

BISHOPS MAKE PROGRESS BUT MUCH WORK REMAINS

Catholic League president William Donohue commented on the final charter that the bishops approved today in Dallas:

“Every fair-minded person will say that the U.S. bishops made much progress in dealing with the issue of child sexual molestation by priests. But progress is not the same as a satisfactory conclusion.

“The draft document that seemed to give a pass to those priests who previously abused a minor on one occasion has been altered to reflect a more realistic understanding of what lay Catholics want.

“But there is a problem regarding the rights of the accused. It appears that the charter may short-circuit some due process rights. When an attempt was made to say that all ‘credible’ allegations will be passed on to civil authorities, it was defeated. When an attempt was made to say that all ‘non-frivolous’ allegations would be passed on, it was also rejected. Does this now mean that there will be one standard for priests accused of child sexual abuse and one for the rest of the nation? Surely it would have been better for the bishops to simply assert that they will abide by the laws in their states and localities.

“While the bishops dealt firmly with molesting priests, they did virtually nothing about those bishops who enabled offending priests. This omission is the most glaring exception in the charter. While no one realistically believed that the bishops would start pointing fingers at their colleagues who played musical chairs with child molesters, it is nonetheless outrageous that they exculpated themselves altogether. Unless some resignations are forthcoming, lay

Catholics will not be satisfied.

“On the issue of the relationship between theological dissidence and behavioral deviance, nothing was done. This, and all the attendant forces that have driven the scandal, remain on the table. This issue must be forthrightly addressed if real progress is to be made.”