

RECONSIDERING THE DALLAS CHARTER

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Fr. Michael P. Orsi

The following recounts what happened to an innocent priest from New Jersey in the wake of the bishops' conference that took place in 2002. Just a few months after it was exposed that the Boston Archdiocese was deeply involved in a cover-up of priestly sexual abuse, the bishops assembled in Dallas. The June meeting was held in a hostile environment: calls for quick and lasting reforms were made from many quarters, and the media had a field day with it. While much good came out of the meeting, it is clear now that on some very important matters, there was a rush to judgment. Nothing was more hastily considered than the due process rights of accused priests. One of those victims was Msgr. Bill McCarthy.

Justice demands that the guilty pay, but it also demands that the innocent not suffer. On June 15-18, the bishops will meet in Seattle, and one of the items they are expected to address is the issue of accused priests and fairness in dealing with them. It is only fitting that the documented case of Msgr. McCarthy be given due consideration. Sadly, he is not alone.

Bill Donohue

Monsignor William McCarthy is a retired priest from the Diocese of Paterson, New Jersey. After a stellar, four-decade pastoral career, he is a priest in good standing. However, for almost five years he wasn't. In *The Conspiracy: An Innocent Priest, A True Story*, McCarthy recounts the ordeal that resulted from a false accusation that he abused two young girls.

A 2003 complaint—made anonymously some 23 years after the incidents were alleged to have occurred—subjected McCarthy to the provisions of the *Dallas Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, enacted by the United States bishops in 2002 to address the highly publicized and damaging reports of child abuse. He is straightforward in his negative assessment of this draconian measure. He also criticizes the ineptitude of some bishops, the unchecked bureaucracy of diocesan chancery offices, the vendettas carried on by some of the laity against priests, the corruption of some law enforcement officers, and the arduous process and long wait faced by priests seeking justice from the Church. Hop to laicize him immediately. Instead, the future pope ordered a canonical trial at which McCarthy was completely exonerated.

Some of the situations addressed in this book are chilling. About the vindictive nature of some people who have a gripe (real or imagined) against a priest, McCarthy writes:

“Leaders of even simple ordinary positions such as pastors of local churches are not without their adversaries who will go to any extent to hurt them. During the ‘pedophile’ eruption in the USA, the media was inundated with countless accusations of priests. People were bombarded with this phenomena, it was in the ‘air’ as it were. Consequently, anyone with a grudge against a priest was motivated to seize the opportunity to make a hit.”

The motive of an accuser (or a purported witness) should be thoroughly investigated as part of the inquiry process whenever an allegation arises. Yet, this is rarely considered a top priority. Instead, ever since the Boston debacle caused by Cardinal Bernard Law’s mismanagement put the issue of recidivist abusers in the nation’s headlines, accused priests are automatically presumed guilty by their bishops, with very little scrutiny of those making the accusations.

The judgment of guilt is generally affirmed in the court of

public opinion, since the priest has already been removed from his ministry. Out-of-court payoffs to plaintiffs, which have become a common practice, exacerbate the problem. People assume that the exchange of money automatically proves there was something wrong, creating a no-win situation even for a priest who is ultimately found to be innocent.

Therefore, unless incontrovertible evidence can be shown that abuse occurred, each case should be litigated aggressively by the priest's diocese (this is as true in the case of dead priests). The system, as it stands now, encourages false accusations, has led to bankruptcy in many dioceses, and left the Church, its bishops and priests more vulnerable than ever.

McCarthy paints a dreary portrait of his former bishop and chancery staff that is, unfortunately, all too common. Instead of an organization guided by Christian principle, we see a group of confused and desperate people whose behavior illustrates such key insights from business management as, "Personnel is policy," and "Like brings on like." Concerned only with self-protection, they are only too willing to throw a priest "under the bus." As McCarthy explains:

"In my case, my former bishop writes an official letter to the Pope demanding my immediate laicization, ex officio; this time not even a trial or personal discussion of any kind. No recourse of any sort was allowed me. No communication was possible—I was shunned by the diocese and my brother priests. My name erased from the official records. My life was essentially evaporated."

Infuriating as it may be, Canon Law enables bishops to act as little potentates in their dioceses. Inadequate bishops, fearful of public opinion, tend to isolate themselves from those who think differently than they do, and confront issues in a dictatorial manner. Bishops who allowed known serial pedophiles to continue in the priesthood should have been removed. So too those who sacrificed innocent priests for

expediency, hiding behind the non-binding *Dallas Charter*. But the Vatican has no mechanism for removing them (even for evaluating them), unless immoral behavior, heresy, or financial mismanagement can be proven. And so, many of them continue to exercise their office in good standing. No wonder the outrage!

It seems to be part of our psychological make-up to trust law enforcement personnel and think of them as good people. We also tend to believe that telling the truth will clear us of an allegation. McCarthy jarringly demonstrates that this trust is misplaced. He chronicles the emotional abuse suffered at the hands of a police detective, and discusses the use of such dubious investigative practices as a rigged lie detector test and proposing “suppressed memories” to alleged victims. He recounts the testimony given by a police detective at his canonical trial:

“Then [the detective] testified—the one who began this whole sham. The one who convinced the girls that ‘Father McCarthy molested you when you were children,’ even though they denied having any memories whatsoever of such a thing happening. He invoked the technique prevalent in the seventies called ‘suppressed memory.’ He had said to them, ‘You don’t remember it because it was so painful and awful that you just buried it...but he did molest you.’ After several intense barrages at them, they allowed themselves to become convinced those awful things actually happened to them.”

McCarthy rightly advises any priest facing a sexual abuse charge to get a civil and canon lawyer before answering any questions, either from the bishop or from the police—especially the police. He notes how the conviction of an abusive priest is viewed as a feather in a police officer’s cap—career-wise.

So much is said about abuse victims—and rightly so—but little is said about the priests falsely accused, either those living

or those who have died. Least discussed of all is the truth that, in some cases, Satan is acting on the minds and imaginations of those people who lend themselves to the task of destroying an innocent priest. The Evil One knows that to cripple the priesthood is to strike at the heart of the Church. That's why every effort must be made to protect the innocent, for their good and for the good of the Body of Christ.

McCarthy shows his readers the entire process, civil and canonical, which he endured. His story is an invaluable education for those not familiar with the usual course of events involved in these cases. He says:

"Unquestionably there needs to be positive meaningful change to the ecclesiastical tribunal system. They have never been truly challenged. It is time for priests around the world to speak out for major reform. It needs to change so that innocent priests like me can get a fair shake—and I'm going to keep fighting until it is done. If I don't keep up the struggle, my life's work will be in vain."

McCarthy acknowledges the importance of his lay friends and brother priests who supported him during his long ordeal. They were, he says, essential to his survival. He praises his new bishop for treating him with dignity and respect, and reports a reconciliation with his now-retired bishop and the Vicar-General who processed the case against him. McCarthy says he has forgiven all those involved in his crucifixion but, he says, he will never forget. Nor will anyone who reads McCarthy's account.

The Conspiracy is a combination diary, spiritual journal, and exercise in self-analysis, and it includes a bibliography of other books McCarthy found helpful during his ordeal. It is self-published, and so doesn't have all the polish of a work edited and produced by a major publishing house. In a sense, that enhances its effectiveness. This is a raw account of one

man's ordeal, capturing both the torment inflicted on an innocent priest and the joy of his vindication.

Despite the successful outcome of his case, the physical and psychological wounds McCarthy sustained have left permanent scars. Yet the depth of spiritual growth which he reports has enabled him to identify with the innocently crucified Lord. Perhaps that's the most important point the book makes.

This story should be read by every priest and every lay person, because the priest scandal is a sad episode in the history of the Church which effects everyone. McCarthy has performed an invaluable service by giving us his story in the form of an insightful memoir. His account puts the sensationalism surrounding the crisis in a different light, bringing into focus those priests who are being abused by an unjust system. And he offers words of hope to any of his fellows who may be experiencing the pain he endured:

"Finally, may I dare say, if there is one message I want to leave from this journal, it is if there is a priest out there who is falsely accused, I want you to know, that you are not alone, and with perseverance and hopefully with patient endurance, you can make it to the other side of darkness."

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Twilight of the Scandal

by Kiera McCaffrey

(Catalyst 12/2006)

The Catholic League would never defend the indefensible. That

is why we praised the media for putting the spotlight on the Church's sex-abuse scandal in 2002. Without journalists breaking the story, the Church may have been slower to clean house and a greater number of adolescents may have been harmed. Similarly, we have never criticized those victims of abuse who file legitimate lawsuits against the church, or lay groups that truly are focused on helping the reform process. Nevertheless, recent events have forced us to reconsider our earlier assessment.

It is obvious to us that there is a growing problem of late with trial lawyers, advocacy groups, certain segments of the media and even lawmakers seeing the sex abuse scandal not as a problem that has largely been corrected, but as an unending supplier of money, ratings and attention. Moreover, individuals from these various fields are joining forces, not to protect young people—if that were the goal, calls for reform would begin with the public schools—but to bludgeon the Catholic Church.

Ideally, victims' groups provide an atmosphere of support for those who were molested as minors and suggest ways in which the Church can ensure the safety of others. However, two elements, bitterness and lust for power, have corrupted many of these groups, which have taken up a new agenda of stripping the Church and her priests of the same rights enjoyed by the rest of America.

The bitterness comes from a projection of the acts of a few onto the entire Church. The lust for power comes not from problems within the Church, but from reforms made subsequently. When the scandal first came to light, the media looked to victims' groups for commentary and background information. Now, at the twilight of the scandal, when abuse cases have declined, the media have less cause to seek out the spokesmen of such groups. Accustomed to the limelight, these organizations are finding it harder to stay in the public eye without becoming increasingly extremist in their endeavors.

They often turn to allies for help with such work.

The ethics behind victims' groups accepting donations from lawyers who represent group members in the wake of traumatic events are questionable. Some advocates for abuse victims realize this and act accordingly. Survivors First, a Boston-based group created in the aftermath of the scandal, has a policy that it will not "accept money from anti-gay groups, anti-Catholic groups or plaintiff lawyers." However, as *Forbes* magazine's Daniel Lyons first made clear in 2003, such scruples are not shared by other organizations.

For instance, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) touts itself as "the nation's largest, oldest and most active support group for women and men wounded by religious authority figures...an independent and confidential organization with no connections with the church or church officials." Notice this statement says absolutely nothing about SNAP's connections to trial lawyers.

David Clohessy, SNAP's national director, admitted this year that approximately 18% of the group's \$500,000 to \$600,000 budget comes from lawyers' donations. Jeffrey Anderson, notorious for his outrageously broad-sweeping suits against the Church (e.g., filing suit against the Vatican and every single U.S. bishop), is one of those hefty donors. Anderson has made tens of millions of dollars from lawsuits against the Church. And each time he takes a cut from a settlement he negotiates or trial he wins (attorneys may receive between 25% and 40% of the money awarded in each ruling), he is in a better position to write the big checks to his friends at SNAP. And SNAP, of course, is often on hand to support him in his legal efforts.

One way for attorneys and victims' groups to open the Church to more suits is to ask judges to demand the Church turn over personnel files. Digging through these confidential documents, they may discover or claim to discover new incidents of crimes

or cover-up. However, it is not only through the courts that they can ensure the Church is more vulnerable to lawsuits; changes in legislation can make it possible to file suit for abuses that allegedly happened many years ago. And a whole slew of folks are working to see that such changes in fact come about.

SNAP spends 10% of its annual budget to promote legislation the group deems in its interest. Just this October, SNAP joined the newly-formed Foundation to Abolish Sex Abuse in urging the Pennsylvania legislature to pass a bill which would give those alleging they were sexually abused before the age of consent until their fiftieth birthdays to file charges. (Current law allows individuals to file suit only until their thirtieth birthdays.) The group has petitioned for similar changes in statute of limitation laws in many other states.

