

FOUL BALL!

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October is the month we relish the highpoint of our national pastime, especially when one of our own New York teams is in the World Series!

Sadly, America has another national pastime, this one not pleasant at all: *anti-catholicism*.

It is not hyperbole to call prejudice against the Catholic Church a national pastime. Scholars such as Arthur Schlesinger Sr. referred to it as “the deepest bias in the history of the American people,” while John Higham described it as “the most luxuriant, tenacious tradition of paranoiac agitation in American history.” “The anti-semitism of the left,” is how Paul Viereck reads it, and Professor Philip Jenkins sub-titles his book on the topic “the last acceptable prejudice.”

If you want recent evidence of this unfairness against the Catholic Church, look no further than a few of these following examples of occurrences over the last couple weeks:

- On October 14, in the pages of the *New York Times*, reporter Paul Vitello exposed the sad extent of child sexual abuse in Brooklyn’s Orthodox Jewish community. [According to the article](#), there were forty cases of such abuse in this tiny community last year alone. Yet the *Times* did not demand what it has called for incessantly when addressing the same kind of abuse by a tiny minority of priests: release of names of abusers, rollback of statute of limitations, external investigations, release of all records, and total transparency. Instead, an attorney is quoted urging law enforcement officials to recognize “religious sensitivities,” and no criticism was offered of the DA’s office for allowing Orthodox rabbis to settle these cases “internally.” Given the Catholic Church’s own recent horrible experience, I am hardly in any position to criticize our Orthodox Jewish neighbors, and have no wish to do so . . . but I can criticize this kind of “selective outrage.”

Of course, this selective outrage probably should not surprise us at all, as we have seen many other examples of the phenomenon in recent years when it comes to the issue of sexual abuse. To cite but two: In 2004, Professor Carol Shakeshaft documented the wide-spread problem of sexual abuse of minors in our nation’s public schools (the study can be found [here](#)). In 2007, the Associated Press issued a series of investigative reports that also showed the numerous examples of sexual abuse by educators against public school students. Both the Shakeshaft study and the AP reports were essentially ignored, as papers such as the *New York Times* only seem to have priests in their crosshairs.

- On October 16, Laurie Goodstein of the *Times* [offered a front page, above-the-fold story](#) on the sad episode of a Franciscan priest who had fathered a child. Even taking into account that the relationship with the mother was consensual and between two adults, and that the Franciscans have attempted to deal justly with the errant priest’s responsibilities to his son, this action is still sinful, scandalous, and indefensible. However, one still has to wonder why a quarter-century old story of a sin by a priest is now suddenly more pressing and newsworthy than the war in Afghanistan, health care, and starvation–genocide in Sudan. No other cleric from religions other than Catholic ever seems to merit such attention.

- Five days later, October 21, [the Times gave its major headline](#) to the decision by the Vatican to welcome Anglicans who had requested union with Rome. Fair enough. Unfair, though, was the article's observation that the Holy See lured and bid for the Anglicans. Of course, the reality is simply that for years thousands of Anglicans have been asking Rome to be accepted into the Catholic Church with a special sensitivity for their own tradition. As Cardinal Walter Kasper, the Vatican's chief ecumenist, observed, "We are not fishing in the Anglican pond." Not enough for the *Times*; for them, this was another case of the conniving Vatican luring and bidding unsuspecting, good people, greedily capitalizing on the current internal tensions in Anglicanism.
- Finally, the most combustible example of all came Sunday with an intemperate and scurrilous [piece by Maureen Dowd](#) on the opinion pages of the *Times*. In a diatribe that rightly never would have passed muster with the editors had it so criticized an Islamic, Jewish, or African-American religious issue, she digs deep into the nativist handbook to use every anti-Catholic caricature possible, from the Inquisition to the Holocaust, condoms, obsession with sex, pedophile priests, and oppression of women, all the while slashing Pope Benedict XVI for his shoes, his forced conscription — along with every other German teenage boy — into the German army, his outreach to former Catholics, and his recent welcome to Anglicans.

True enough, the matter that triggered her spasm — the current visitation of women religious by Vatican representatives — is well-worth discussing, and hardly exempt from legitimate questioning. But her prejudice, while maybe appropriate for the Know-Nothing newspaper of the 1850's, the *Menace*, has no place in a major publication today.

I do not mean to suggest that anti-catholicism is confined to the pages *New York Times*. Unfortunately, abundant examples can be found in many different venues. I will not even begin to try and list the many cases of anti-catholicism in the so-called entertainment media, as they are so prevalent they sometimes seem almost routine and obligatory. Elsewhere, last week, Representative Patrick Kennedy made some incredibly inaccurate and uncalled-for remarks concerning the Catholic bishops, as mentioned [in this blog on Monday](#). Also, the New York State Legislature has levied a special payroll tax to help the Metropolitan Transportation Authority fund its deficit. This legislation calls for the public schools to be reimbursed the cost of the tax; Catholic schools, and other private schools, will **not** receive the reimbursement, costing each of the schools thousands – in some cases tens of thousands – of dollars, money that the parents and schools can hardly afford. (Nor can the archdiocese, which already underwrites the schools by \$30 million annually.) Is it not an issue of basic fairness for **ALL** school-children and their parents to be treated equally?

The Catholic Church is not above criticism. We Catholics do a fair amount of it ourselves. We welcome and expect it. All we ask is that such critique be fair, rational, and accurate, what we would expect for anybody. The suspicion and bias against the Church is a national pastime that should be "rained out" for good.

I guess my own background in American history should caution me not to hold my breath.

Then again, yesterday was the Feast of Saint Jude, the patron saint of impossible causes.

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