

Attacking the Church and Double Standards

By William Kilpatrick
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In the war against jihad it might seem that President Obama's plan to remove all discussion of Islam and jihad from our national security document would rank higher as a threat to Western security than recent attempts to link the pope to 40 year-old sex crimes in Milwaukee. But the perfect storm that has hit the Catholic Church may turn out to be of greater consequence for the West's survival. For that reason it's important to sort out how much of the current indignation toward Rome represents justified anger, and how much of it represents a larger anti-Christian agenda.

Non-Catholic Christians who think the recent media blitz against the Catholic Church is mainly about sex abuse should think again. Likewise, Christians would be naïve to think that those who would like to discredit the Catholic Church will be content, should they succeed, to leave the rest of Christianity alone. The attack on the Catholic Church should be seen as part of a larger attack against Christianity itself. Of course, there have been attacks on Christianity before, but never before have the stakes been so high. From the standpoint of the West's survival it would be difficult to imagine a worse time for the pundits to launch a campaign to undermine Christian belief.

There is much to suggest that media criticism of the Church is fueled less by outrage over pedophilia, and more by another agenda. There wasn't much outrage over Roman Polanski's rape of a 13 year-old girl a number of years ago. When attempts were made last year to bring Polanski back to the U.S. to serve his sentence, many of the same cultural elites who are now condemning the Church, leapt to his defense. Likewise, there has never been much media outrage over the apparent crimes of celebrated sex researcher Alfred Kinsey. The media continued to lionize Kinsey long after it was revealed that he had collaborated with pedophiles in order to gather data. "What did Kinsey know and when did he know it?" has never been a pressing question for CNN or The New York Times.

In 1996—several years before the priestly sex scandal broke—Mary Eberstadt wrote the first of two in-depth articles on "Pedophilia Chic" for the Weekly Standard. She made a convincing case that liberal elites were moving in the direction of tearing down the taboo against pedophilia. The only thing that stopped them, she suggests in a recent article, was the opportunity to use priestly pedophilia as a weapon to demonize the Church. Of course, there was no pause in the liberal media's campaign to normalize homosexuality, and this may account for the fact that much of the media coverage conveniently ignored the homosexual nature of the abuse—something that should have been difficult to ignore, given that about 90 % of male abuse victims were teenage boys, not young children. While criticizing the Church for cover-ups, media pundits had no compunctions about their own calculated cover-up of a major aspect of the abuse.

Though sexual abuse remains a problem in the Catholic Church, enormous strides have been made in rooting it out, due in large part to a crackdown that originated with Cardinal Ratzinger in 2001. So, the venomous attacks on him and the church he represents, suggest that something else is afoot. When a major Canadian newspaper features a piece claiming that the pope's "whole career has the stench of evil," it's time to reach for the decoding machine. That particular quote comes from Christopher Hitchens, who has made a career in recent years of questioning the legitimacy, not just of Catholicism, but of Christianity, itself.

Hitchens aside, there is plenty of other evidence that Catholics are not the only ones being targeted for de-legitimization. In Canada and in Europe, Christian pastors have been fined or jailed for expressing their beliefs from the pulpit. In Birmingham, England, Christian evangelists were warned by police that distributing gospel leaflets in a Muslim section would be considered a hate crime. A survey of history textbooks for American schoolchildren reveals that they present Christianity as a purveyor of bigotry and violence. On college campuses, Christian clubs are routinely banned. Meanwhile, Christianity is often the butt of vulgar comedy routines, and of crude cartoons that make the infamous Muhammad cartoon look benign by comparison.

Why the outrage? Read between the lines of a typical assault column and you'll find that what the columnist really hates about Catholicism and about Christianity in general is not the moral failings of Christian leaders, but the fact that Christianity still proposes moral absolutes. It is not sexual misbehavior that galls, but rather that the churches dare to put limits on sexual behavior. Christian churches are the main obstacle to the dominance of secular gods such as moral relativism and absolute sexual liberation. While Christians and non-Christians are rightly disturbed by the sex scandals in the Catholic Church, they also ought to be disturbed at the motives behind some of the criticism.

As Brendan O'Neill, himself an atheist, writes, "Many contemporary opinion-formers are not concerned with getting to the truth [of what happened]...rather they want to milk incidents of abuse and make them into an indictment of religion itself." What draws militant secularists and atheists toward the Catholic-abuse story? O'Neill says it is "their belief that religion is itself a form of abuse." As atheist Richard Dawkins writes, "Odious as the physical abuse of children by priests undoubtedly is, I suspect that it may do them less lasting damage than the mental abuse of bringing them up Catholic in the first place." But, as O'Neill points out, if religious upbringing is a form of abuse, then "authorities must protect children not only from religious institutions but from their own religious parents, too." The dismantling of Christianity can proceed that much more smoothly if enough people can be convinced that it's for the children's sake."

