

CARDINAL DINARDO DESERVES BETTER

When law enforcement agents act like bullies, justice is sundered. That's what happened last October in Michigan when police raided all seven Catholic dioceses—including the home of one bishop—in search of evidence of sexual abuse by the clergy.

In late November local police, the Texas Rangers, the local D.A.'s office, and other agencies raided the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, headed by Cardinal Daniel DiNardo. They were looking for evidence concerning Rev. Manuel La Rosa-Lopez; he has been accused of molesting two teenagers more than a quarter century ago. The priest says he is innocent of all charges.

The archdiocese says it is wrong to call it a "raid" because they were cooperating with law enforcement. But when dozens of cops and the Texas Rangers show up, unannounced, carrying boxes they expect to fill with documents, records, electronics, etc., what else should we call it? It is precisely because the archdiocese was cooperating with law enforcement that this mad search was so unnecessary.

How did the agents even know that the priest was accused of molesting two teenagers? The authorities found out because DiNardo notified them. That's how.

The archdiocese admitted it was still looking for more documents on the priest, and law enforcement appeared satisfied. So what made the alarms go off?

CBS had done a hit job on DiNardo the previous week, and this surely played a role in getting the agents ginned up.

"We do believe, based on our research, that there will be a

secret archive that will have information on this case,” said J. Tyler Dunman of the special crimes unit for the Montgomery County District Attorney. “Secret archives”? They are what organizations such as CBS call confidential records, but it sounds more melodramatic to label them “secret archives.”

Montgomery D.A. Brett Ligon said, “This is not a search warrant against the Catholic Church.” So what is it? He disingenuously admitted, “We’re going to go wherever the investigation requires us to go.” In other words, they are using the accused priest as a pretext to raid the archdiocesan offices.

Why didn’t the D.A. subpoena the records? Because that would not have accomplished their real goal—which is to go wherever the raid takes them.

There were hundreds of media stories on Cardinal DiNardo in the month of November, and many were critical. The treatment was often unfair, and leading the way was the CBS story.

Why DiNardo? The short answer—that he is chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the bishops were assembling in Baltimore in November for their biannual meeting—is incomplete. Why did the media go after Cardinal Donald Wuerl when the Pennsylvania grand jury report was issued in August (he previously served as Bishop of Pittsburgh)?

Wuerl was targeted because he was the most senior clergyman cited in the report. It did not matter that he had one of the best records of any bishop in the nation handling cases of sexual abuse—he was the biggest fish that the Church’s foes could fry. That was certainly true of Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro; he was aided and abetted by the media. We knew at the time that the next target would be another senior prelate.

CBS began its story by reporting on La Rosa-Lopez. Here is what viewers were not told.

The alleged abuse of a teen male took place at the end of the last century. The alleged victim never said a word about it until August 2018. As soon as this case was reported to the archdiocese, officials contacted the Children's Protective Services. The next day an arrest warrant for the priest was issued, and he voluntarily turned himself in that evening.

Why didn't CBS tell its viewers this? By the way, DiNardo did not become Archbishop of Galveston-Houston until 2006.

The other alleged victim was a woman who claimed the priest kissed and fondled her when she was a teenager. She wrote about the priest in her diary, confessing that she was in a romantic relationship with him. When did this allegedly happen? In 2000. Curiously, she came forth with her story only days after the alleged first victim came forth with his old story.

Why didn't CBS tell its viewers this?

The CBS story focused mostly on two other priests, Rev. John Keller and Rev. Terence Brinkman.

CBS said that in 1998 Keller molested a 16-year-old male who reported it to the archdiocese four years later. Keller denied that the fondling ever happened. An archdiocesan lay review board investigated this case and could not substantiate the accusation.

The CBS story said that Brinkman allegedly sodomized a 12-year-old male in the 1970s. The priest denied this happened. The lay review board investigated and could not substantiate the accusation.

These two cases—one from more than 20 years ago and the other from over 30 years ago—were the only accusations ever made against either priest during their 40 years of service to the archdiocese. Too bad CBS didn't report this.

It's also too bad that CBS didn't report that the archdiocese responded to more than 30 questions submitted by the network, yet, according to Church officials, "almost all of our responses [were] completely ignored by the CBS team."

Cardinal DiNardo deserves better. But in this sick environment, where priests are considered guilty before proven innocent—and high-ranking members of the clergy are seen as meriting even fewer rights—anything is possible. The public is being set up to believe the worst about the Catholic Church.

The bishops are under siege. What will the bullies think of next? They surely won't convene a grand jury probe of the public schools. Bet on it.