Voice of the Faithful is another organization that targets clergy at frequent occasions. Formed in 2002, the group purports to seek a "Spirit-driven dialogue toward a stronger Catholic Church." However, as is evident from an amicus brief the group filed with SNAP in a case in Maine, Voice's idea of a stronger Catholic Church evidently means one where the Church is forced to turn over files on deceased priests who have had molestation claims made against them. Besides stripping rights away from priests, Voice has been criticized for advancing ideas that go against Church teaching. Though the group's spokesman, John Moynihan, has stated they are "neutral" on the issues of abortion, homosexuality and the all-male priesthood—troubling enough for a supposedly Catholic flock—Voice meetings and literature have played host to speakers and articles espousing heterodox views time and again.

Another group, Healing Alliance (formerly known as Linkup), turned to Jeffrey Anderson to educate them about effective lobbying techniques. Those gathered at the 2003 annual meeting of the victims' support group were instructed by the lawyer-

turned-showman that teddy bears are the key to influencing elected officials. He told them that, should an advocate call on a legislator who is not in his office, the advocate only needs to leave one of the stuffed toys with a staffer in order to turn a missed opportunity into a successful appeal: "You tell them it represents the innocence of a child—the innocence that's been stolen—and I guarantee they'll remember you."

But when it comes to changing public policy, Anderson isn't content to give a few pointers and then leave the driving to the advocates. He and Larry Drivon, another attorney specializing in claims against the Church, helped draft a bill in California that opened a one-year window during which the statute of limitations for bringing civil suits on sex-abuses cases was abolished.

Colorado Senate President Joan Fitz-Gerald later based her own legislation, which would have opened a two-year window and would have permitted civil actions to be brought against those who are "deceased or incapacitated," on Anderson and Drivon's work. Helping Fitz-Gerald draft this legislation was another attorney, Marci Hamilton. Hamilton, a professor at the Cardozo School of Law in New York, was referred to Fitz-Gerald by SNAP; she works for the group as an expert on behalf of victims and is a strident critic of the Catholic Church.

Victims' groups have lobbied for similar legislation in other states as well. Despite the fact that witnesses die and memories fade, there is a continued push to do away with the safeguards built into our laws. It is not only statute of limitation laws that are targeted by legislators; several states have considered bills that would mandate priests to report cases of molestation learned in the confessional. Though none has become law, the fact that legislators, lawyers and advocacy groups have even advanced the idea is testament to their hostility toward the Church.

If Catholic officials even speak up about such matters, they

make themselves vulnerable to a volley of criticism. The Colorado Catholic Conference learned this when it argued that the Fitz-Gerald bill should apply uniformly to all institutions, including public schools. Despite the fact that it was opposition from public schools that sunk the bill, Catholics bore the brunt of the blame. Favoring soundbite over substance, state Senator Ron Teck whined that "the phrase 'What Would Jesus Do?' was being ignored [by the Church] for the sake of secular society and benefit.'"

People like Teck know that such trite clichés have a certain appeal, much like Anderson's teddy bear shtick. Not only do they sway the folks at home, but for the newsmen, they make great copy. And the media are always hungry for a story about abuse in the Church: no sooner had the scandal broke when the papers showed their own interest in getting a look at confidential clergy personnel files. Papers such as the *Boston Globe*, the *New York Times*, the *Hartford Courant* and the *Washington Post* appealed to judges to release confidential documents related to civil lawsuits against the Church.

Catholic leaders have seriously undertaken the good work of protecting minors in recent years (for which the bishops have received little credit). When the media, lawyers, lawmakers and advocacy groups are able to look past the desire to punish the Church—which is increasingly hard to do as they become more and more dependent on it for their livelihoods—they can help with that good work as they have in the past.

Instead, the reputations of these victims' advocates are seriously tarnished. Since they are entangled with trial lawyers out to make a buck or advance positions inconsistent with Catholic teaching, groups like SNAP and Voice of the Faithful can only be viewed with suspicion. When politicians turn to money-hungry attorneys to craft the laws, it's hard to trust that they're really looking out for the best interests of their constituents. And when the media cares as much about filing news-making lawsuits as reporting the news, there are

few places for people to learn the straight facts.

The Catholic Church has cleaned up its act. Many others need to follow suit.

Sex Abuse and Signs of Fraud

by the Rev. Gordon J. MacRae

(Catalyst 11/2005)

Three years before the latest wave of clergy sex abuse claims rippled out of Boston across the country, Sean Murphy, age 37, and his mother, Sylvia, demanded \$850,000 from the Archdiocese of Boston. Sean claimed that three decades earlier, he and his brother were repeatedly molested by their parish priest. In support of the claim, Mrs. Murphy produced old school records placing her sons in a community where the priest was once assigned. No other corroboration was needed. Shortly thereafter, Byron Worth, age 41, recounted molestation by the same priest and demanded his own six-figure settlement.

The men were following an established practice of “blanket settlements,” a precedent set in the early 1990s when a multitude of molestation claims from the 1960s and 1970s emerged against Father James Porter and a few other priests. In 1993, the Diocese of Fall River settled some 80 such claims in one fell swoop. Other Church institutions followed that lead on the advice of insurers and attorneys.

Before the Murphys’ \$850,000 demand was paid, however, Sean, his mother, and Byron Worth were indicted by a Massachusetts grand jury for conspiracy, attempted larceny, and soliciting others to commit larceny. It turned out that Sean and Byron

were once inmates together at the Massachusetts Correctional Institute at Shirley where they concocted their fraudulent plan to score a windfall from their beleaguered Church.

On November 16, 2001, Sean Murphy and Byron Worth pleaded guilty to all charges and were sentenced to less than two years in prison for the scam. The younger Murphy brother was never charged, and Mrs. Murphy died before facing court proceedings.

Local newspapers relegated the Murphy scam to the far back pages while headlines screamed about the emerging multitude of decades-old claims of abuse by priests. When two other inmates at MCI-Shirley accused another priest in 2001, a Boston lawyer wrote that it is no coincidence these men shared the same prison. "They also shared the same contingency lawyer," he wrote. "I have some contacts in the prison system, having been an attorney for some time, and it has been made known to me that this is a current and popular scam."

It is not difficult to understand the roots of such fraud. Prison inmates, like others, read newspapers. Just months before the onslaught of claims against priests, the Archdiocese of Boston landed on the litigation radar screen with the notorious arrest of Mr. Christopher Reardon, a young, married, Catholic layman, model citizen, and youth counselor at a local YMCA who was also employed part-time at a small, remote parish outpost north of Boston. As Mr. Reardon's extensive serial child molestation case came to light—with substantial and graphic DNA, videotape, and photographic evidence of assaults that occurred over previous months—the YMCA quickly entered into settlements consistent with the State's charitable immunity laws.

In a search for deeper pockets, however, a local contingency lawyer pondered for the news media about whether the rural part-time parish worker's activities were personally known—and covered up—by the Cardinal Archbishop of Boston. It was a

ludicrous suggestion, but it was a springboard to announce in the *Boston Globe* (July 14, 2001) that “the hearsay and speculation” among lawyers and clients, is that “the Catholic Church settled their cases [of suspected abuse by priests] for an average of \$500,000 each since the 1990s.”

It was a dangled lure that would soon have many takers, some of whom have been to the Church’s ATM more than once. In January of 2003, at the height of the clergy scandal, a 68-year-old Massachusetts priest had the poor judgment to be drawn into a series of suggestive Internet exchanges with a total stranger, a 32-year-old man named Dominic Martin. Using a threat of media exposure of the printed exchanges, Mr. Martin demanded that the priest leave an envelope containing \$3,000 in a local restaurant lobby. The frightened priest, who never had a prior accusation, compounded his poor judgment by paying the demand. Soon after, another cash demand was made, but the priest finally called the police who set up a sting of their own. On January 24, 2003, Dominic Martin and his wife, Brianna, were arrested at the drop point, and charged with extortion.

The police report revealed that Mr. Martin had changed his name. His birth name was identified as Tod Biltcliffe, a man who, a decade earlier, obtained a lucrative settlement when he accused a New Hampshire priest of molesting him in the 1980s. At the time the priest protested that Mr. Biltcliffe was committing fraud and larceny. The Church settled anyway. Biltcliffe’s claim was that when he was 15 years old, the priest fondled his genitals while the two were in a hot tub at a local YMCA. Curiously, the investigation file contained a transcript of a 1988 “Geraldo Rivera” show entitled “The Church’s Sexual Watergate.” One of the cases profiled was that of a young man who claimed that a priest fondled his genitals while the two were in a hot tub at a local YMCA.

The 1988 “Geraldo” transcript was a sensationalized account of clergy sex abuse cases from the 1970s and 1980s. The

transcript is notable because it contains many of the same claims of exposing secret Church documents, archives, and episcopal cover-ups in 1988 that lawyers and reporters claim to have exposed in 2003.

Writer Jason Berry, and contingency lawyers Jeffrey Anderson and Roland Lewis all appeared live on “Geraldo” on November 14, 1988 to announce the existence of secret Church archives, cover-ups by bishops, and out-of-court settlements of Catholic clergy sex abuse claims across the country. Jason Berry, who excoriates the Church and priesthood at every opportunity, actually defended, in 1988, the existence of so-called “secret” Church archives: “Canon law says that you have to have a secret archive in every diocese...That’s funny because I’ve been attacking the Church for three years on this...I want to express my own irony of [now] being in a position of defending the Church.”

I have been in prison for eleven years. As a priest, I cringed while the latest wave of abuse claims unfolded in the press in the last few years. Inmates often feel like victims, but some saw the proliferation of abuse claims as a lucrative scam and wondered why they were letting such an opportunity pass. I have been repeatedly asked whether I would give the name of a priest who might have been present in someone’s childhood neighborhood, or if I thought the Church would quietly settle if a claim was made. When asked if the claim would be true, the answer is always the same: “Of course not!” One inmate reported that he was visited by his lawyer who asked if he is Catholic. The lawyer is alleged to have said: “If you want to accuse a priest of something, I can have \$50-grand in your account by the end of the year.”

Another inmate told of his narcotics arrest by a detective who was apparently fielding cases for contingency lawyers. The young man reported that he was asked whether he wanted to accuse a priest who had been accused by others. The young man insisted there was nothing he could accuse the priest of, but

the detective reportedly suggested: "That's sort of beside the point, isn't it? We're talking a lot of money here."

Yet another inmate claims that he indeed was molested by a priest and is awaiting settlement from a distant diocese. The man says little about the abuse beyond a vague and cursory suggestion that he somehow repressed it. He drones on incessantly, however, about plans for his expected windfall, about investment opportunities, and about how non-invasive the settlement process has been. Another, rather insightful inmate remarked: "Let me get this straight. If I say that some priest touched me funny 20 years ago, I'll be paid for it, I'll be a victim, and my life will be HIS fault instead of mine! Do you have any idea how tempting this is?"

In a 2004 article in the *Boston Phoenix*, "Fleecing the Shepherds," legal expert and author Harvey Silverglate cautioned against capitulating to significant numbers of questionable claims brought after the Church entered into huge blanket settlements. In some cases, such claims were deemed "credible"—the standard established for permanent removal of accused priests—with no other basis than their having been settled.

As accusations swept over the U.S. Church, few in the media dared write anything contrary to the tidal wave gaining indiscriminate momentum against the Church. A notable exception was the left-leaning Catholic magazine *Commonweal*, which editorialized: "Admittedly, perspective is hard to come by in the midst of a media barrage that is reminiscent of the day care sex abuse stories, now largely disproved, of the early nineties...All analogies limp, but it is hard not to be reminded of the din of accusation and conspiracy-mongering that characterized the anti-Communist witch hunts of the early 1950s."

With media coverage of the unprecedented millions invested in blanket settlements, the trolling for claims and litigation

continues unabated. Last year, a Boston area high school history teacher and coach of twenty years, a husband and father with no prior record or accusation, was caught up in an Internet sting by a detective posing on-line as a teenage boy cruising Internet chat rooms for sexual encounters. The practice has netted the detective some 400 arrests, including—by his own estimation—1 priest, 6 police officers, and 18 public school teachers. The ex-teacher, now prison inmate, related that as the handcuffs were set upon him, before he was even led out of the YMCA to which he had been lured and arrested, the detective asked some curious questions: “Are you a Catholic?” “Yes.” “Were you ever an altar boy?” Another “yes.” “Were you ever molested by a priest?”