There is, of course, a major exemption from media condemnation of child abuse. It appears that the abuse of children is much more acceptable to the opinion-makers when it is protected by the shield of multiculturalism. The media has been much less willing to criticize the widespread child abuse that occurs in Islamic cultures, or to note that, in the case of Islam, the abuse is religiously sanctioned. For example, although one can find plenty of criticism of the Ayatollah Khomeini's political views, rarely does one see a condemnation of his views

on sex. The one-time spiritual leader of Iran not only endorsed sex with children in his writings, but he also took to himself a 13 year-old bride.

Here we come to the world-historical turning point of which the frenzied assaults on the Catholic Church are only a part. The drive to undermine the Church's moral authority, and the threat posed by Islam are linked in an ironic way. For many centuries the Catholic faith was the main bulwark against the Islamization of Europe. Now that Christianity is in decline in Europe, Islam is on the move again. And with the growing presence of Islam has come an increase in child abuse—or what the West considers as child abuse. The sexual exploitation of children is considered a far less serious offense in Islamic societies, and is often protected by the force of sharia law. Muhammad, who consummated his marriage with Aisha when she was nine years-old, is considered by all Muslim authorities to have provided a “beautiful pattern of conduct.” That's why, whenever a Muslim country tries to ban child marriages (as recently happened in Yemen), you can be sure that the imams will rise up to insist on their right to marry minors.

And the exploitation of girls is only half the story. There also appears to be some justification in the Koran for the culture of pederasty, which Phyllis Chesler points out is “epidemic in the Muslim world.” A recent edition of PBS Frontline reported on the phenomenon of the dancing boys of Afghanistan—youngsters who are recruited, usually at age nine or ten, to provide entertainment and sex for men. While Islam frowns on adult homosexuality, pederasty is a different matter. Perhaps this has to do with several passages in the Koran which promise men that in addition to the dark-eyed maidens that await them in paradise, “there shall wait on them young boys of their own as fair as virgin pearls” (52: 22). Since the boys are mentioned in conjunction with the maidens, and since they are described in the same way—“graced with eternal youth,” “fair as virgin pearls”—it seems likely that they are there for the same purpose.

The dancing boys haven't yet been imported to Europe, but Europe's waltz with the multicultural devil has already whirled it into unfamiliar territory. A United Nations NGO study estimates that there are now 10,000 cases of female genital mutilation in Switzerland, with hundreds of thousands of cases elsewhere in Europe. According to a National Police Chiefs report an estimated 17,000 girls and women in the UK are victims of honor crimes or forced marriages each year. In the British Midlands girls in their early teens are routinely flown to Pakistan to marry men they have never met.

Europe's Muslim girls are being mutilated and forced into marriages... therefore, according to the twisted logic of the opinion molders, it must be time to go after the Vatican for possible cover-ups of long ago. It's a strange juxtaposition. Not that the abuse scandals aren't newsworthy stories. But there are two ways to frame them. You can angrily focus on what wasn't done in the past, or you can point out how much the Church has done in recent years to root out the problem. Unlike the public schools (which have a much higher incidence of abuse) the Catholic Church has actually done something about its abuse problem. That's why almost all the cases highlighted by the media took place decades ago.

Judging by the way the story has been handled, it's difficult to avoid the impression that the Western elites want to do as much damage as possible to the Church—which, when you think about it, betrays an almost suicidal impulse. It really does seem that the fate of Europe is bound up with the fate of Christianity in Europe. Europe is in trouble in large part because it has rejected its Christian heritage and embraced moral and cultural relativism, instead. In the end, cultural relativism is a suicidal policy which is why Pope Benedict has frequently cautioned the West about the dangers inherent in a “culture of relativism.”

Relativism is the ultimate justification for never having to say you're sorry. As the climate of opinion changes in a relativist society, so will the consensus about what's right and wrong. And if Catholic Christianity is swept aside in Europe, the climate of opinion will increasingly be dictated by Islam. Some may think that once Europe is free of its Catholic/Christian influence, children in lederhosen will once again romp freely through the meadows. But don't count on it. Instead, look for children in hijabs being hurried into the local government approved clitorrectomy clinic.

A lot of people find it difficult to fathom the motives of suicide bombers. It may be time to also ponder the motives of the suicide pundits who have declared open season on the religion that built their civilization, while treating as a protected species the religion which aims to dismantle it.

William Kilpatrick's articles on Islam have appeared in Front Page Magazine, Jihad Watch, Catholic World Report, the National Catholic Register, World, and Investor's Business Daily.