

OREGON PRIEST BUGGED IN CONFESSIONAL

On April 22, 1996, Father Tim Mockaitis of Eugene, Oregon administered the Sacrament of Reconciliation to Conan Wayne Hale in the Lane County Jail. On May 3, Fr. Mockaitis was informed by a reporter of the Eugene *Register Guard* that the Sacrament of Reconciliation was recorded by the Sheriff's office. A court order allowed investigators to listen to the recording; the audio tape remains in the custody of the Lane County District Attorney.

Representatives of the Archdiocese of Portland met with the Lane County District Attorney on May 7 to review this case. District Attorney Doug Harclerod maintains that Oregon law allows the recording of conversations inside jails and admits that this is the first time that prosecutors have tried to obtain information from the jail regarding conversations between clergy and inmates.

Catholic League president William Donohue had this to say about the case:

"The Catholic League will take this case to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and will support in an amicus capacity any lawsuit brought against the Lane County District Attorney's office.

"The pursuit of justice in a democracy is never an absolute, rather it is a conditional pursuit. Other noble ends, such as respect for the rights of the accused and respect for religious freedom, often limit the reach of the state. In this regard, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, an integral exercise of religious freedom in Roman Catholicism, cannot be sacrificed to satisfy the ambitions of overly zealous prosecutors.

"We hear *ad nauseam* about violations of church and state from those bent on privatizing religion. But little is heard when the state violates church-state boundaries, as surely was done in this instance. But even those who are not Catholic will want to support the Catholic League in this effort: what is at stake is more than just freedom of religion, it is the lust for power that emanates from the state. What happened in Eugene is the kind of thing that Storm Troopers delighted in doing not too long ago, and as history has shown, militants like that respect no limits in anything they do."

The Catholic League is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends individual Catholics and the institutional Church from defamation and discrimination.