Father Gordon MacRae is in prison for claims alleged to have occurred in 1983, and for which he maintains innocence. His case was extensively analyzed in a two-part series in The Wall Street Journal (April 27/28, 2005) by Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, Dorothy Rabinowitz.

The Catholic League's Response to Voice of the Faithful's Criticism of Bishop Murphy

(For more material related to Bishop Murphy, please go [here](#).)

(8/2003)

VOTF CLAIMS:

According to the [Massachusetts attorney general's] Report, Bishop Murphy played a key role in the failure to protect the children. As a consequence, he has abdicated his moral authority.

With regard to Bishop William Murphy, now of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, the report says:

And, even with undeniable information available to him on the risk of recidivism, Bishop Murphy continued to place a higher priority on preventing scandal and providing support to alleged abusers than on protecting children from sexual abuse. (P.39)

IN FACT:

The above statement excerpted from Attorney General Reilly's report represents an editorial summary of Bishop Murphy's tenure in the Boston Archdiocese, and not a well-supported one. The attorney general's report itself offers virtually no evidence to support this sweeping charge: Bishop Murphy is treated only in a brief blurb on pages 39 and 40 of the report. Surely had the Massachusetts attorney general's office found any damning information about Bishop Murphy, this would be the place to publish it—both in the interest of truth and in the interest of justifying the attorney general's use of taxpayer money for his grand jury investigation.

Even the book *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church*, produced by staff of the *Boston Globe*, contains nothing that casts Bishop Murphy in a poor light. Of the few entries in the index for William F. Murphy, only one is unflattering, and it clearly refers not to Bishop Murphy but to the Rev. William F. Murphy, Delegate to the Cardinal—a different person altogether. In fact, one of the entries even corroborates Bishop Murphy's claim to have supervised John Geoghan's exit from the priesthood. Even the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Boston Globe's* compendium on the crisis has nothing bad to say about

Bishop Murphy. But VOTF has already made up its mind about him.

VOTF CLAIMS:

Bishop Murphy misrepresented his role in the cover-up. In his "Report to the Diocese – Part one," (*Long Island Catholic* 7/2/03) Bishop Murphy says that a Delegate (at one time a priest also named William Murphy) was responsible for handling cases of sex abuse, and that the Delegate reported directly to the Cardinal. However, the Attorney General's Report says that... "Although Cardinal Law delegated responsibility for handling clergy sexual abuse matters, his senior managers [i.e. bishops] kept the Cardinal apprised of such matters either directly or through the Vicar of Administration, who supervised the ... Delegate." (P 31) Bishop Murphy himself became Vicar of Administration in 1993 [to 2001]. (P 38)

IN FACT:

Yes, Cardinal Law was "apprised of such matters...through the Vicar of Administration," as it is stated on p.31 of Attorney General Reilly's report. But this was not the procedure during Bishop Murphy's tenure. What VOTF leaves out is the following, which comes from the very same paragraph in Reilly's report:

For the most part, [Cardinal Law's] involvement included the review and approval of recommendations on such matters from his Vicar of Administration...or after the adoption of the 1993 policy, from the Review Board.

As Bishop Murphy said, the 1993 policy was in place when he became Vicar of Administration. His comments are not inconsistent with Reilly's report.

VOTF CLAIMS:

The Report also says that the "Delegate ... sometimes discussed

clergy sexual abuse matters directly with the Cardinal, and on other occasions conveyed information to the Cardinal through Bishop Murphy.(P 38) The report further says that the Delegate "...generally kept both the Cardinal and Bishop Murphy apprised of significant clergy sexual abuse matters." (P 48)

IN FACT:

Bishop Murphy never claimed that he had no knowledge of abuse cases. In his "Report to the Diocese," he wrote,

The Vicar General did not deal with accused priests, **except for the specific cases described below**, none of which involved a reassignment to a pastoral position [emphasis added].

Bishop Murphy did not issue the blanket denial of involvement that VOTF suggests. Furthermore, Bishop Murphy writes,

While I was not involved in handling priests, allegations against them, evaluations of them or any decision regarding their possible return to pastoral ministry, Cardinal Law did on occasion ask my counsel or gave me some specific tasks that dealt with a few of these priests after they had been removed from pastoral ministry.

One of the few such instances mentioned in the report is Bishop Murphy's role in revoking a Fr. Francis Murphy's appointment to a position because he and Cardinal Law "were concerned that [the abusive priest] could still have contact with children through his assignment" (Attorney General's report, p. 64).

In yet another instance, Bishop Murphy's interaction with a priest who had been removed from the ministry is completely to his credit. Commenting on his efforts to remove John Geoghan from his position at the Office of Senior Priests, Bishop Murphy writes:

I met with John Geoghan several times over five or six months trying to get him to resign. Whether I cajoled him by reference to family or pressed him with strong arguments, he kept refusing to respond to that request. With the Cardinal's permission, I removed him against his will. By that point he was living in his family home. Later I worked with the Cardinal on the petition to the Pope who removed him from the priesthood in response to our report and request.

VOTF CLAIMS:

Bishop Murphy abdicated his duty to protect the children by ignoring the criminal nature of child abuse. In denouncing Bishop Murphy's actions, the Report states:

"The problem was compounded because Bishop Murphy failed to recognize clergy sexual abuse of children as conduct deserving an investigation and prosecution by public authorities. Instead he viewed such crimes committed by priests as conduct deserving an internal pastoral response." (P. 39)

IN FACT:

Until recently the Commonwealth of Massachusetts did not require clergy to report abuse; and the internal pastoral response was at the time the norm in all religions. That notwithstanding, the comments about Bishop Murphy amount only to bald assertion. If Attorney General Reilly had specific examples of this behavior, presumably he would have included them in such a comprehensive report. However, the evidence simply is not there.

VOTF CLAIMS:

Bishop Murphy showed a regrettable lapse of judgment when he assigned an alleged abuser to oversee abusers.

In an apparent lapse of judgment, Bishop Murphy was involved in having a priest named Melvin Surrette [sic], who had "been accused himself of sexually abusing children, to be Assistant Delegate responsible for arranging suitable job placements for priests found to have engaged in sexual abuse of children." (P.38) The Attorney General's report further comments that, "The Archdiocese documents relating to Surrette's [sic] assignment do not show any consideration of the propriety of having a man accused of sexually abusing children significantly involved in finding suitable job placements for other alleged abusers. Further, there appears to have been no appreciation of the inherent conflict of interest or appearance of impropriety in having a priest under investigation by the Delegate working as Assistant to the Delegate." (39)

IN FACT:

Bishop Murphy wrote in his "Report to the Diocese":

One of the priests, Melvin Surette, made several proposals to the Cardinal seeking to have a nonpastoral ministry in the chancery. One of his proposals was that he would have an office under the supervision of the Delegate. Working from that office, he would seek out appropriate job opportunities for priests on leave. Such jobs would have to be such that there would be no possibility of contact with minors. The Chancellor and I approved an expenditure of about \$14,000 for him to set up such an office under the supervision of the delegate. That proposal, to my memory, never materialized and the money was never spent.

VOTF CLAIMS:

It is our firm conviction that Bishop Murphy is not meeting the spiritual and material needs of our Parishioners. Our

diocese is suffering under his rule. We are without a spiritual leader.

Bishop Murphy has not satisfactorily addressed the needs of the diocese, especially those of the poor. The Bishop's extravagance in the renovation and furnishing of his own lavish quarters has compounded the problem. The Bishop's Appeal is down; Parish collections are down; donations made by Long Island Voice of the Faithful to Catholic Charities have been returned by Bishop Murphy because "it is important to maintain a sense of unity of mission." Could this be a reason why Mass attendance is also down? Bishop Murphy's decisions and policies have hurt those in need and hindered the ability of the diocese to raise funds from the laity.

IN FACT:

Bringing up the bishop's residence is not only petty; it relies on the gross distortions of the likes of *Newsday's* Jimmy Breslin. As for Bishop Murphy's decision to reject VOTF's donations: this is a sound policy. Few institutions are willing to be bullied by parallel fundraisers who have strings attached to their money and dubious agendas. Complaints like these seem tacked onto VOTF's manifesto for good measure, in case scandal-related accusations against Bishop Murphy fail.

VOTF CLAIMS:

Bishop Murphy's credibility has been damaged beyond repair. On numerous occasions, and in statements published in the Long Island Catholic, Bishop Murphy has downplayed his role in the Boston cover-up. An objective reading of the Attorney General's Report clearly brands our bishop as one of the key wrong doers.

IN FACT:

This is a strong statement, and it is totally unfounded. An

objective reading of the Attorney General's Report leaves one with the conclusion that Reilly did not have the evidence to back up his rhetoric about Bishop Murphy. An objective reading of VOTF's interpretation of the report only proves that point: why else would VOTF resort to grasping at straws, misleading logic, and guilt by association?

Furthermore, Bishop Murphy's efforts to clean up the mess he inherited when he became bishop of Rockville Centre were exemplary. The Diocese's statement on the Massachusetts Attorney General's report puts it well:

What is more relevant to Long Islanders is Bishop Murphy's leadership and actions on issues involving sexual abuse since his appointment to the Diocese of Rockville Centre in September, 2001. To start, Bishop Murphy reviewed the files of all priests in the diocese and removed from ministry anyone who had an allegation of sex abuse of a minor in his personnel file. He revamped the diocesan procedures for dealing with sex abuse of minors, established a hot line for reporting incidents of sexual abuse and appointed a Pastoral Intervention Team to report allegations to law enforcement and to work with victims and the priests accused. All of this was in place more than a month before the bishops met in Dallas in June 2001.

Bishop Murphy's actions in Rockville Centre were swift and responsible, to say the least. He reined in the abusive priests who remained undisciplined by his predecessor, Bishop McGann; in fact, he removed two priests within two months of his arrival. Bishop Murphy was quick to enact policies to protect the people of his diocese.

VOTF CLAIMS:

Bishop Murphy's continued presence thwarts the healing our diocese needs. Our diocese is scourged with disunity. Faithful

Catholics are disillusioned. Attendance is down, contributions are down. We are in a state of disarray. There is a profound and pervasive distrust for our spiritual leader. Polls overwhelmingly support his resignation. We desperately need new leadership.

IN FACT:

Which polls overwhelmingly support Bishop Murphy's resignation? Polls of VOTF members, perhaps; those would hardly be representative of the Catholic population in general, especially when the truth is known about Bishop Murphy. Even so, being a bishop is not a popularity contest; to subject episcopal tenure to poll results would unnecessarily politicize the episcopacy. Who would like to see bishops molding their teachings to pander like politicians?

VOTF CLAIMS:

Bishop Murphy has contributed to the American Bishops' loss of moral authority. In a wider context, Bishop William Murphy, along with the Bishops of the United States, has lost the moral high ground that used to give weight to statements concerning issues such as poverty in our country, war, nuclear weapons and the death penalty. Whether or not people agreed with the Bishops' positions on these issues, the statements were debated both within and without the Catholic Church and in the pages of many respected publications. This, unfortunately, seems no longer to be the case.

IN FACT:

It is notable that VOTF concentrates only on the bishops' positions on "poverty in our country, war, nuclear weapons and the death penalty." They are all surely issues worthy of the bishops' attention. But why no mention of such issues as

abortion, homosexuality, human cloning, or euthanasia? Indeed, soon after the scandal reached its peak, major newspapers applauded bishops who spoke out against the war. At that time, few used the scandal to silence the Church. However, when the Church recently spoke out on gay marriage, few could resist telling the Church to mind its own business. Only then did commentators claim that the Church should not speak, in light of the sex abuse scandal. The fact that VOTF is unconcerned by efforts to silence the Church on sexual issues is very telling.

William Donohue's comments in the August 3 edition of the *New York Times* sum up the entire matter succinctly:

"I am not interested in someone's editorial opinion," Mr. Donohue said. "I want evidence."

