

BISHOPS UNDER FIRE; MULTI-LEVEL ATTACK UNDERWAY

It started in the spring, and it just got hotter as we got into the summer: the bishops have been the subject of relentless attacks, much of it having to do with the issue of sexuality. The John Jay report on clergy abuse, along with a new wave of lawsuits and gay rights legislation—gave way to vicious condemnations, ranging from columnists to commentators.

In some cases, individual bishops were singled out for denunciation, and in this regard no one was the butt of more unfair remarks than Archbishop Timothy Dolan. He is an easy target: he is the head of the New York Archdiocese and the president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. He is also outspoken, much to the chagrin of those who would like to silence him.

Some of the most vocal critics are the so-called victims' groups. Nothing the bishops will ever do will please them, so out-of-control is their anger. Even though sexual molestation has long since ceased to be an issue among the clergy, these groups, assisted by lawyers on the hunt for new victims—it does not matter how long ago the alleged incident occurred—are doing everything in their power to keep this issue alive.

Besides the bishops, priests have been the object of many suspect lawsuits. For example, a man who claims he was abused in 1984 has sued the Fort Worth Diocese and the entire Pallottine religious order. The accuser, who has been in prison for over a decade, says he cannot remember the priest's name. If this isn't bizarre enough, the accuser is in the slammer for sexual abuse. Unfortunately, there are too many suspect cases like this to think it's all coincidental.

When the John Jay study came out, the narrative was quickly set by the New York Times: it was miffed that the social scientists who did the report didn't attack the bishops. The Church's critics were doubly incensed when the report mentioned the social and cultural context of the 1960s and 1970s, the decades where most of the damage was done.

Left-wing Catholics gave cover to those with an anti-Catholic agenda. In June, they assembled in Detroit, though even the organizers admitted that few young people, or non-whites, were drawn to the event. That they are stuck in a time warp—they can't spring away from the 1960s—is an understatement.

Bill Donohue's 24-page analysis of the John Jay study (an excerpt is on pp. 8-9) was sent to hundreds of bishops, lawyers, activist groups and members of the media. We are pleased to note its warm welcome in many circles.