

IT'S MORAL PANIC TIME

In the wake of the Pennsylvania grand jury's exclusive focus on sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, people are coming out of the woodwork with outlandish tales of long-ago horrific abuses at Catholic institutions, and Internet sites such as BuzzFeed are enthusiastically blaring every wild-eyed accusation.

The Catholic Church has never had a monopoly on the mistreatment of some young people, yet that is what is being promoted today. Why? To feed an anti-Catholic moral panic.

"A moral panic," as sociologist Ashley Crossman explains, "is a widespread fear, most often an irrational one, that someone or something is a threat to the values, safety, and interests of a community or society at large. Typically, a moral panic is perpetuated by news media, fueled by politicians, and often results in the passage of new laws or policies that target the source of the panic."

Can there be a better explanation for what is going on right now with regard to the Catholic Church?

The media, by focusing exclusively on abuse of minors in Catholic institutions—and stubbornly refusing to credit the Church for reforms that have made Catholic settings today among the *safest* places for children—perpetuate an irrational fear that the Catholic Church poses a unique threat to the safety of children.

Politicians fuel this irrational fear with investigations and grand jury probes that exclusively target the Church—ignoring widespread abuse in other faith communities, in youth sports and recreational programs, and *especially* in the public schools.

Then media and politicians team up to try to pass new laws—primarily to suspend the statute of limitations— that,

again, exclusively target the Catholic Church, giving the public schools a pass.

And then of course the anti-Catholic bigots gleefully pile on, like the Freedom From Religion Foundation calling for Catholics to leave the Church. Of course this has nothing to do with their professed purpose of promoting separation of church and state. But it has everything to do with their real purpose: promoting hostility to religion, especially Catholicism.

This is a textbook case of moral panic—one that even too many Catholics are allowing themselves to get caught up in.

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.

BIG MEDIA SILENT ON BISHOP RHOADES

Every time there is a story about a priest accused of wrongdoing, it makes its way into the newspaper. If the accused is a bishop, it merits coverage by all the big media: print, digital, radio, and television. But when a bishop gets cleared of wrongdoing, they go mute.

On September 13, Dauphin County District Attorney Francis Chardo said that following a full investigation, it was determined that "there is no basis to conclude that Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades ever engaged in a criminal or otherwise improper relationship with a person whom we will refer to as J.T." Harrisburg, Pennsylvania is the seat of Dauphin County.

Bishop Rhoades, who heads the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, and who was previously stationed in Harrisburg, was charged with molesting a teenager decades ago in Puerto Rico. But the stories told by J.T. (an ex-con) never added up. More important, his own mother said that Bishop Rhoades' account was accurate.

Bishop Rhoades has had his reputation smeared, and the media are letting the false accusation stand. The Associated Press was alone among the big media to run a story on his exoneration. The story was covered by newspapers in Indiana and Pennsylvania, but it received no mention in the evening news on any broadcast or cable channel. The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and all the other prominent newspapers, said nothing about it.

Sadly, we have become accustomed to this kind of biased journalism. When a bishop is accused, the story is given high profile, but when a bishop is exculpated, the story is buried. Small wonder why the public holds the media in low regard. Catholics have more reason than every other segment of society to hold them in contempt.

STANFORD RENAMES FATHER SERRA SITES

Stanford University has decided to rename many places on campus that give tribute to Father Junipero Serra, the 18th century Spanish missionary who was canonized in 2015. A total of 21 missions were established by the missionaries, nine of which were under the tenure of Serra; he personally founded six missions.

The decision, which was approved by Stanford's board of trustees, means that Serra Mall will be renamed "Jane Stanford Way" in honor of Jane Stanford, co-founder of the university. Two campus buildings bearing Serra's name will be renamed, but some other campus sites will keep the Franciscan's name; the names of other Spanish missionaries will also remain.

The university committee that made these recommendations acknowledged the "multiple dimensions of his [Serra's] legacy—as a California pioneer, as a celebrated religious figure, but also as founder of a system that did harm to Native Americans." It said that "the historical record confirms that the mission system inflicted great harm and violence on Native Americans."

The most serious weakness in the committee's report is its failure to recognize Serra's heroics in combating the inhumane treatment afforded the Indians by the Spanish authorities. Similarly, its failure to identify specific instances of injustice committed by Father Serra is telling. The committee's report seems to blame Serra for the misdeeds of others, which is patently unfair.

