

TAKING AIM AT BISHOP FINN

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This ad, written by Bill Donohue, was rejected by the Kansas City Star, without explanation. The close relationship between the newspaper and SNAP is disturbing, but to turn down \$25,000 is still surprising. The Star can impose a gag rule on us, but it cannot control us. Indeed, this ad was printed in the Northeast News, a weekly suburban newspaper. We intend to let everyone in Kansas City, Missouri know about this matter.

There is nothing wrong with asking legitimate questions about the way Bishop Robert Finn handled the Fr. Shawn Ratigan matter. But there is something wrong about not asking legitimate questions about the politics of those out to sink him. First, let's recap what actually happened.

Last December, crotch-shot pictures of young girls, fully clothed, were found on Fr. Ratigan's computer; there was one photo of a naked girl. The very next day, the Diocese contacted a police officer and described the naked picture; a Diocesan attorney was shown it. Because the photo was not sexual in nature, it was determined that it did not constitute child pornography. This explains why the Independent Review Board was not contacted—there was no specific allegation of child abuse.

When Fr. Ratigan discovered that the Diocese had learned of his fetish, he attempted suicide. When he recovered, he was immediately sent for psychiatric evaluation. It is important to note that Bishop Finn, who never saw any of the photos, did this precisely because he was considering the possibility of removing Fr. Ratigan from ministry. After evaluation (the priest was diagnosed as suffering from depression, but was not judged to be a pedophile), Fr. Ratigan was placed in a spot away from children and subjected to various restrictions.

After he violated them, the Diocese called the cops. That's when more disturbing photos were found. At the same time, Bishop Finn contacted an attorney to do an independent investigation into this matter.

Fair-minded persons may question whether the Diocese was too lenient, but unless there is reason to believe that a crime has been committed, there is no cause for contacting the authorities. Yet the Diocese—unlike the officials of other organizations faced with the same situation—contacted a police officer and a lawyer immediately. [Note: in 2007, a huge investigation by the Associated Press of teacher sexual misconduct revealed that Missouri school districts were guilty of “backroom deals” that allowed molesting teachers to “quietly move on.” So where is the dust-up about this? Where are the calls for grand jury probes?] Why, then, the attempt to get Bishop Finn?

What's driving the anti-Finn campaign is politics. The major players are the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) and attorneys Rebecca Randles and Jeffrey Anderson. Their goal is not justice. Nor is it child welfare. Their goal is to sabotage the Catholic Church.

Here's how it works. Anderson, who is worth hundreds of millions, helps to fund SNAP. SNAP works with Randles, a protégé of Anderson, and together they find new “victims”—adults who just now seem to remember being groped decades ago. Indeed, upwards of 20 new lawsuits have been filed since Ratigan was nailed in May. SNAP, ever coy, then holds a press conference, making wild accusations. Importantly, no one in Finn's office is prepared to comment *because Randles has yet to file suit*. In other words, SNAP and Randles ambush the Diocese, garnering a high media profile, and then press the authorities to indict Bishop Finn.

What is SNAP? It sells itself as a victims' advocacy organization that represents those who have been abused by any

authority. This is a lie. It concentrates almost exclusively on the Catholic Church. How do I know? For one, just check its website. More revealing, last July I asked trusted sources to register at a SNAP conference outside of Washington, D.C. The entire event was dedicated to discussing ways to undermine what they called the “evil institution,” namely the Catholic Church. No one from SNAP has contested a single comment attributed to the speakers as described in my report, “SNAP Exposed.”

Here’s how SNAP manipulates the media. At the meeting, attendees were instructed how to hold a press conference: “Display holy childhood photos”; Use “feeling words”; Say, “I was scared” or “I was suicidal”; “Be sad, not mad”; “If you don’t have compelling holy childhood photos, we can provide you with photos of other kids that can be held up for the cameras.” The unmistakable goal is to feign sorrow and stage the event.

SNAP’s director, David Clohessy, began his activist career by working for ACORN, the now discredited far-left wing organization. In 1988, while watching the movie, “Nuts,” he had a revelation: his memory exploded with tales of being molested by a priest 20 years earlier. Three years later, his attorney, Jeffrey Anderson, sued the local diocese; working with Anderson for the first time was Rebecca Randles. The time gap in both instances is striking.

Clohessy wants Bishop Finn behind bars for not moving fast enough on this matter. But when Clohessy was working for SNAP in the 1990s, he refused to contact the authorities when he learned of a man who was sexually abusing young men. That man was his brother, Kevin, a Catholic priest. Feeling conflicted, David wondered, “he’s my brother; he’s an abuser. Do I treat him like my brother? Do I treat him like an abuser?” He chose the former. “He [Kevin] told me he was getting help, getting treatment.” This is understandable. What is not understandable is his outrage at bishops when they voice the same sentiment

about their brother priests. The duplicity is sickening.

Is SNAP really upset about child porn, or just when a priest is involved? Dr. Steve Taylor is a psychiatrist who is in prison for downloading child porn on his computer. He is not just an ordinary shrink with a sick appetite—he worked for SNAP for years. Before his conviction, Barbara Blaine, the founder of SNAP, intervened on his behalf and wrote to the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners asking them to give consideration to Taylor's alleged humanitarian work—she didn't want him to lose his license. Had Taylor been a priest, her reaction would have been vengeful.

