

ANOTHER SCANDAL?

In late June, the *Dallas Morning News* ran a series of articles alleging that another scandal had unfolded: the Catholic Church was now guilty of moving molesting priests overseas. For 18 months, the newspaper tracked these runaway priests. It concluded that “Nearly half of the more than 200 cases we identified involve clergy who tried to elude law enforcement.”

Bill Donohue was asked to respond to the series in an op-ed; it appeared on June 27. It is reprinted below.

The *Dallas Morning News* deserves credit for exposing the transfer of molesting priests overseas. Molesters, be they priests or plumbers, deserve to be punished, and not put on a plane. But the series is not something most Catholics are prepared to hyperventilate about, and for good reason: the stories are mostly anecdotal and the timeline is mostly pre-scandal.

Social scientists distinguish between the episodic and the systemic. The former is unexceptional; the latter is problematic. In this regard, the series disclosed specific cases of moral delinquency, but it did not uncover a systemic pattern of delinquency. To be specific, what made the story in Boston so dramatic was the extent and depth of the cover-up; the overwhelming evidence tying senior church officials to it; and the fact that it occurred over decades. On this score, the *DMN* series pales by comparison.

If some molesting priests (almost all of whom are homosexuals, not pedophiles) were moved around locally, it is not surprising to learn that some were also moved around globally. In every case, those who authorized the transfer should be subjected to the full force of the law. But policing a religious order priest, like the Salesians, is not the same as policing a diocesan priest: the former is not under the direct

supervision of a bishop; the latter is.

The series touches on the question of why molesting priests were kept in ministry after their superiors learned of their offense. Readers should know that the advice to subject such priests to treatment—instead of kicking them out—is exactly what the Vatican was told earlier this year by a panel of sex abuse experts drawn from around the world, not one of whom was Catholic. In short, the role of the psychological community must be addressed if this issue is to be resolved.

Finally, if the transfer of miscreant priests were commonplace after the scandal broke in January 2002, then that would be cause for alarm. But since this is not the case, it is not likely the series will create the same furor.