

LATEST CHURCH SCANDAL: VICTIMIZING INNOCENT PRIESTS

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on the latest scandal to hit the Catholic Church—false charges against priests:

“In June, 2002, Father Ronald Bourgault was removed from priestly ministry pending an investigation that he molested a boy in the mid-1960s. Now he’s back at work at St. Zepherin’s in Wayland, Massachusetts. The reason: his accuser admits he mistakenly identified Father Bourgault as his accuser. The accuser says he doesn’t even remember the name of the priest who allegedly molested him.

“In November, 2002, Father Dan Wetzler was removed from priestly ministry pending an investigation that he molested a boy in the mid-1960s. Now he’s back at work at St. Paschal’s in Spokane, Washington. The reason: a police investigation concluded that the boy was molested by someone else. Furthermore, it has now been determined that the priest and his accuser never even met each other.

“Both of the cases cited are brand new: the priests were exonerated this past week. How many more cases there are like this is something the Catholic League is beginning to investigate.

“It is due to cases like these that the Catholic League strongly objects to any tampering with the laws governing the statute of limitations. The fundamental reason why we have a statute of limitations provision in law is to safeguard the rights of the accused: memories fade in time and witnesses may have died or cannot be located. Worse, accusers like those who maligned Father Bourgault and Father Wetzler may surface for any host of reasons, none of which is legitimate.

“Guilty priests, like anyone else, must pay. But in this frenzied climate it behooves everyone to be on the alert for steeple-chasing lawyers and their memory-impaired clients. Beware, too, of those whose memories are crystal clear but whose motives are filthy dirty.”