

FR. GROESCHEL UNDER FIRE



Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on remarks made by Father Benedict Groeschel in the *National Catholic Register* regarding the sexual abuse of minors:

A quarter century ago, Father Groeschel and seven other priests broke away from a religious community to found the Franciscan Friars of Renewal. His service to the Church over the past half-century has been nothing less than heroic. His ministry to the least among us is especially noteworthy.

Father Groeschel holds a Ph.D. in psychology from Columbia University, and has put his training to work by counseling some of the most mentally and socially challenged people in our society. In addition, for the past four decades he has been screening men for the priesthood, weeding out those who should not be ordained. His record is impressive.

In a recent interview, he *hypothesized* how a young person (14, 16 or 18, as he put it) could conceivably take advantage of a priest who was having a nervous breakdown. He also referred to Jerry Sandusky, the disgraced Penn State football coach, as “this poor guy.” For these remarks, and related comments, he is now being labeled as a defender of child abuse.

The accusation is scurrilous. In the same interview, Groeschel emphatically said that priests who are sexual abusers “have to leave.” His reference to Sandusky was exactly the way a priest-psychologist might be expected to speak: “poor guy” conveys sympathy for his maladies—it is not a defense of his behavior! Indeed, Groeschel asked, “Why didn’t anyone say anything?”

Groeschel is nearly 80 years old. A few years back, he was

almost killed in an auto accident that left him disabled; it has definitely taken a toll on him. I have known him for two decades, and recently spent an afternoon with him. I've read his books, listened to his tapes—on sexual abuse—and have come to know a great priest. To condemn him for one part of one interview is wholly unjust.