For the most part, Serra got along fine with the Indians. They understood, for example, that it was the Catholic Church that led the protests against inhumane treatment of the Indians; the Spanish crown ultimately agreed with this position.

Both colonial authorities and the missionaries vied for control over the Indians, but their practices could not have been more different. With the exception of serious crimes, Serra insisted that all punishments be meted out by the priests, the result being that the Indians were spared the worst excesses at the hands of the civil authorities.

The Franciscans also sought to protect Indian women from the Spaniards. They segregated the population on the basis of sex and age, hoping to protect the women from unwanted advances.

When sexual abuse occurred, it was quickly condemned by Serra and his fellow priests.

The violence that the Stanford committee cites was certainly not done by Serra, or at his behest. The only person he ever flogged was himself: it was an expression of redemptive suffering. Not to recognize these facts is delinquent.

As for the missionaries uprooting the Indian culture, the evidence shows that no attempt was made to wipe out the native language of the Indians. Indeed, the missionaries learned their language and even employed Indians as teachers. Some cultural modification was inevitable, given that the missionaries taught the Indians how to be masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, and painters. The Indians were also taught how to buy and sell animals, and were allowed to keep their bounty. Women were taught spinning, knitting, and sewing.

It is disturbing that so many historical figures are being reexamined under the cultural microscope of the 21st century. Those engaged in this cultural transformation—it is more like an eradication—are creating standards that will no doubt be used by successive generations to indict many of them. This is not a mature way to judge history.

Father Serra is being sacrificed on the altar of political correctness. To Catholics, however, he was a saintly man, one whose place alongside other great saints remains secure.

POPE'S REMARKS ON THE FAMILY

AND SEXUALITY

Pope Francis' comments on economic issues, the environment, and migration, which reflect his more liberal leanings, have received much media attention, including before his addressing the World Meeting of Families in Dublin in August. In contrast, his statements on marriage, the family, and sexuality, which evince a more traditional moral outlook, have not been widely reported by the media. Here are some of his more poignant comments on the latter series of issues.

Abortion

- “It is God who gives life. Let us respect and love human life, especially vulnerable life in a mother’s womb.”
- “A pregnant woman isn’t carrying a toothbrush in her belly, or a tumor... We are in the presence of a human being.”
- “The right to life is the first human right. Abortion is killing someone that cannot defend him or herself.”
- On the extension to all priests of the ability to forgive the sin of abortion, the pope said: “Careful, this does not mean trivializing abortion. **Abortion is a grave, grave sin. It’s the homicide of an innocent.** But if there is a sin, it is necessary to facilitate forgiveness.”
- On June 16, 2018 Pope Francis spoke to an Italian family association, and following his scripted remarks, he made some unscripted comments. He denounced those couples who screen for abnormalities in the womb in order to abort such children, likening the decision to a Nazi-like tactic. “Last century,” he said, “the whole world was scandalized by what the Nazis did to purify the race. Today, we do the same thing but with white gloves.”

Gay Marriage

- “Let us not be naive: this is not simply a political struggle, but it is an attempt to destroy God’s plan. It is

not just a bill (a mere instrument) but a 'move' of the Father of Lies [the Devil] who seeks to confuse and deceive the children of God."

- "At stake is the identity and survival of the family: father, mother, and children."

- "At stake are the lives of many children who will be discriminated against in advance, and deprived of their human development given by a father and a mother and willed by God. At stake is the total rejection of God's law engraved in our hearts."

- "Marriage between people of the same sex? 'Marriage' is a historical word. **Always in humanity, and not only within the Church, it's between a man and a woman...**we cannot change that. This is the nature of things. This is how they are. Let's call them 'civil unions.' Let's not play with the truth. It's true that behind it there is a gender ideology. In books also, children are learning that they can choose their own sex. Why is sex, being a woman or a man, a choice and not a fact of nature? This favors this mistake. But let's say things as they are: Marriage is between a man and a woman. This is the precise term. Let's call unions between the same sex 'civil unions'."

- Pope Francis said only heterosexuals can form a family. "It is painful to say this today: People speak of varied families, of various kinds of family," but "the family [as] man and woman in the image of God is the only one."

Gays

- "If someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him?"

- "You have to distinguish between the fact of a person being gay, and the fact of a lobby. The problem isn't the orientation. The problem is making a lobby."

Gender Ideology

- "I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the

same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it. Yes, we risk taking a step backwards.”