"What we have here is classic McCarthyism, guilt by association," Mr. Donohue said later in the interview. "Simply because Bishop Murphy served in Boston, he is presumed guilty."

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- [Read about the Catholic League's petition drive in support of Bishop Murphy](#)

More material on Bishop Murphy, Newsday, and Voice of the Faithful

- [LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT TO SMEAR BISHOP MURPHY](#) (2/11/04)
- [CHECKMATE: NEWSDAY AND VOICE OF THE FAITHFUL](#) (1/12/04)
- [REPORT ON BISHOPS IS ENCOURAGING](#) (1/6/04)
- [CATHOLIC MALCONTENTS ATTACK BISHOP MURPHY](#) (12/4/03)
- [6,000 LONG ISLAND CATHOLICS SIGN PETITION IN SUPPORT OF BISHOP MURPHY](#) (9/25/03)
- [THE EVIDENCE MOUNTS: BISHOP MURPHY IS INNOCENT](#) (8/7/03)
- [CATHOLICS RALLY TO SUPPORT BISHOP MURPHY](#) (7/29/03)

- [PETITION DRIVE TO SUPPORT BISHOP MURPHY BEGINS](#) (7/25/03)
 - [GANGING UP ON BISHOP MURPHY](#) (7/24/03)
 - [LONG ISLAND PASTORS NOTIFIED OF NEWSDAY'S DEFENSE OF BRESLIN'S BIGOTRY AND DISTORTIONS](#) (12/26/02)
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The Analysis of a Smear

by Father Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R.

(Catalyst 6/2003)

I have been expecting a smear attack from the anti-Catholic segment of the media for years, and on March 2, 2003, it came. The *Dallas Morning News*, which I had never heard of, carried an article by Brooks Egerton entitled, "Priest plays down abuse crisis while helping clergy keep jobs." The article began with a charge that I claimed that the sex-abuse scandal was "the stuff of fiction." The article went on to report that a New Jersey diocese criticized my part in cases involving priests accused of abuse, and Egerton even quoted one victim as saying that I had "failed a lot of victims."

Egerton also maintained that I had refused to be interviewed by him. In fact, he called my office twice while I was out on the road preaching. I did not refuse to be interviewed. In the case of a smear, you are between a rock and a hard place. It is common enough for the person called by an investigative reporter to become a victim. If you speak to one, prepare to have your remarks twisted, significantly abbreviated in a negative way, or simply turned against you. In this case I later learned a number of things about this investigative reporter that make me grateful to God that I was not at home when he called.

The trick in all this is that if you do not speak to the so-called investigative reporter, he will make you responsible for all inaccuracies in the article. If you do speak, you will be grossly misquoted. The heart of the smear is always a plain old-fashioned distortion, such as saying that I called the scandal a fiction.

A number of recent books and articles have been critical of the media. Ann Coulter's fascinating book *Slander* (Crown Publishers) and Bernard Goldberg's book *Bias* (Harper Perennial) are very good examples of the severe criticism of the media. Several writers as different as Richard Neuhaus and Andrew Greeley, as ideologically diverse as George Weigel and Peter Steinfels, and also of course William Donohue, have criticized the media for their handling of the clergy sex crisis.

When the media are not biased, they are often just inept. I got a taste of this from a small New England newspaper, the *Metro News*. Covering a talk I gave, which was attended by nine hundred people, the reporter indicated that two hundred people were present. I said that in the case of the resignation of the late Archbishop Eugene Marino of Atlanta several years ago, I could testify that about 98 percent of what was reported in the media about him was not true. The *Metro News* correspondent reported that I had said that 98 percent of the accusations against clergy in the present scandal were untrue. Egerton must have known I did not say this, because he had read at least the first part of my book. If you don't believe me, read the book yourself (*From Scandal to Hope*, OSV 2002).

The victim I referred to above claimed that I had "failed a lot of victims," according to Egerton. The victim later admitted he had never read my book and got his information from Egerton, who based it on the *Metro News* article. This victim was apologetic and friendly when he learned the facts of the case.

If you find all this complicated, welcome to the world of smears. Distortions, sprinkled with partial truths, are stock-in-trade because the average reader gets tired of the whole thing, shrugs his shoulders, and decides that some of the charges must be true. This was the apparent reasoning of Josef Goebbels, Hitler's propagandist, who is reputed to have said, "Never tell a little lie; no one will believe it. Tell a big lie, and they will believe it."

Often those who are involved in smear tactics do some legitimate things. They tell a story, which the media are supposed to do, but they tell it in a way to suit themselves. It is absolutely amazing how the public is unprepared to think even for a moment that the media would not tell the truth. We all think that the media can be sued if they lie. What a denial of reality! It is actually very difficult and expensive to hold the media legally responsible, especially for half-truths and unbalanced reporting.

Obviously investigators, reporters, and their editors are partially motivated by their own causes and opinions. I am very clear in my book that the present scandal is about homosexual incidents with minors; it is not about pedophilia, which involves prepubescent children. I am critical of the "gay" influences in the churches, and I distinguish gays from those who experience same-sex attractions but who follow the commandments of God and do not try to induce others into a sinful lifestyle. It is interesting to note, for example, that the *Chicago Tribune* (12/9/85) reported that Egerton was in a dispute with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters in Wisconsin who had a homosexual-exclusion policy. Egerton is quoted as saying, "That is deeply offensive to me. I really like kids, but I'm not going into the closet to be a Big Brother."

The *Tribune* also reported several other gay activities Egerton was involved in. He was described as the assistant city editor of the *Dallas Morning News* and chairman of the Texas chapter of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association in

1995. One should not be surprised that he may have a little bias against the Catholic Church, which, along with most other world religions, disapproves of homosexual acts and lifestyles.

It is part of the usual smear campaign to make extraneous charges to undermine the credibility of the individual. This is known as "getting the dirt" on someone. In his article Egerton had me living in a mansion. In fact, I have lived for many years in a garage next to a retreat house. He also makes much of my not having a license as a psychologist. Many professors of psychology (I have been a professor for about forty years) do not get licenses, because they are not paid by insurance companies or other third parties. A license is required for such payment. I actually could charge individuals for my services even without a license, but I have never taken a single cent for my counseling and spiritual direction and never will.

In an original response I made on the friars' website (www.franciscanfriars.com), I said that I could not discuss the priests whose names Egerton mentioned in the *Dallas Morning News*. Apparently he obtained information on some of these cases from the public relations person of the Paterson (N.J.) Diocese. How and why did she ever give such information to an investigative reporter? At my insistence, the Paterson Diocese later issued a clarification, which was intended to shed light on the remarks Egerton quoted from the diocesan spokeswoman. The clarification proved inadequate, and the Paterson Diocese refused to send it to the *Dallas Morning News*, limiting it only to the local paper. It makes a juicy part of the smear if a reporter can change the quotations of a public representative who is injudicious enough to give the reporter information that can then be misconstrued.

Since the smear came out, I have obtained permission from the priests involved to indicate that I neither evaluated nor treated them. They were all in well-recognized treatment

programs and obtained recommendations from a skilled staff of mental health professionals, including psychologists and psychiatrists. Only one of them was involved in a charge of the abuse of minors, and he is no longer in the priesthood. What I did was to arrange for these priests to receive therapy. The one involved with minors has not been accused of a similar charge since the original accusation in the mid-1980s and the treatment he received.

Smears spread. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, to which I once gave an anti-Catholic Robey award (named for Robespierre) on television, reprinted Egerton's article, adding the original touch of an even worse headline ("Critic of media had a role in sex-abuse scandals"). I'm waiting for other papers to pick it up, particularly those I have identified publicly as having an anti-Catholic bias.

It's rare that one can do much legally with a smear, but at the insistence of friends of mine, who are well-known lawyers, I am looking into this possibility. You can do one of two things with a smear or unjust attack. You can lie down and play dead and hope that they won't notice you again, or you can come back at them. Most, if not all, of what they say is lies and distortions. Unfortunately, not to respond appears to give consent to what they say (silence gives consent, as the old legal adage has it), and I think such a policy has proved disastrous in the present clergy scandal situation.

I am deeply grateful to the Catholic League, especially to *Catalyst*, for their excellent defense of Catholicism and for their taking on all the smears possible. I expect other smears, and in fact I will be looking forward to them. They may even help the Church to be purified and spark reform. Since we Franciscan Friars of the Renewal are pro-life, pro-reform, and pro-Catholic, we'd better not be afraid. And there are blessings in being smeared. If it is for the sake of the Gospel, we will receive something much better than a plenary indulgence. Christ Himself has said:

“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11-12).

Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., is the Director of the Office for Spiritual Development of the New York Archdiocese and a founding member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal.

Fr. Benedict Groeschel Responds to his Critics

(Catalyst 5/2003)

Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R. is a good friend of the Catholic League. On March 2, the *Dallas Morning News* published an article about him titled, “Priest plays down abuse crisis while helping clergy keep jobs.” It was written by Brooks Egerton, a staff writer for the *News*; he is also the past chairman of the Texas chapter of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. The article was reprinted in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on March 23. Another article critical of Father Groeschel was written by Maya Kremen; it appeared in the Paterson, NJ *Herald News* on March 4.

Father Groeschel has responded to the articles and we are reprinting his answers point by point to set the record straight. We have taken the liberty of splicing his remarks so

that the point-counterpoint context is readily understandable.

Dallas Morning News: *In the world according to Father Benedict Groeschel, the Catholic Church's sexual abuse scandal is largely the stuff of fiction. Reporters "doing the work of Satan" are driven to lie, the New York priest says, because they hate the church's moral teachings.*

Fr. Benedict: I do stand by my statement that the secular media have taken the scandal out of proportion, ignored many charges of abuse of minors and committed by others in professional roles, created the impression that this is only a problem of Catholic clergy. Writers as varied as George Weigel, Philip Jenkins, Andrew Greeley, Richard Neuhaus and Peter Steinfelds have all been critical of the media coverage of these scandals.

DMN: *The Franciscan friar's base is a mansion on Long Island Sound, where he runs the Archdiocese of New York's spiritual development office and Trinity Retreat Center for clergy.*

BG: I have not been the director of Trinity Retreat for ten years. This retreat for priests has never been referred to before as a mansion. In fact, I don't even live in the building. I have lived for years in the garage.

DMN: *According to his own written account, he has counseled hundreds of his brethren and "happily, 85 priests have returned to the active ministry."*

BG: Egerton mentions that 85 priests have returned to the active ministry through Trinity Retreat, implying that some of these priests had difficulties with minors. These were priests on leaves of absence, not priests who had been accused of any misbehavior at all.

DMN: *Father Groeschel... declined interview requests.*

BG: I did not decline to be interviewed. I never spoke to Mr. Egerton because I was not at home when he called.

***DMN:** Dallas Bishop Charles Grahmann has allowed one of his priests, removed from parish work after the diocese concluded he had abused a girl, to help manage the retreat center in recent years. That priest, the Rev. Richard T. Brown, moved to a hermitage a few months ago...*

BG: Fr. Richard Brown never assisted in the management of Trinity Retreat. He did typing and recorded reservations for priests coming on retreat. He lived a most prayerful and ascetical life while here and he had done so for many years before as many people have said. He did no pastoral work in the New York Archdiocese, nor did anyone ever request permission for him to do so.

***DMN:** Leaders of the neighboring Diocese of Paterson, N.J., one of several that sent business to Father Groeschel, blamed three "unfortunate" reassignments on his advice.*

Letter from Marianna Thompson, Director of Communications, Diocese of Paterson, to the *Herald-News*: I never used the word "blame" in my conversations with the Dallas Morning News. The diocesan focus in this issue is not to cast blame on others...

***DMN:** "It just burns me to no end," said Buddy Cotton, who has accused the Rev. James Hanley of abusing him in the Paterson Diocese and recently called Bishop Rodimer to complain about Father Groeschel.*

BG: [From a letter to the *Herald News* 3/3/03] I had nothing to do with the reappointment of James Hanley to another parish after he was removed from Mendham as a result of serious accusations of abuse of minors. In fact, I had never heard of the case. I became involved when Hanley came on retreat after he was removed a second time from a new assignment.

