

USA TODAY SLAMS CHURCH FOR DEFENDING ITSELF

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 we 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.