

# HOUSE CHAPLAIN SEARCH IS TAINTED

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on the search for the new House Chaplain:

"I have now read all letters received from congressmen involved in the process, the Final Report of the Chaplain Search Committee and all news reports on the subject. The only safe conclusion to draw is that the search for the new House Chaplain is tainted.

"It is tainted for at least two reasons: a) questions asked of Father Timothy O'Brien in the second round of interviews were improper at best and bigoted at worst and b) there are conflicting reports on whether House Speaker Dennis Hastert and House Majority Leader Dick Armey knew that O'Brien was the top candidate as chosen by the selection committee.

"When Rep. Steve Largent asked O'Brien whether wearing his collar might be seen as divisive, he must have known that the outgoing House Chaplain, Rev. James Ford, has been wearing a collar for the last 21 years; this suggests that something else was troubling Largent. Rep. Dave Weldon's question—name three of your favorite passages from Scripture—while not inappropriate, was extremely narrow and designed to yield contentious results. And when Rep. John Shimkus asked whether a single, celibate priest could adequately counsel family members, he must have known that priests have been successfully doing this for ages.

"Regarding the other question, congressmen Hastert, Armey and Joe Pitts claim that it would have been 'impossible' for anyone to say that O'Brien was the top choice of the selection committee; congressmen Ralph Regula and Zach Wamp also support this position, albeit less strongly. On the other hand,

congressmen Shimkus, Anna Eshoo, Lois Capps and Henry Waxman say that it was well-known that O'Brien placed first. And it is not disputed that Rep. Dick Gephardt knew that O'Brien was number one (he was part of the final trio along with Hastert and Armey). Furthermore, the person who counted the votes, Ted Van der Meid, is counsel to Hastert.

"There is enough here for the full House to seriously question whether justice has been done in the course of selecting the new House Chaplain."