

SEXUAL ABUSE LOBBY IS AGENDA-RIDDEN

On May 3-4, activists will descend on Albany pressing to lift the statute of limitations on the sexual abuse of minors. Their motives are not pure: their real goal is to stick it to Catholics.

If the lawmakers and activists behind this effort were sincere, they wouldn't devote an entire day, May 4, to the Catholic Church. Had they chosen to address sexual abuse among Orthodox Jews—and no one else—it would properly be labeled anti-Semitic. That is why this stunt smacks of anti-Catholicism.

Because of sovereign immunity, the public schools are exempt from proposed revisions in the law. To wit: Unless a proposed law explicitly states that the revisions apply equally to the public and private sectors, it means public school victims have only 90 days to bring suit. For private school victims [read: Catholic], they could sue for offenses that occurred decades ago. Get the point?

Even if the playing field were equal in law, there is no organized effort to target the public schools the way Catholic schools are. Consider, for example, the groups invited to speak on May 4. Here are some fast facts:

- One of them is known for advising its supporters how to manipulate the media with "holy childhood photos," using "feeling" words. It is also known for lying to the media (its leader admitted this under oath). Another official even said that accused priests *should not* have equal rights.
- An official from a second group has made unsubstantiated charges against the leaders of the Church. How do I know? Because I have repeatedly asked for proof, yet none has ever been provided. This same outfit goes public with the names of accused priests, yet it makes no attempt to confirm the veracity of allegations. Innocent priests are therefore smeared.
- Another group is so extremist that one bishop excommunicated its members. After they appealed to Rome, the Vatican confirmed their excommunication. This is not exactly an everyday occurrence.

These persons are not reasoned critics: they are professional victims' activists who trot around the nation to promote their hate-filled agenda. That some are funded by Church-suing lawyers is incontestable. Even worse is the invidious stereotype inviting the public to think that the Church owns this problem, and that no reforms have been made.

On May 4, there will be a showing of the movie "Spotlight"; it accurately portrays the misdeeds of the Boston Archdiocese. But it is being used for propaganda purposes to convince the public that nothing has changed, when, in fact, much has: dramatic, and successful, reforms have been implemented in all Catholic institutions. In fact, almost all the abuse took place between 1965 and 1985.

When this story broke in 2002, I was quoted in the *New York Times* saying, "I will not defend the indefensible." But I hasten to add that I will also not defend those who seek to exploit this issue to serve their agenda.

According to Dr. Paul McHugh, former psychiatrist in chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital, "Nobody is doing more to address the tragedy of sexual abuse of minors than the Catholic Church."

In the past ten years, the average number of credible accusations made against 40,000 priests is 8.4. Which means that in any given year, less than 1 percent of priests nationwide have had a credible accusation made against him. Who can beat that record?

It is in the public schools where this problem is most acute today.

- "NYC Public Schools See Record Number of Complaints Against Staffers." That was the headline in a *Daily News* story on January 6, 2016.
- In 2013, it was reported that school officials in New York City tried to fire 128 employees for molestation, yet only 33 were terminated.
- In 2012, a report covering the previous five years found that 97 tenured teachers or school employees were charged with sexual abuse of students.

What accounts for this condition? Here is a *Daily News* headline from 2015: "UFT to Blame for Keeping Perverts in City Schools: Chancellor Walcott." They may not call them "rubber rooms" any more, but nothing has fundamentally changed.

The Catholic Church is not opposed to legal revisions that would allow more time for victims to come forward in the future, but it is opposed to changes allowing for an expanded "look-back" period. We know what this is all about, and it has nothing to do with justice for all.

If lawmakers want to make real changes, let them demand that the clergy and all counselors be added to the list of mandatory reporters. The Church supports such a change. Working against this is the New York Civil Liberties Union and Family Planning Advocates, the lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood. Why? Because that would require Planned Parenthood counselors to report cases of statutory rape that come to their attention, and that is not something they can stomach.

The sexual abuse of minors is a serious problem in our society—it even led to jail time last week for a former Speaker of the House. It demands a serious response, free from politics. Those who harbor an agenda against the Catholic Church have no legitimate role to play in such matters.

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