DMN: *A psychologist who evaluated Father [Morgan] Kuhl for federal prosecutors recommended that he "be enrolled in a program specific to sex offenders," not just in the general psychotherapy and spiritual counseling he was getting.... U.S. District Judge Anne Thompson initially sentenced Father Kuhl to a short prison term followed by house arrest. But she later reduced the penalty, over the objections of prosecutor Donna Krappa, to five years of probation and ordered the priest to "adhere to the program requirements at Trinity Retreat."*

In advocating probation, Father Groeschel represented himself to the court as a counseling psychologist, Ms. Krappa said in an interview. New York state officials said he has never had the license generally required for use of that title. Using the title without a license is a misdemeanor, state officials said.

BG: I can say Morgan Kuhl never received any treatment from me and was in fact directly enrolled in a formal treatment program elsewhere. We provided a supervised residence, which the court agreed to continue.

As to the issue of my not having a license: a Doctor of Psychology does not need a license unless he is receiving third part payments for instance from an insurance company or an agency. I never intended to receive any pay doing psychological counseling or spiritual direction, so I never bothered about a license. In fact I have never been paid a cent for my services that Mr. Egerton refers to as "business." It is not uncommon for professors of psychology not to obtain licenses to practice, because clinical practice is not our principal vocation.

BG: [To the *Herald News*] I am at a great disadvantage in defending myself because of the right of confidentiality of the people involved. I have worked as a therapist and spiritual director with clergy for 30 years after obtaining a doctorate in Counseling Psychology at Columbia University. I

have never charged a fee and have never asked for or received payment. I have seen clergy of various different denominations and faiths. Like any therapist I have made mistakes. People forget that therapists and spiritual directors are neither prosecutors nor defense attorneys. Since I cannot defend myself, I think that any honest person will admit that what has been said against me is unfair and based on misinformation. Being a strong advocate of Church reform does not make you popular—but Jesus did not suggest that we would be popular if we try to follow Him.

CLOSING COMMENTS BY FATHER GROESCHEL:

Since the accusations came out, I contacted each of the priests involved and obtained their permission to state publicly that I neither evaluated nor treated them. They were all treated in very well-known professional programs and their placements were based on the joint decisions of well-known psychiatrists, psychologists and mental health professionals. At the suggestion of Cardinal O'Connor, we offered the Trinity Retreat as a place of retreat, prayer, penance and rehabilitation to priests. I often passed on the written recommendation of other mental health professionals.

WILLIAM DONOHUE OFFERED THESE REMARKS:

Father Benedict Groeschel is a courageous and brilliant priest who has given his life to the Catholic Church. Only those who seek to undermine Catholicism would ever lash out at him. And when they do, the Catholic League will not hesitate to rush to his defense.

Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., is the Director of the Office for Spiritual Development of the New York Archdiocese and a founding member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal.

The Church Scandal: Fodder for State Meddling

by William A. Donohue

(Catalyst 4/2003)

The sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church is being used by state lawmakers to crack the wall of separation of church and state. Unless this is resisted by the hierarchy of the Church, state meddling in the internal workings of the Church will grow.

One of the more conspicuous examples is the willingness of some state legislators to undermine the confidentiality of the confessional by revoking the traditional priest-penitent privilege. They say this must be done in order to protect children: by breaking the seal of the confessional, it is argued, priests would have to disclose information concerning the sexual abuse of minors. But this is a fatally flawed argument and it is being advanced by hypocrites.

There is no evidence to suggest that by ending the confidentiality of the confessional children will be protected. This is a red herring. To begin, let's put the issue into perspective.

A study by the *Washington Post* revealed that less than 1.5 percent of priests over the past 40 years have been accused of sexually molesting a minor. *The New York Times* did a study as well, covering the years 1950 to 2001: it put the figure at 1.8 percent. Currently, less than one percent of priests nationwide are under investigation. While one priest would be too many, it is important to remember that scholars who have

studied this issue (Penn State's Philip Jenkins comes quickly to mind) have determined that the incidence of abuse by priests does not differ from that of the clergy of other religions, and may even be lower.

The overwhelming majority of those abused are postpubescent males—they are not children. Breaking the seal of the confessional could not have saved any of them; nor will it protect anyone in the future. Let's remember a few basic facts.

The seal of the confessional does not apply to the penitent. If someone confesses knowledge of abuse to a priest, there is nothing to stop him from contacting the authorities. Nor is there something that would prevent the priest from asking such a penitent to discuss this further in his office, thereby freeing the priest from his confessional vows. The priest could also withhold absolution until such time as the authorities were notified. In short, there are ways a priest can fulfill his duties without sacrificing anyone.

Another problem with attempts to break the seal of the confessional is the grave implications it has for the First Amendment. Freedom of religion, and the establishment clause which keeps church and state separate, will not mean much if the state is permitted to encroach on the Church's doctrinal prerogatives. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is not something the state can be allowed to trespass upon without doing irreparable harm to Catholicism. It would be a violation of separation of church and state of grave magnitude, having wide implications for all religions. Nothing would be sacrosanct.

Then there is also the problem of unenforceability. How could the state possibly know whether a priest has learned of sexual abuse in the confessional? The priest is certainly not going to say. In the event the penitent calls the cops after revealing such knowledge, and the priest is questioned about what he knows, he could simply refuse to discuss anything he

learned in the confessional. What are they going to do, put him in handcuffs? Will the police wire the confessional? All of this is nonsense.

Hypocrisy is fueling this issue as well. There is no push being made to end the attorney-client privilege, just the priest-penitent privilege. Yet are we to believe that lawyers learn less about the sexual abuse of minors in confidential discussions than do priests? Moreover, the public has little regard for lawyers as a group: a Harris survey in October, 2001 revealed that as a profession, attorneys have "hardly any prestige at all." They finished in a tie for last place with union leaders; doctors were first.

Another hypocritical element in this is the failure of the media to discuss why mandatory sexual abuse reporting bills are being held up in the states. It is not the fault of the bishops. It is the fault of Planned Parenthood and the ACLU.

Planned Parenthood staffers find out about cases of statutory rape on a regular basis, yet they report almost none of them. We know this to be true because a sting operation conducted by a pro-life group recently reported as much. The lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood, Family Planning Advocates, has been trying to ward off any bill that would blanket all professionals equally. What they want to do is keep the exemption for abortion providers while ending the exemption for the clergy. And their friends in the ACLU are working with them, providing legal cover.

Getting the priests is what this game is all about; it has nothing to do with protecting children. That it is being done without much of an uproar from Catholic circles is disturbing. A happy exception to this is Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington.

When the Maryland legislature was contemplating a bill requiring priests to report cases of suspected child abuse

learned in the confessional, Cardinal McCarrick rightly got his back up. He quickly denounced the bill and publicly stated that he would gladly go to jail before ever breaking the seal of the confessional. We immediately supported him, as did others. And the result? The bullies backed off and dropped the bill.

There is another lesson to be learned here. Not only was Cardinal McCarrick's leadership indispensable to this effort, it won the admiration of those not generally in our corner. For example, an editorial in the pages of the *Washington Post* took note of McCarrick's determination. "As one of the most responsible bishops during the sex abuse scandal," the editorial said, "the archbishop of Washington should be taken seriously when he takes such a passionate stand."

What this goes to show is that our side needs to do more than dialogue. Too often dialogue is a recipe for paralysis. There are some things so fundamental—like breaking the confessional seal—that no amount of conversation is going to matter. What matters is playing hardball. That's what wins and that's what earns respect. There is no need to play dirty, but there is every reason to play to win.

Catholics need to check another abuse by lawmakers: far-ranging subpoenas of sensitive documents must end. For example, there is no doubt that some are using the scandal as a pretext to read internal Church memos, priest personnel files and the like. If there is something specific that is needed, that is one thing. But the mass collection of records is quite another. What is so obscene about this is that no other profession is being treated this way. Why not grab the files on members of the clergy from other religions as well? Why limit it to the clergy? Why not obtain the personnel files of teachers, psychologists, social workers, et al.?

Another way some states are playing fast and loose with the Catholic Church these days is by rescinding laws governing the

statute of limitations as it applies to the abuse of a minor. It cannot be said too many times that this long-standing provision in law was formulated to protect the rights of the accused from those with fading memories. Moreover, witnesses may die or cannot be located. No one can really be safe from reckless charges if decades after an alleged offense occurred, the state is going to prosecute alleged offenders.

Impaneling grand juries is another game to watch. What is the purpose of establishing a grand jury knowing that the statute of limitations has run its course? This is what was done on Long Island. Suffolk County District Attorney Thomas Spota impaneled a grand jury knowing full well he could not produce one indictment.

What Spota did was a disgrace. He spent the taxpayers' money on a fishing expedition. He never cross-examined the witnesses, nor did he allow officials from the Diocese of Rockville Centre to testify. He refused to release the names of the jurors and he deliberately leaked a copy of his report to the local newspaper, *Newsday*, before the Diocese of Rockville Centre had a chance to respond. And when I wrote to him asking him to support a bill in New York State that would cover abortion providers, as well as members of the clergy, he failed to respond.

Some of the attorneys involved in bringing the lawsuits against the dioceses are suspect players themselves. Jeffrey Anderson likes to sue the Catholic Church more than anyone in the nation. He aims high—he would like to bring down the Vatican and is not shy about using the infamous RICO law to do so. He has also made quite a living off of this: he has made an estimated \$20 million suing the Catholic Church.

None of this is to say that Church officials have always conducted themselves with honor. Some have not. But it is to say that Catholics would do well to keep their guard up during times like these. There is a lot to exploit at the moment and

there is no shortage of mean-spirited persons ready to do so. The role of the Catholic League in all this is to come to the aid of the Church when it is under fire. We have been busy writing to state legislators about many of these issues. We have taken the opportunity to debate these issues on television and radio, informing the public what is at stake. For the most part, we have been received well.

Unless we beat back overly aggressive lawmakers and trial lawyers at this time, we will pay for it down the road. The scandal should never have happened, but it did. What should not be allowed to happen next is for the Church to be hammered by those who seek to meddle in the Church's internal affairs.

SUPREME COURT AFFIRMS RIGHTS OF PRO-LIFE ACTIVISTS

It was a great victory for abortion protesters. Thanks to pro-life activist Joe Scheidler, it will now be easier for those opposed to abortion to exercise their First Amendment rights.

On February 26, the U.S. Supreme Court in an 8-1 decision ruled that the federal Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, as well as the Hobbs Act, do not apply to abortion foes who protest outside abortion clinics.

Not only will abortion protesters be free from the threat of future RICO suits, but protesters of all causes will not have to labor under such threats. If there are clear cases of harassment or abuse of women seeking an abortion by abortion protesters, then there are plenty of laws on the books that can be used against them. But to use a remedy like RICO, or the Hobbs Act, both of which were meant to apply to gangsters engaged in extortion, as a way to protect abortion-seeking women from being intimidated by protesters, is outrageous.

"The real story here," we told the press, "is the extraordinary disrespect that the so-called champions of

liberty have for free speech.” The National Organization for Women, which brought the lawsuit, has proven beyond a doubt that it would use any law available as a weapon to beat down pro-life protesters. NARAL and Planned Parenthood have similarly shown their contempt for the First Amendment by previously supporting the use of RICO against anti-abortion demonstrators; even affiliates of the ACLU have used RICO to stop the free speech of abortion foes. We explained our reasoning by saying, “That’s because abortion is their god: they would rather lose our fundamental civil liberties before they would ever lose the right of a woman to abort her baby.”

Pro-life activists, many of whom are Catholic, can be proud of this victory. Even those who are not pro-life but still maintain fidelity to the First Amendment can feel a sigh of relief. “Most important,” we concluded, “for the abortion-rights industry to try to muzzle the free speech of demonstrators by manipulating a law aimed at gangsters shows who the real fanatics are.”

