

THE GULLIBLE GEORGE WILL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on an opinion piece by syndicated columnist George Will that appeared in the March 12 edition of the *Chicago Tribune*:

Opinion writers who opine about matters they are not well grounded in are a problem. George Will is such a man. A devout atheist, he takes the Catholic Church to task for offenses, real and contrived, relying heavily on the work of Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, the man behind the discredited Pennsylvania grand jury report on the Church.

If Will took the time to read the grand jury report, which I did, and if he took the time to read the John Jay reports on the issue of clergy abuse, which I did, he would not appear so gullible.

I debunked the grand jury report when it was released. One of the myths I addressed is taken up by Will. He begins his article by saying, “‘Horseplay,’ a term to denote child-rape, is, says Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, part of a sinister glossary of euphemisms by which the Catholic Church’s bureaucracy obfuscates the church’s ‘pattern of abuse’ and conspiracy of silence.”

Will took Shapiro’s bait. First of all, most of the alleged victims were neither children nor were they raped: inappropriate touching of adolescents—which is indefensible—was the typical offense. So stop the hyperbole, Mr. Will.

Also, the word “horseplay” was not part of the lexicon of Church officials: it appears once in over 1300 pages of the report, and it was used to describe the behavior of a seminarian. Once again, Will fell for Shapiro’s ploy.

Don’t take my word for it—read what Peter Steinfelds said about

Shapiro's grand jury report; he is a former religion reporter for the *New York Times*.

After reading the report, fact checking the accusations, and speaking to those familiar with the report, including people in Shapiro's office, Steinfels concluded that Shapiro's most serious and sweeping indictments of the Church are "grossly misleading, irresponsible, inaccurate, and unjust."

Don't take Steinfels' word for it—consider what happened in December. That's when the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled 6-1 in favor of eleven accused priests who claimed that releasing their names to the public would violate their reputational rights as guaranteed by the Pennsylvania Constitution. The Catholic League filed an amicus brief in this case.

The court ruled that the report contained "false, misleading, incorrect and unsupported accusations."

Will needs to rewrite his article, rebutting what I said, what Steinfels wrote, and what the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled.

He should know better than to cite a grand jury report as the basis of his article. The priests named in the grand jury report were never afforded the right to challenge the accusations. That is because such reports are investigative, not evidentiary.

In 2015, after Will accused Pope Francis of standing against "modernity, rationality, science, and ultimately...open societies," I wrote the following about him: "He is an educated man, but his grasp of Catholicism is on a par with that of Bill Maher's." Looks like nothing has changed.

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