

CBS: CATHOLIC BASHING SYSTEM

It was one of the most incredible spin jobs the Catholic League has ever seen. CBS literally took the truth and stood it on its head. At the expense of the Catholic Church, of course.

On the CBS Evening News of August 6, it was reported that the Vatican issued a document in 1962 that “lays out a church policy that calls for absolute secrecy when it comes to sexual abuse by priests—anyone who speaks out could be thrown out of the church.”

That same day, on CBSNEWS.com, the report said, “For decades, priests in this country abused children in parish after parish while their supervisors covered it all up. Now it turns out the orders for this cover up were written in Rome at the highest levels of the Vatican.”

The problem with all this is that it is based on a lie. The 1962 document has nothing to do with any purported cover up. It deals specifically with solicitations that a priest might make in the confessional to a penitent. Indeed, it prescribed penalties for any priests who, “whether by words or signs or *nods of the head*” (our emphasis) might convey a sexual advance. The ultimate penalty—being tossed from the priesthood—was possible.

William Donohue appeared with Paula Zahn on CNN on August 7, the day after the story broke. He held up a copy of the document on TV and charged CBS with lying about the report. In a news release he wrote on the subject, Donohue discussed the following points:

“This is an issue fraught with deception all right—but it’s not the Vatican that’s guilty—it’s CBS. By ripping the document out of context, CBS led viewers to believe that the Vatican was engaged in a sexual abuse cover-up as early as

1962. Here's what it didn't say in its report.

"First, the document did not apply to sexual misconduct—it applied only to sexual solicitation. Second, the only venue the document addressed was the confessional. In other words, it was meant to deal only with cases of sexual solicitation by a priest of a penitent in the confessional. Third, because the policy was specifically aimed at protecting the secrecy of the confessional, it called for an ecclesiastical response: civil authorities were not to be notified because it involved a sacrament of the Catholic Church, not a crime of the state.

"Fourth, if a priest were found guilty, he could be thrown out of the priesthood. Fifth, if the penitent were to tell someone what happened (perhaps another priest), he or she had 30 days to report the incident to the bishop or face excommunication. If anything, this proves how utterly serious the Vatican was about such an offense—it threatened to punish the penitent *for not turning in the guilty priest*. Sixth, the 1962 document was superseded by the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the norms established in 2001 for dealing with serious crimes involving the sacraments.

"For CBS to leave all this out shows how hungry it is to malign the Catholic Church. If anyone is acting like the Mafia, it's CBS."

The next day, on August 8, Donohue had a letter delivered to Jim Murphy, executive producer of the CBS Evening News. In his letter Donohue said that in the ten years he has been president of the Catholic League, "never have I been more outraged over a news story on television than the one CBS recently did on the 1962 Vatican document on priestly sexual misconduct."

Donohue specifically charged that two lawyers for alleged victims, Carmen Durso and Daniel J. Shea, had manipulated CBS into issuing this report. These lawyers got the confidential

document translated into English so they could use it to pressure Massachusetts Attorney General Thomas Reilly to reopen his case against the Boston Archdiocese. In other words, two greedy lawyers exploited CBS for their own gain.

When the CBS report surfaced, Larry Drivon, another lawyer who represents those allegedly victimized by priests, charged that the Catholic Church was engaged in "Mafia-style behavior—racketeering." He added that the Vatican document is "an instruction manual on how to deceive and how to protect pedophiles."

Murphy replied to Donohue on August 11 saying that CBS stood by its report. Donohue then answered him by accusing CBS of perpetuating a lie against the Catholic Church. "Nothing in the document even comes close to demonstrating the validity of this scurrilous charge," Donohue said. He also told Murphy that if he had in his employ such irresponsible journalists, "I'd fire them."

Donohue closed his letter by asking Murphy the following: "Ever wonder why the *New York Times* and most of the other elite media outlets never wrote one word about this report? And did you ever figure out why the story that was printed in the *Boston Herald* shot holes through the CBS report?"

To register a complaint, write to Jim Murphy, Executive Producer, CBS Evening News, 524 W. 57 Street, New York, New York 10019.

Ask him why he finds it necessary to defend such lies.