At the July SNAP conference, Blaine spoke about priests who believe they have been mistreated by the authorities and want to countersue. She said they may have “a legal right,” but they “don't have a moral right to do so.” This is what SNAP means by justice. When lawsuits were flying in 2002, after revelations about the Boston scandal, many priests who claimed innocence decided to countersue. SNAP actually declared such lawsuits “brutal” and “un-Christian.”

This one-way street favored by SNAP also manifests itself in other ways. While it always protects the names of its accusers, it demands that we know the names of accused priests, including those who are dead. Moreover, it will not release the names of its donors. Yet they condemn the Catholic Church for lacking transparency.

In August, SNAP accused New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan of covering up an alleged incident involving a teenage girl who said she was “inappropriately touched” by an 87-year-old priest. Dolan knew nothing about it until the cops were called. SNAP has yet to apologize. It also accused Dolan of “acting secretly” about a previous case where a priest was suspended. But Dolan was not in New York at the time—he was the Archbishop of Milwaukee. Moreover, at the SNAP conference, Dolan was accused of shielding 55 molesting priests. This is

libelous. But it is what we have come to expect from these people—a SNAP official once spat in the Archbishop's face.

SNAP is so anti-priest that its Kentucky chapter leader once lobbied state authorities to warn residents when Catholic priests who have been accused, *but not convicted*, of sexual abuse move into their neighborhood. Just priests. A few years ago, in California, a boy's father alleged that his son had been abused by a priest in the 1990s. The case was dismissed. The alleged victim, now a grown man, said it never happened. When SNAP then learned that this innocent priest was appointed to a sex abuse panel, it went ballistic. In SNAP's mind, once a priest is charged, he's guilty, no matter what the verdict says.

The reason why SNAP wants to bring down Bishop Finn is because it always shoots for the top. In September, Clohessy admitted that his goal is to bring down the pope. "We're not naïve," he said. "We don't think the pope will be hauled off in handcuffs next week or month. But by the same token, our long-term chances are excellent." This kind of thinking explains why SNAP recently blasted the Vatican's new guidelines on sex abuse *the day before they were released*.

SNAP is so hateful that it even endorses Gestapo-like tactics used against the Catholic Church. Last year, the world was stunned to learn of a Belgium police raid on Church facilities, looking for evidence of wrongdoing. The bishop was detained for over nine hours; the police even went so far as to drill into the tombs of two deceased cardinals looking for documents. And what did Barbara Blaine say? "If children are to be protected, the actions of Belgian law enforcement must become the norm, not the aberration."

While fascist means are acceptable to SNAP, it knows it can't get away with that in the U.S. So it elects to work with those who are flooding the Diocese with lawsuits. This way it can drain its resources, tie up the courts and seek to turn

the public against the Catholic Church.

Randles was one of the lawyers who was behind the bundled lawsuits that led to a 2008 settlement with the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. Those lawsuits included claims dating back to just after World War II. Now she's back, representing clients who just now seem to recall being abused many moons ago. The timing couldn't be more convenient. The SNAP-led crowd is now claiming that the settlement, which held that the Diocese had to take steps to curb abuse, was violated. Their proposed remedy represents the fulfillment of their dreams: they want the Diocese to cede control of its operations.

Between 2009-2010 (the latest years for which data are available), there was a 42 percent increase in false allegations against priests. So-called repressed memory figures prominently in these bogus charges. A few years ago, researchers at Harvard Medical School studied this phenomenon and concluded that it has no scientific basis—it is purely a cultural invention. Harvard psychology professor Richard J. McNally also studied this subject. “The notion that the mind protects itself by banishing the most disturbing, terrifying events is psychiatric folklore.” He added, “The more traumatic and stressful something is, the less likely someone is to forget it.”

Randles is now charging that not only did the Diocese know what was happening, and did nothing about it, those in charge actually *encouraged it*. Here are some examples, all filed recently. In the case of Fr. Stephen Wise, the suit charges that “The Diocese ratified Wise’s sexual abuse of the plaintiff by encouraging him to commit the abuse and encouraging him to continue committing the abuse.” In the Fr. Michael Tierney case, the suit claims, “the sexual abuse of minors became a collective objective of the Diocese.” And in the Fr. Mark Honhart case, the suit also claims, “the sexual abuse of minors became a collective objective of the Diocese.”

In one sense, this kind of language is useful: it is positive proof of the anti-Catholic mindset. In their vision, the Catholic Church is the font of all evil, with the pope at command central. All of this might have been believable if it had been said by nativists 150 years ago, or by those in the asylum today, but to think that such malicious fiction is being trumpeted in 2011—by lawyers no less—is mind-boggling.

Clohessy recently wrote to the prosecutors of Clay County and Jackson County. “Jailing Finn, once his guilt has been determined or admitted, would be an unprecedented and effective step toward preventing future clergy sex crimes and cover ups, in Kansas City and elsewhere.” So Bishop Finn either admits his guilt or is found guilty. There is no other option. That’s exactly the way they think.

It is incorrect to assume that Randles and company are motivated mostly by money. No, their real goal is control—the control of the Catholic Church. Randles wants the Diocese to accept third-party supervision of these matters. She is asking for “continuing supervision,” explaining that she is “looking for a mechanism to enforce the provisions of the settlement agreement from this day forward, so that there is some form of continuing watch-dogging.” It doesn’t get much plainer than this.

The Catholic League stands by Bishop Finn without reservation. What’s at stake goes well beyond Kansas City. It should be clear by now that the ultimate goal is to have the Catholic Church cede its autonomy to the state. It’s what the Catholic haters have long wanted, and are now using Bishop Finn to dig a hole in the First Amendment.