FAITH-BASED CARE ACT MAKES SENSE

On January 21, the six Democratic contenders for the presidency appeared at a NARAL Pro-Choice America event celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade*.

The following day, the actual anniversary date of the abortion ruling, NARAL president Kate Michelman and Planned Parenthood president Gloria Feldt held a press conference in Washington on abortion rights. One of the participating organizations at the press conference was Catholics for a Free Choice, headed by Frances Kissling.

We told media that one of the founders of NARAL was Dr. Bernard Nathanson. He converted a number of years ago to the pro-life side and even became a Catholic. Nathanson has

admitted in great detail the anti-Catholic roots of NARAL: lying about the Church, fabricating data and demonizing Catholicism were an integral part of NARAL's strategy. Over the years NARAL may have become more careful about expressing its hostility to the Catholic Church, but it is still not to be trusted. Be that as it may, one person who continues to exercise no such caution is Kissling.

Kissling has not shied away from making her anti-Catholicism public. Indeed, she wears it proudly on her sleeve. That is why so many Catholics are outraged by the refusal of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to drop Kissling's group as a link on its website.

Our statement to the media left no doubts about our resolve in dealing with this issue: "There can be no more room for both Catholics and anti-Catholics in the Democratic party than there can be for both African Americans and white supremacists. That is why the Catholic League will not let go of this issue: the DNC must stop its association with anti-Catholicism and Democratic aspirants to the presidency must address this issue."

This is an unseemly coalition—Democratic candidates for the presidency joining with the advocates of partial-birth abortion and anti-Catholicism. We look for some brave voices in the media to start asking these men some really tough questions about this issue. The public has a right to know their thoughts on the Kissling connection and no one has a right to know more than Catholics.

BILL O'REILLY GETS IN OVER HIS HEAD

Many people admire Bill O'Reilly for his aggressive style and his emphasis on "no-spin" reporting. He delights in being a contrarian. It is also well known that O'Reilly is a Catholic, and in discussions of Catholicism he often gets in over his

head, as he does while opining on other subjects. Lately O'Reilly has picked up the pace on his criticism of the Church; many members of the league have complained, and we have been monitoring the situation.

Initially, O'Reilly lashed out but covered himself, often by distancing himself from his commentary or by withdrawing some of his barbs. For example, the following remarks are excerpted from the March 5 broadcast of the "Radio Factor" on Westwood 1. O'Reilly criticized the Church for its stance on the conflict with Iraq, and attempted to discredit the Church's position by referring to the recent sex abuse crisis. While we have taken issue with such tactics before, O'Reilly was quick to soften the blow of one statement by lamenting the fact: "The Catholic Church in America has no question lost its moral authority. And that is, I hate to say it, that is the truth." In addition, he put criticism of the Church in other people's mouths: "So, you know, people who aren't Catholic are saying, well, you know, 'Look-you're letting little kids get brutalized, and you're not doing anything about it. Why should we listen to you about anything?'" And again, he toned down the comment by noting his own regret: "And that's unfortunately the prevailing wisdom."

O'Reilly was quick to point out that his point of view is not that of someone outside the Church: "Now the day of prayer and fasting on Ash Wednesday, I'm for that." He quotes from the Catechism and cites it as a valid source of guidance. But he tried to refute the pope's position by comparing it to that of Pope Pius XII, what he called a "very eerie parallel." Although he claimed to have "investigated this fairly extensively," his history was not quite accurate. O'Reilly said that the Vatican "at that time basically didn't do anything either.... And so the pope at that time came under a tremendous amount of criticism for basically allowing Hitler to basically be aggressive without the Catholic Church taking a stand against the Third Reich."

Catholic League members know that this is a canard, and O'Reilly backed down from his statement a moment later, admitting that the pope "did criticize Hitler; it's on the record." O'Reilly offered further defense of Pius XII's position: "If Pope Pius had done anything aggressive, Mussolini would have shut him down." And he admitted that Pius XII did good work during the war, for instance, by providing safe houses for refugees.

Speaking on the current pope, he blurted out, "I have never liked this pope. I have always felt he was an autocrat who had no vision about how people live in the real world"; but he quickly noted that John Paul II "survived the Nazis," and later stated self-deprecatingly, "I couldn't really even clean the restroom of the pope."

O'Reilly often overshot his mark, only to cover himself by semi-retractions; he could then point to his moderating comments when people criticize his more uncontrolled statements. His very deliberate style is frustrating. This is not to say that O'Reilly is free from blame; his "no-spin zone" doesn't always live up to the name.

The final straw came on the March 15 broadcast of the Fox News Network's "The O'Reilly Factor." O'Reilly criticized Pope John Paul II for not having "a position on Saddam [Hussein]." After commenting on the brutality of Saddam Hussein's regime, O'Reilly said, "And then the pope sits in Rome and says, gee, this is terrible, but does not throw his moral authority behind removing this dictator." At this point the league could no longer ignore O'Reilly's rhetoric and so issued the following news release:

"Bill O'Reilly has made no secret about his contempt for Pope John Paul II. On his radio show on March 5 he explicitly said, 'I have never liked this pope. I have always felt he was an autocrat who had no vision about how people live in the real world.' Now he is implying that the Holy Father is giving a

wink and a nod to Saddam Hussein.

"O'Reilly's ramblings about the pope do not make him an anti-Catholic. But it does make him an ignoramus. The pope does not have a 'position' on Saddam Hussein anymore than he has one on George W. Bush. But he does have a position on the culture of death and all that it represents. Indeed, there is no one in the world who has more forthrightly addressed issues like genocide, torture, abortion and the like than Pope John Paul II. For O'Reilly to suggest that the pope is soft on Saddam is scurrilous.

"Just last Saturday Fidel Castro presided over the inauguration of a new convent of nuns in Cuba. He did so as a fitting tribute to the fifth anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba. Now it will no doubt come as a tremendous shock to Bill O'Reilly to learn that the pope was able to accomplish this without ever having a position on Fidel Castro. Come to think of it, the pope never had a position on any of the Soviet Union's officials, yet even Gorbachev credited the Holy Father with bringing about the implosion of the U.S.S.R.

"It's time O'Reilly took a deep breath and stopped with the hyperbole. It's also time he learned a little more about his own religion."

CONTROVERSY MARKS ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE (AGAIN)

It would not be St. Patrick's Day without controversy, and this year was no exception. This time the controversy swirled around New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and the Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick. The Catholic League, not surprisingly, had a hand in the turmoil.

The problem began when Spitzer was chosen to address the Friendly Sons on the evening of St. Patrick's Day at their

annual dinner. Spitzer is not popular with practicing Catholics in New York because of his ill-fated attempt to shut down the crisis pregnancy centers in the state. As soon as members of the Friendly Sons received their invitation to the dinner—with Spitzer as a featured speaker—they began calling the Catholic League for help.

We immediately issued a news release informing people that Spitzer has never marched in New York City's St. Patrick's Day Parade. Indeed, in 2000, when asked if he would march in the parade, he told the New York Post, "No." When pressed, he replied, "It's more a scheduling thing than anything else. I'm not going to march in it. I'll just leave it at that."

Well, the Catholic League did not just leave it at that. It was quite obvious that Spitzer had previously refused to march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade because parade officials bar gays from having their own contingent (note: gays have never been barred from marching any more than pro-life Catholics have—it's just that neither group is permitted to have its own unit).

On February 24, we called Spitzer's office to learn whether the Attorney General was planning to march this year. We were told that Spitzer hadn't decided yet and will let us know in a few weeks. It didn't take long before officials of Friendly Sons, under mounting pressure from the rank and file, revoked Spitzer's invitation. That, however, wasn't enough for the Catholic League.

We still wanted to know whether Spitzer was prepared to address a major dinner on St. Patrick's Day yet not march in the very parade that honors the patron saint of the Archdiocese of New York. So on March 13, we called his office for an answer. We were told the event was never on his calendar. "In other words," we told the media, "he had every intention of going to the dinner but not marching in the parade. Which means he's decided to stiff Catholics."

One more item of interest: when we called the Friendly Sons after Spitzer's invitation was pulled and asked why he wasn't speaking, we were told he was never scheduled to speak in the first place. This is a lie. We have a copy of the invitation.

Despite this unfortunate incident, this year's St. Patrick's Day Parade was as much fun as it always is.

SOUTH DAKOTA RESOLVES BUSING DISPUTE

With short notice, parents of Catholic school students in South Dakota were told the state would no longer provide busing for their children. But the controversy came to a quick end when lawmakers found a compromise measure.

It all began when public schools that provide busing to parochial school students were told they can no longer do so and still be covered by insurance. Citing a South Dakota law and an attorney general's opinion from 1992, school authorities said they had no choice but to curtail service to Catholic students.

In 1992, then-Attorney General Mark Barnett said that the South Dakota constitution does not permit funds for any sectarian or religious institution. And the reason it doesn't is due to the bigoted Blaine Amendment provisions that are built into the state's constitution; these amendments, all aimed at prohibiting any funding for Catholic institutions, are based on 19th century anti-Catholic legislation. The state recently moved to enforce this provision, and the sitting Attorney General, Larry Long, backed the decision.

But it appears that there was more at stake than the bigoted Blaine Amendment clause in the South Dakota constitution. They instituted a new formula for public school funding: instead of providing money based on how many public school children lived in the school district, the new formula followed a strict head

count of children in the public schools. Because public school enrollment in the rural areas of the state has been declining, the new formula was designed to pressure private school students into their schools.

Lawmakers, however, quickly came up with a compromise. Busing for parochial school students could be continued as long as the school districts do not spend any extra money as a result. So far, so good, as Catholic school students are being bused to school again.

The Catholic League pledged to join the fight but did not have to do so given the compromise measure. But it just goes to show that until the Blaine Amendments in the states are jettisoned, the residue of anti-Catholic legislation will continue to be a problem.

ANTI-RELIGIOUS FANATICS

Despite all the talk about how religious Americans have become since 9-11, anti-religious fanatics abound these days. Here are three fast examples.

It is hardly surprising to learn that the logo for a city in New Mexico by the name Las Cruces, which means “the crosses,” features—you guessed it—multiple crosses. But to the good-humored folks at the local chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, this is an abomination. So they’ve sued. The complaint? The logo means the state is promoting religion. If so, it certainly hasn’t had any effect on Americans United.

The educrats at Varela High School in Florida have no problem with pictures of most student clubs appearing in the school’s yearbook. The Animal Rights Club and the Gay-Straight Alliance Club are perfectly welcome to submit pictures of their members. But not the Choose Life Bible Club. That would be

unconstitutional—it might suggest the school is promoting religion. That the school might be promoting sodomy is one thing, but it is quite another to go so far as to promote religion. There are times when a man, or even a transgendered type, needs to draw a line in the sand. High Noon has arrived.

What makes this case so interesting is the comment made by the principal: he said the term “Choose Life” might offend students who support abortion. He is, of course, correct. But what apparently escaped him was a compromise—the offended students should be free to adopt signs saying, “Choose Death”; then everyone could be happy. In any event, the ever-sensitive principal folded when threatened with a lawsuit.

Then there was the unassuming dentist from Pagosa Springs, Colorado, who got himself a fast lesson on what the First Amendment will not tolerate these days. All he wanted to do was pay for an advertisement on a local National Public Radio (NPR) station saying, “Gently Restoring the Health God Created.” When the free speech advocates at NPR heard this, they went nuts. “God.” That was it. The word “God.” Now, had the dentist decided to use the name of God in vain, he no doubt would have been defended for exercising freedom of expression.

If you think it’s hard to write this stuff without being cynical, you’re right.

CANDY CANE CONTROVERSY

Passing out colored condoms on high school grounds is less controversial than religious-themed candy canes. That’s what we’ve concluded after examining the controversy at Westfield High School in western Massachusetts.

Last December, six students from Westfield distributed 450 pieces of candy to fellow classmates. The candy canes

contained notes declaring the J shape stood for Jesus and red and white stripes symbolized Christ's blood and purity. They were immediately threatened with suspension, and on January 2 were told they had to serve a one-day suspension. Their crime? Violating separation of church and state. Their response? A lawsuit.

