

ASSESSING BISHOP FINN'S GUILT



Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a judge's decision yesterday finding Kansas City-St. Joseph Bishop Robert Finn guilty in a case involving Father Shawn Ratigan:

Let's get rid of some myths. Bishop Finn was not found guilty of a felony: he was found guilty of one misdemeanor, and innocent of another. The case did not involve child sexual abuse—no child was ever abused, or touched, in any way by Father Shawn Ratigan. Nor did this case involve child pornography. Here's what happened.

On December 16, 2010, a computer technician found crotch-shot pictures of children, fully clothed, on Ratigan's computer; there was one that showed a girl's genitals exposed. The next day Ratigan attempted suicide. The Vicar General, Msgr. Robert Murphy, without seeing the photos, contacted a police officer about this matter. The officer, after consulting with another cop, said a single photo of a non-sexual nature would not constitute pornography. After a few more of the same types of photos were found, an attorney rendered the same judgment: they were not pornographic.

Finn then asked a psychiatrist to evaluate Ratigan. The bishop was given the judgment of a professional: the priest was not a risk to children (he was diagnosed as suffering from depression). Finn then placed restrictions on Ratigan, which he broke. When it was found that Ratigan was again using a computer, upon examination more disturbing photos were found. Murphy then called the cops (Finn was out of town) and a week later Ratigan was arrested. Yesterday, Finn was found guilty of one misdemeanor of failing to report suspected child sexual abuse.

The Catholic League supports harsh penalties for child sexual abusers, and for those who cover it up. But it also supports equal justice for all, and given what we know of what is going on in many other communities, religious as well as secular, we find the chorus of condemnations targeting Bishop Finn to be as unfair as they are contrived.

We would be remiss if we did not mention that only two newspapers in the nation put this story on the front page: the *Kansas City Star*, understandably, and the *New York Times*.