

MEDIA WATCHDOG, FAIR, SMEARS POPE

(See [update](#) of 5-14-08)

Earlier this week, a media watchdog group, Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) ran a story titled, "Pope Gets Pass on Church Abuse History." The self-styled "progressive" group said that in 2001, before Joseph Ratzinger was named pope, the cardinal "sent a letter to church bishops invoking a 1962 doctrine threatening automatic excommunication for any Catholic official who discussed abuse cases outside the church's legal system."

Catholic League president Bill Donohue commented as follows:

"When we pressed FAIR to provide us with the evidence that would substantiate its claims, it cited an English newspaper, the *Observer*; it also asked us if the paper ever ran a correction. So this is the level of scrutiny that FAIR employs: it does no independent fact checking, relying instead on foreign sources to verify its accusations.

"We knew FAIR had been sucked in as soon as we read it. That's because I took CBS Evening News apart in 2003 when they flagged this allegedly incriminating 1962 Vatican document. As I noted at the time, no other mainstream media outlet picked up this bogus story. With good reason.

"The document did not apply to sexual misconduct—it applied only to sexual solicitation that might take place in the confessional. By sexual solicitation it meant 'whether by words or signs or nods of the head,' the priest may have crossed the line. 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. Guilty priests could be thrown out of the priesthood and a penitent who told someone what happened had 30 days to report the incident to the bishop or face excommunication. In other words, the document detailed punitive measures for miscreants—just the opposite of a cover-up.

“FAIR, of course, has no time to read Vatican documents. Which is why it repairs to British tabloids to do its dirty work.”