The candy-cane distributing students got a boost recently when a new regulation issued by the U.S. Department of Education provided a list of students' rights that the authorities must respect. Among those rights is the right to pray in school, etc. Lawyers for the students were heartened by the news. They are invoking it in their brief, which seeks to get the U.S. District Court in Springfield to throw out their suspensions and allow them to distribute religious material on school grounds.

Things are looking up for the students as the U.S. Department of Justice has filed a friend-of-the-court brief on their side. Now had the students only settled for distributing condoms, the anti-religious cops wouldn't have uttered a word. Such is the state of freedom and morality in America today.

CENSURE GRANTED

In last month's *Catalyst*, there was a story on the antics of Hightstown, New Jersey councilman Eugene Sarafin. Twice Sarafin had used obscenities to describe his Catholic critics. We called for his censure and on March 3 it was granted.

After writing to all of Sarafin's colleagues urging censure, Council President Nancy Walker-Laudenberger introduced a resolution publicly censuring Sarafin's remarks. The motion passed 5-1; Sarafin was the lone dissenter.

We are pleased that these lawmakers took their responsibilities seriously, and we hope to never hear about

Sarafin ever again.

AP SHOWS CLASS

It really rubs us the wrong way whenever we experience anti-Catholic bias of a gratuitous nature. And we see a lot of this kind of needless and care-free expressions of Catholic bashing. A story we recently read is a case in point.

The story revolved around a series of strip joints down south called Sammy's strip clubs. It provided all sorts of detail about the multi-million dollar enterprise, including one piece of information that hardly seemed to fit: the identification of the strip club owner's religion.

"The naked truth is surprising: A chain of Deep South strip joints is run by a one-time Catholic schoolgirl from Alabama." That's the way reporter Leigh Anne Monitor began her story in the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, a prominent Alabama newspaper. This little nugget of info had absolutely nothing to do with the story, yet it was gratuitously cited anyway.

What bothered the Catholic League most of all was the fact that the Associated Press (AP) picked up the story and ran it on the Alabama state wire for use in other newspapers in the state. William Donohue promptly registered a complaint with an AP official, Mike Silverman, asking him to explain why it was necessary for AP to report that the woman went to a Catholic school. Donohue asked, "How is this fact relevant to an article about a strip club?"

We are happy to say that Mr. Silverman acted responsibly by agreeing that the reference to Catholic school was gratuitous. He regretted that AP let this get by and explained that it was actually in violation of AP policy to do this. Donohue then commended Silverman for his response by saying this decision proves that "AP is a class organization."

KISSLING ON CAMPUS

A pro-abortion group at Williams College, an elite institution in Massachusetts, has invited Catholics for a Free Choice president Frances Kissling to speak during Holy Week. William Donohue wrote a letter to Williams College President Morton Owen Shapiro expressing his concerns.

Donohue identified Kissling as an anti-Catholic who fraudulently uses the term "Catholic" as a cover for her bigotry. Donohue's request of the president was to denounce Kissling for the bigot she is. We are awaiting a response and may consider other avenues to protest her presence on campus.

NO REPLY

There's a club in Washington D.C. called "Between Friends" that likes to host after-hours dance parties for homosexuals. It recently decided to throw a party called "Sunday Mass." An advertisement for the event showed a picture of Christ with the inscription, "Get on your knees, say your prayers, and beg because, boi...God has spoken."

We wrote the proprietor wanting to know whether he has plans to host a Jewish or Muslim service, but he hasn't replied. Somehow we think we'll never hear from this guy. We just hope he got our point.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

Call to Action bills itself as a progressive lay Catholic organization. It rejects the Church's teachings on sexuality and other matters, but it nonetheless maintains it is a loyal Catholic group. Though it has the support of some bishops, it

would not be surprising if Cardinal Adam Maida, Archbishop of Detroit, and Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Arlington, Virginia, are wondering, "with friends like these who needs enemies?"

The Detroit chapter of Call to Action is planning many protests this spring. All the demonstrations will protest the exclusion of women from the priesthood. Among its ventures, there will be a demonstration at the rededication of Blessed Sacrament Cathedral. The blessing of the Church's oils will also be an occasion for a demonstration, as will the ordination of the next class of seminarians. A billboard advocating women's ordination will be posted just a few blocks away from the renovated cathedral, the home church of Cardinal Maida.

Call to Action in Arlington, Virginia, is seeking to bankrupt the diocese. It is urging a boycott of the Arlington Diocese's annual Lenten appeal. It says it is not satisfied with Bishop Loverde's reaction to the sex abuse scandal. Call to Action wants area Catholics to clip a coupon that says "Zero Dollars" and mail it to the diocese's Lenten appeal.

Catholics for a Free Choice is not a Catholic organization and it has twice been condemned by the bishops as a fraud. But this hasn't stopped its leader, Frances Kissling, from selling herself as a Catholic. What is striking about Kissling these days is that she has finally said something nice about Pope John Paul II, though her insincerity is obvious.

Kissling, like most on the left of the political spectrum, is opposed to the war against Iraq. More than that, Kissling and her ilk find it much more difficult to say anything bad about Saddam Hussein than about George W. Bush. That she has taken to praising Pope John Paul II for failing to support the war shows how utterly shameless the woman is.

On CNN's "Crossfire," Kissling said, "I think the Vatican tends to see things in humanitarian ways." How sweet. Maybe

now she'll begin to discover the humanity of unborn babies and start protesting child abuse in the womb.

It was nice to hear Kissling say "the Vatican is a voice for peace." Too bad she doesn't agree with Mother Teresa that nothing destroys peace more than abortion. It was also fun listening to her discover the wisdom of papal authority. In a defense of the pope, she offered, "Religious authority also has legitimate authority." Now if only she meant what she said, we might have cause to celebrate.

The Interfaith Alliance is a rag-tag bunch of religious leaders that have a problem with religion. Their latest target is "In God We Trust." They are incensed that some lawmakers in Colorado want to see our national motto on plaques in every public school in the state. One of those objecting to this initiative is Sister Maureen McCormack of the Sisters of Loretto. "I want to know in whose God we are trusting," she said. One is tempted to say, "Yours," but that would no doubt be rejected as hopelessly chauvinistic. Better to have the god of some indigenous band of tribal warriors—that might win Sister Maureen over.

Another group that makes us wonder is Voice of the Faithful. Those who belong to the group are Catholics upset with the sex abuse scandal; they seek a greater voice for the laity. What made us sit up and take notice recently was the reaction of some of their Long Island members to a miscreant priest. They defended him and blasted those Catholics who exposed him.

It seems that Rev. Charles Papa has visited hundreds of pornographic websites. He has been accused of accessing child pornography, though he disputes this. In any event, when some parishioners found out about his porn hobby, in textbook Voice of the Faithful fashion, they contacted the authorities. And who rushed to his defense? Why the high priests of "zero tolerance," Voice of the Faithful.

As one of its most active members put it, “he [Father Papa] is a human being and a loving, sharing, giving, kind priest. Although porn is not how we want priests to spend their time, let the one without sin throw the first stone.”

To understand the behavior of Voice of the Faithful, it is important to know that Rev. Papa supported church members for founding a local chapter of the group last summer. He has also been criticized by parishioners for his dissidence and rejection of certain Church practices. Had he been orthodox, his defenders might have taken a different tact. So much for Voice of the Faithful’s commitment to principles.

One more example of this group’s affinity for politics was demonstrated in March when the Greater Philadelphia chapter admitted lobbying the papal nuncio to the U.S., Archbishop Gabriel Montalvo, on the right of the laity to help select the next bishop of Philadelphia (Cardinal Bevilacqua will soon be retiring). It would be neater, and surely a lot quicker, if Voice simply detailed those areas of ecclesiastical life it isn’t interested in controlling.

So if these are some of our friends these days, we don’t look forward to meeting our enemies.

JUST DESERTS

It’s not the first time we’ve read about trouble coming to those who have previously offended us, but this time it’s big news: both Disney/Miramax and WNEW are experiencing their share of difficulties these days. We say it’s just deserts.

Miramax, a Disney subsidiary, has produced several anti-Catholic movies over the years— so much so that we’ve pressed Disney chief Michael Eisner to dump Miramax head Harvey Weinstein. Now it seems it’s Weinstein who wants to dump Eisner.

Miramax is in its glory these days as one movie after another has done extremely well at the box office. Weinstein's operation is said to be worth \$3 billion. On the other hand, Disney has been going through some rough times for years. Weinstein has brought in 40 of Disney's 44 Oscar nominations this year and he wants out. He says Eisner is gypping him out of his fair share of the profits. An attempt by Weinstein to buy out Disney's Miramax share was rejected by Eisner.

WNEW is the New York radio station that made national news when it broadcast a live sex romp from St. Patrick's Cathedral last summer. The Catholic League led a major protest and the result was that the show's hosts, Opie and Anthony, were fired. This, however, was only the beginning: the station has been floundering ever since.

The station was once known as the nation's number-one carrier of rock music. According to an article in posted on CNN.com, "The venerable station has gone from free-form to free fall, barely registering an Arbitron rating and dumping its most recent format—talk—last month." In short, with Opie and Anthony off the air, WNEW hasn't figured out a way to keep what's left of its audience.

Disney/Miramax and WNEW both tangled with the Catholic League and lost. Maybe that's because we're getting a little help from a source unknown to these guys.

PHIL DONAHUE AND ROSIE O'DONNELL ON DISPLAY

The February 24 edition of "Donahue" (MSNBC) featured an interview of Rosie O'Donnell by host Phil Donahue. The segment ended with an extended conversation on Catholicism.

In discussing the sex abuse scandal in the Church, O'Donnell said: "And you know what? It needs to be out in the forefront. I really hope that the Catholic Church gets sued until the end of time. Maybe, you know, we can melt down some of the gold

toilets in the pope's Vatican and pay off some of the lawsuits because, you know, frankly, the whole tenet of Christianity, of being pious, of living a Christ-like life, has been lost in Catholicism, I believe."

William Donohue couldn't resist offering his own analysis to the media. Here it is:

"Well, you know, there is something about two aging and embittered Irish Catholics that is so, well, you know, embarrassing.

"We learned a lot from Rosie last night and none of it was endearing. Here is a grown woman crediting Oprah Winfrey with 'teaching America how to have feelings and how to grieve.' Prior to Oprah we just sulked. Now we all bleed. Then there was the exchange she had with Phil laughing heartily about those times of yesteryear when their parents scrubbed the house before the Monsignor popped by for a visit. Now their houses are a filthy mess as not even a deacon will drop by.

"To hear Rosie proclaim that the Church should not be exempt 'from the laws of nature and God' was quite a treat, especially given that her ideas on the subject strike some as being intrinsically disordered these days. Equally perverse is her comment on the gold toilets in the Vatican: she must be thinking about where she last sat when visiting her grieving friends in Hollywood."

"Well, you know, it's a shame that this close to St. Patrick's Day two deracinated Irish Catholics should find the need to vent on national television. Talk about reality TV—these two are not to be believed."

As it turned out, this was the very last show Phil Donahue did. MSNBC cancelled the show due to poor ratings.

LETTERS

Vanity Fair

April 2003

The Great Debate, Continued: Christopher Hitchens, Catholic League hero?...

Rarely is there an article on abortion worth reading anymore. That's because both sides are so utterly predictable that it's a waste of time. Christopher Hitchens's contribution, however, is the exception to the rule ["Fetal Distraction," February]. As one who has sparred with him before, I commend Hitchens for his courage and honesty in dealing with this most divisive of issues.

William A. Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights
New York, New York

Newsday

February 21, 2003

Murphy's Not to Blame

There is not a single Catholic I know who is not angry, hurt and dismayed by the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church. There is never an excuse for molesting minors and it is even worse when those in positions of authority turn a blind eye to it. But it is also true that nothing justifies unfair accusations.

