using as exculpatory the pope’s alleged machismo upbringing?

There is a game going on here. We have the good pope, Francis, and the bad pope, Benedict. This is currently being played out on the big screen. Those who have reviewed “The Two Popes” have noted the unfair nature of the contrasting portrayals. This includes *Commonweal*, Bishop Robert Barron, *First Things*, the *Washington Post*, and *Vanity Fair*.

This is nothing new. On March 3, 2014, I published an op-ed ad

in the *New York Times* titled, “Happy Anniversary Holy Father.” On the day of Pope Francis’ first year anniversary, March 13, I mentioned the Catholic League’s tribute to him in a news release. But I also took the opportunity to comment on the way the media were treating Francis and his predecessor.

“What is particularly odious is the increasing tendency of agenda-ridden Catholics to trash Pope Benedict XVI, as well as Blessed Pope John Paul II: this is done so that their inflated image of Pope Francis stands in sharp contrast to Benedict and John Paul II. What they hope to achieve is a sense of momentum—things are moving their way and we need to get in line. Their goal is as transparent as it is dishonest.

“The Catholic League loves all three popes, and we implore everyone to give due recognition to their very different strengths. But to those who constantly look at the world through a political lens, there are good popes (Francis) and bad ones (his predecessors). This is a jaundiced view of reality, and it is unfair to all of them.”

Looks like nothing has changed. There needs to be one level playing field, inside the Church, as well as outside.

DONOHUE RESPONDS TO DETROIT FREE PRESS EDITOR

Catholic League president Bill Donohue responds to the *Detroit Free Press* editor regarding his reply to our [news release](#) of January 2:

Here is what *Detroit Free Press* editor Peter Bhatia wrote in reply to our news release:

Thanks for your e-mail. However, the allegations made by Dr. Donohue are completely without merit. The story was responsible, deeply reported and factual, reporting on a difficult situation that has arisen over time in Catholic boys' schools here. Take the time to read the story and I think you will see it is fair. To borrow a phrase from Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Dr. Donohue is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.

Peter Bhatia

Editor and Vice President, Detroit Free Press and freep.com
Great Lakes regional editor (Michigan and Ohio), USA TODAY Network

Here is Bill Donohue's reply:

Mr. Bhatia's reply is flatulent. He says the story's facts are accurate. That was not my point, and he knows it. My point was that this was a contrived non-story with disjointed accounts spliced together to put a bad face on the Catholic Church. I even gave as an analogue how this might play out if the target were African Americans. His dodge is further proof of the dishonesty and juvenile journalism of the *Detroit Free Press*.

DETROIT FREE PRESS IS AN ABSOLUTE DISGRACE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a news story in the January 2 *Detroit Free Press*:

Let's say you are a reporter who detests the Catholic Church (there are more than a few out there), and would like to do an article that reflects badly on it. You come across a story

that may qualify, but it is rather routine: it is about high school boys acting inappropriately.

Not satisfied that it will really put the Church against the wall, you decide to enhance the piece by trotting out a story about a noted Catholic public figure (Brett Kavanaugh) who was accused of acting offensively when he was in high school. It happened decades ago in some other part of the country, and the charges were never corroborated by anyone, but that doesn't matter. It can be made to fit.

Still not satisfied this will embarrass the Church, you add a story about a Catholic priest who, while having nothing to do with the original story, is serving time for what he did in the 1990s.

The story then ropes back to high school boys today in two Detroit Catholic schools who did something really newsworthy: they got into a brawl following a hockey game.

This 2679-word cut-and-paste "news story" appeared in the January 2nd edition of the *Detroit Free Press*.

If I were the editor of this media outlet, and I also hated the Catholic Church, I would reject this story as a sophomoric piece of journalism that would convince the reader that we have a blatant bias against Catholicism. Yet it passed muster and was printed.

To say this story is disjointed would be an understatement: forcing unconnected stories—stuffing them together without any segue—is what we would expect from a high school student hoping to finally make the honor roll.

If a reporter did a story on African American high school students who acted inappropriately, and added to it a story on O.J.—jamming in a story about Bill Cosby—and ended with a note about brawling black high school athletes, it wouldn't pass the smell test. The odor of bigotry would be in the air.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Education found that between 2013 and 2016, Detroit Public Schools listed 45 criminal cases of sexual misconduct, and 233 incidents of sexual harassment involving students.

Worse, the district had no Title IX investigation procedure. Moreover, just a few years ago, *USA Today* did a major study of sexual misconduct in the public schools in every state, rating them on several measures. Michigan received an overall score of "F."

Those who work at the *Detroit Free Press* have no interest in sticking it to the public schools, which is why they would never do to them what they did to the Catholic Church today. They are a disgrace to the profession of journalism.

Contact Peter Bhatia, editor and vp: pbhatia@freepress.com