- “The crisis of the family is a social reality. Then there are ideological colonizations of the family, modes and proposals from Europe and also from overseas. The error of the human mind that is gender theory creates a lot of confusion.”

- “Gender ideology is demonic!”

- “Today there is a global war out to destroy marriage. Not with weapons but with ideas...we have to defend ourselves from ideological colonization.”

- Gender theory represents a “global war against the family.”

- Gender theory has caused a “world war against marriage,” an example of “ideological colonization.”

- There is a “nasty” tendency in schools to “indoctrinate” children, teaching that gender can be chosen and changed.

- “It is one thing if a person has this tendency and also changes his sex. It’s another thing to teach this in school to change mentalities. This is what I call ‘ideological colonization.’”

- Teaching gender theory is “the great enemy of marriage.”

- Teaching gender theory “is against natural things.”

Marriage and the Family

- “Complementarity will take many forms as each man and woman brings his or her distinctive contributions to their marriage and to the formation of their children—his or her personal richness, personal charisma.”

- “Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child’s development and emotional maturity.”

Moral Destitution

- “Moral destitution...consists in slavery to vice and sin. How much pain is caused in families because one of their

members—often a young person—is in thrall to alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography!...In such cases moral destitution can be considered impending suicide.”

Morality and Sexuality

- “Morality is always a consequence... there is a great danger for preachers, that of falling into mediocrity. Condemning only morality—forgive the expression —‘under the belt.’ But no one talks of the other sins like hate, envy, pride, vanity, killing another, taking a life. Entering the mafia, making illegal agreements... ‘Are you a good Catholic? Then give me the check’.”

Priestly Sexual Abuse

- “On this path, the Church has done much, perhaps more than all others. The Catholic Church is perhaps the only public institution that has moved with transparency and responsibility. No one has done more, and yet the Church is the only one that is being attacked.”

Women

- “We cannot forget the irreplaceable role of women in the family. The qualities of gentleness, of particular sensitivity and tenderness, which is abundant in the female soul, represent not only a genuine force for the life of families, for the irradiation of a climate of peace and harmony, but also a reality without which the human vocation would be unfeasible.”

- “They are the strawberries on the cake, but we want more!”

Women Cardinals

- “I don’t know where this idea sprang from. Women in the church must be valued, not clericalized. Whoever thinks of women as cardinals suffers a bit from clericalism.”

Women Priests

- “The Church has spoken and said: ‘No.’ John Paul II said it, but with a definitive formulation. That door is closed.”
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INDIANA PRIEST ASSAULTED AT THE ALTAR

Father Basil Hutsko was getting ready to say Mass on a recent Monday morning at St. Michael Byzantine Catholic Church in Merrillville, Indiana (he was praying at the altar) when a man came up behind him and assaulted him.

The priest was grabbed by the neck, choked, thrown to the floor, and beaten mercilessly. His head was pounded against the floor, leaving him unconscious. The attacker was yelling, “This is for all the kids!” The police are investigating this as a hate crime.

While the primary blame for this attack belongs to the assailant, secondary blame must be shared by (a) those who have embarked on a torrent of hate speech against the Catholic Church, and (b) those Catholics so angered by recent news stories that they are assigning collective guilt to all the clergy. Failing to distinguish between the innocent and guilty creates situations like this.

These two types of responses, the former from the left and the latter from the right, have created a milieu that invites hate-filled persons to engage in violence. By blaming all the priests, and all the bishops, for the deeds of a few enablers and a few offenders in their ranks, they have crafted an environment where acts like this are bound to happen.

Pray for Father Hutsko, and for those who share primary and

secondary responsibility for what happened.

DE BLASIO VIOLATES CONSTITUTION

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio violated the United States Constitution in September when he held political rallies in four Brooklyn churches. According to the *New York Post*, he went to the churches “to stump for Zellnor Myrie, who’s running against state Sen. Jesse Hamilton” from Crown Heights. In doing so, de Blasio blatantly crossed church and state lines.

Some will say that it is okay for the mayor to do so because the churches he attended were populated by African Americans. But the Constitution does not make exceptions for people of any ethnicity or race: it applies equally to everyone.

If a pro-life Republican campaigned in a Catholic church—even if it was in a predominately black Catholic church—the alarms would be sounded by every media outlet in the New York area. Cutting de Blasio slack for disrespecting the First Amendment cannot be justified.