Closer to home, the reaction against Bishop William Murphy of the Rockville Centre Diocese has been incredibly unfair. The problem on Long Island must be put squarely on the doorstep of

Bishop John McGann. Murphy is to blame for none of the problem: 100 percent of it goes to McGann. And that is why it is so obscene to hear people calling for Murphy to resign. He may still have to defend his record in Boston, but on Long Island the verdict is in: He's innocent.

Not only is Murphy innocent, he moved with dispatch to get rid of problem priests. Let me be specific. We all know now that the Rev. Brian McKeon was a serial molester. Under McGann, he was promoted to pastor of St. Anne's in Garden City. Under Murphy, he was bounced: Murphy took over in September 2001 and, in November, McKeon was gone.

No doubt McGann had his reasons for keeping such priests and it is not my intention to impugn his motives. It is my intention to say that whatever good reasons he had, he, like some other bishops, exercised flawed judgment in this regard.

To blame Murphy for any of this is irresponsible. If anything, he put in place a team of professionals led by an exemplary priest, Father Bob Batule, to deal squarely with this issue.

Finally, it is not the bishops of New York who are holding up a mandatory reporting law in New York State—it is Family Planning Advocates (the lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood) and the New York Civil Liberties Union. They are opposed to blanketing everyone because they are interested in shielding abortion providers from reporting cases of statutory rape. Would that Suffolk District Attorney Thomas Spota would get on board with the bishops in insisting that there be no exemptions; instead, he wants the law to apply only to the clergy.

There are lots of reasons to be angry but no amount of it justifies trashing the innocent. The evidence shows that almost all priests have had absolutely nothing to do with the scandal; it also shows that Murphy's role on Long Island has been to tackle what he inherited.

In short, before anyone further hyperventilates over the “crisis,” let’s not forget that most of our priests are good men and that Long Island’s bishop is doing what he can to move forward.

William A. Donohue

Editor’s note: The writer is president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights. Manhattan

The American Conservative

March 10, 2003

Drawing Distinctions

Jeremy Lott (Feb. 10) claims that the Catholic League uses the same tactics as CAIR. That may be true in some instances but the examples he cited are poor. The Catholic League does not issue “frequent alerts to elicit comments and money from supporters.” Six times a year we ask our members for a donation to pay for a specific project.

Do we “demonize” our opponents? We fight back against those who bash the Church, but it is not easy to see how this amounts to “demonizing.” Regarding the charge of our “slipshod use of polling,” we don’t poll. Finally, do we “elevate small tiffs into a national outrage”? That’s quite subjective: when we got “Opie and Anthony” fired for broadcasting a description of a couple having sex in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, we weren’t elevating anything—we were simply responding to an outrageous condition.

In short, it is tricky business to lump all anti-defamation organizations together.

William Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights

New York, NY

Reason

March 2003

E Pluribus Umbrage

Tim Cavanaugh, author of "E Pluribus Umbrage" (December), finds it amusing that in the midst of the church's priest scandal, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights "alerted its 300,000 members to a grave threat to the faith: a King of the Hill episode in which cartoon housewife Peggy impersonates a nun."

This makes it sound as if we object to Sister Act portrayals, but anyone who has really followed the Catholic League knows this is bunk. Our objection to this episode was the vile way in which the Eucharist was treated. Cavanaugh omits this because it would interfere with the point he wants to make.

On a more important note, Cavanaugh says that our petition to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) protesting Opie and Anthony shows we really do believe in censorship. This is nonsense. Congress long ago established the FCC, and no one has ever ruled it to be a censorial body. Indeed, when we succeeded in getting the show kicked off the air, we immediately requested the FCC not to go through with yanking the license of the station.

Perhaps the most telling comment by Cavanaugh is his remark that "the most endearing thing about Bill Donohue is that he genuinely seems to enjoy hurting people." It would be more accurate to say I enjoy giving it to intellectual jackasses. Cavanaugh will escape my wrath because he is no intellectual.

William A. Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and

America

March 3, 2003

Accurate

The Rev. Andrew M. Greeley's conclusion that *The New York Times's* coverage of the sexual abuse scandal in the church constitutes "virulent anti-Catholicism" is irresponsible ("The *Times* and Sexual Abuse by Priests" 2/10). The *Times*, like most major newspapers that covered the scandal, never implied that most priests were predators. And this is especially true of Laurie Goodstein, whom Father Greeley attacks. Never have I found her to be anything but professional and accurate in her reporting.

It does no good to blame the messenger for bringing bad news.

William A. Donohue

President, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights

New York, N.Y.

A Time for Redemption

by David Reinhard

(Catalyst 5/2002)

I think the Roman Catholic Church has turned the corner on its priest sexual abuse scandal. Yes, turned the corner.

True, the stories about pedophile priests—the crimes and cover-ups—will fill the news and fuel the outrage of

Catholics, non-Catholics and anti-Catholics for some time to come. The courts, civil and criminal, will continue to mete out some measure of justice in these cases for a good while.

And commentators of all stripes, faiths and motivations will offer their opinions on what ails the Catholic priesthood. But, in recent weeks, the church has finally moved to right itself, and not because of any recent statements from the Vatican or American bishops, welcome as they may be. I've seen the first fitful steps at two churches in Portland [Oregon], and I'm sure many other Catholics have witnessed the same thing at their churches. It happens when a priest breaks from discussing the daily scripture readings and devotes his homily to today's all-too-routine headlines. It happens when a priest marshals the courage and grace to speak about the unspeakable—a priest's sexual abuse of children, what Philadelphia's Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua calls "the most depraved of moral aberrations."

How difficult it must be for these priests to address this with their congregations, particularly with altar boys or girls and other youngsters in attendance. It must be uncomfortable as, well, hell. Certainly, it is for the most faithful Catholics.

But silence will not suffice. Screening out unfit candidates for the priesthood and maintaining zero-tolerance for priests who have sex with minors—a category that extends beyond pedophilia, which is about adult sexual attraction to prepubescent children—are important. It's encouraging that most dioceses have taken action. But sometimes talk is as important as action, particularly when the actions have occurred in the church's bureaucratic warrens and within secret legal settlements.

Facing this scandal head-on—finally speaking about the unspeakable—is, I think, vital for the priests and their parishioners, not to mention the church. Priests and

parishioners need each other now more than ever. Their responses to the scandal are probably not so different.

That became clear—painfully and comfortingly—on a recent day when Father Paul Peri stood in the center aisle at St. Michael's in downtown Portland and poured out his heart. He wanted to talk about the proverbial elephant in the living room, the Catholic topic everyone and no one was discussing at church services. So he talked to the congregation.

He talked about how sad he was for the victims of this abuse. He talked about how angry he was at those who had brought shame on the church and, yes, the media's hyping this story out of proportion. He talked about the shame he feels and his worry that this scandal will turn away men seeking the priesthood. He talked, as well, about the priests he knows.

They're probably not so different from the 40,000 other priests across the nation. They get up each day, celebrate Mass, teach and minister to the poor, the lonely, the dispossessed. They're not without sin, but they are without scandal. They live in the light, not the darkness. Yet they are not the public face of the Catholic clergy these days—Boston's defrocked priest John Geoghan is—and the scandal of this maddening reality was Peri's own cross to bear this Lent.

He ended on an upbeat note that day, but it was not Peri's hopeful words that seemed to move his flock. It was the mere discussion of "the issue" and the fact that his feelings—his sorrow, anger, shame, and frustration—mirrored their own. Did the tears come from witnessing Peri's pain or from a relief that our common scandal was brought out of the darkness and into the light?

Parishioners, of course, cannot know what it means to be a priest these scandal-filled days. If you're a priest, how does anyone know you haven't molested a child? How do you defend

yourself against suspicions when the crime itself occurs in private? You almost have to prove something didn't happen; you almost have to prove a negative.

It's an impossible burden that makes an often lonely calling lonelier. In the current atmosphere, the clerical collar becomes a kind of choker. As one priest told me, "You stand up there and feel people who don't know you suspect you of being a child molester."

This has been a season of suffering for the Catholic clergy and laity. You hear or read the stories of clerical sexual abuse, as well as reports that molester-priests were shuffled from one parish to another. You're outraged on almost every level. You know this goes on in other institutions. The news is full of reports of sexual abuse in other religions and helping professions. There's scant evidence that pedophilia is any more prevalent in the Catholic Church than in the larger population.

But the gap between the church's moral teaching and these acts—the hideous behavior and the church hierarchy's apparent tolerance of it—is great. It makes the church a natural and legitimate target of special outrage. You know these pedophile priests are a relative handful of men who've served in the priesthood over the years. You know these cases most often go back decades when pedophilia was seen more as a moral failing—"go and sin no more"—than an intractable psychological pathology.

But you also know that a single instance of sex abuse is one too many, particularly when it's committed by an alleged man of God and facilitated by the church's actions; particularly when it alienates a young person or family from God's love.

If Peri's homily put the current scandal in human context, Father Emmerich Vogt's homily a few days later at Portland's Holy Rosary Priory placed today's news in a historical and

cultural context.

This is not the first time that scandal has rocked the church. In fact, said Vogt, the church was born in the scandal of Judas. "Judas priests" have been with the church throughout history and continue to this day—not only in today's pedophile priests, but in priests and other religious figures who soft-pedal the church's moral teaching on abortion, homosexuality, adultery, illegitimacy and pornography. Even the papacy has had its scandal. Pope Alexander VI's four illegitimate children in the 15th century are but one example.

This certainly isn't the first time Catholics have been called on to speak out against scandalous clerical behavior. As Vogt noted, St. Francis de Sales was asked to do so in his day. "Those who commit these types of scandals are guilty of the spiritual equivalent of murder," said the 17th-century bishop. Their terrible example destroys the faith of others in God.

The church might be a divine institution, but it's filled with imperfect humans who are inevitably products of their time and culture. And look at our era's sexed-up atmosphere. What should we expect? Our priests come from our culture's families. Vogt said it's mystifying to witness a secular culture that celebrates or tolerates all of today's degradation now zeroing in on the church's sex scandal.

Yes, the stories of abusive priests command attention. Nobody's more eager to bring justice to these priests than the parishioners who love their church and children, or the priests who are unfairly tarred.

But, as a Catholic, the attention often seems outsized to me. Is the church being singled out for special scrutiny here? Is it because the church has resisted the postmodern moral order? Is it because the church maintains an unshakable belief in absolute truth and opposes all of today's media-friendly hobbyhorses—abortion, relaxed sexual mores and all the rest?

Is it because there are many other agendas at work?

What else to conclude when Catholics and non-Catholics offer up as fixes such things as ending priestly celibacy or opening the Catholic priesthood to women? In New Jersey, an Orthodox rabbi will soon go to trial on charges of groping two teen-age girls. In South Carolina, a Baptist minister is serving a 60-year prison sentence for sexually abusing 23 children. In Maryland, a former Episcopal priest was convicted recently of molesting a 14-year-old boy. In Portland, the Mormon Church announced last fall a \$3 million settlement in a lawsuit brought by a man claiming he was abused by a high priest in the early 1990s. Celibacy and the all-male clergy didn't lead to the sins of these religious leaders.

And yet, however disproportionate the current targeting of the Catholic Church may be, this sad reality remains: Some Catholic priests violated their vows and their parish's children, and the hierarchy didn't respond in the best interests of its children. Priests and parishioners together must say, "Enough." Today's Judas priests must find no sanctuary in the Catholic Church.

Past scandal, Vogt assured his flock, has always produced good men and women to renew the church. We've seen the first stirrings of this in places like St. Michael's, Holy Rosary and other parishes across the country.

Yes, the sex-with-minors scandal is infuriating, depressing and embarrassing. But there's worse to endure. As St. Francis de Sales also said about scandal in the church, "While those who give scandal are guilty of the spiritual equivalent of murder, those who take scandal—who allow scandals to destroy their faith—are guilty of spiritual suicide."

Yes, the church will have to carry this cross well beyond Lent. But Catholics are ever a hopeful people who believe in the redemptive power of suffering. We are, this day reminds

us, an Easter people.

David Reinhard is an associate editor for the Oregonian newspaper. This article originally appeared in the March 31 edition of the Sunday Oregonian.