

OVERSTATING THE PHILLY PROBLEM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments as follows:

The public impression that the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has been sheltering priests who have sexually abused minors has led to outrageous comments by agenda-driven lawyers, professional victims' groups and pundits. It's time to take a deep breath and look at the facts.

Beginning in 2003, 61 cases of priestly misconduct were examined by the archdiocese. Twenty four were dismissed because the accusations could not be substantiated. Of the 37 remaining cases, three priests were suspended immediately following the recent grand jury report; 21 additional priests were suspended this week. Which means a total of 24 priests have been suspended, leaving 13 unaccounted for. Of the 13, eight were found not to have a credible accusation made against them; one has been on leave for some time; two are incapacitated and no longer in ministry; two more belong to religious orders outside the archdiocese.

This means that no credible accusation was made against the majority of the priests (the initial 24 plus the eight newly absolved, or 32 of 61). Moreover, *none* of the 24 who are currently suspended (the initial three plus the 21 this week) has been found guilty of anything. To top things off, the charges against them include such matters as "boundary issues" and "inappropriate behavior," terms so elastic as to indict almost anyone.

Just as it is important not to understate the problem, it is important not to overstate it. Neither the archdiocese, nor the media, has been particularly clear about offering a concise, disaggregated tally. The confusion is complicated because the public assumes that not only are all of these priests guilty, but that they are all guilty of a serious offense.

What is being lost in the public discussion are the constitutionally protected due process rights of accused priests. The rush to judgment is especially despicable in a day and age when accused Muslims are more likely to be presumed innocent than accused Catholic priests. And they aren't being detained because of "boundary issues."