

POPE BACKS FRENCH CARDINAL

In mid-May, when Pope Francis was interviewed by the French media, he was asked if he backs Cardinal Philippe Barbarin; the Archbishop of Lyon is under investigation for his handling of a molesting priest.

Many in the media ran with sensational headlines, but the pope stood his ground and defended the civil liberties of the archbishop. "Based on the information that I have, I believe that Cardinal Barbarin in Lyon took the necessary measures and that he has matters under control." Here's what happened.

Father Bernard Preynat molested several boys between 1986 and 1991, and was suspended in 1991 for doing so. Cardinal Barbarin did not become Archbishop of Lyon until 2002 and was first made aware of Preynat's offenses in 2007-2008. He immediately confronted the priest, and was satisfied that the priest's offenses ended when he was suspended.

In 2014, the archbishop met with a man who claimed that Preynat abused him: Barbarin instructed him to put his story in writing and send a copy to the Vatican. He also commenced an investigation. In 2015, Barbarin removed Preynat from ministry.

Cardinal Barbarin admits that he should have exercised better judgment, but to say he was involved in a cover-up is absurd.

We live in a time when there is a war on the rights of accused priests; they are also assumed guilty until proven innocent. Pope Francis is to be commended for standing by Cardinal Barbarin. As he told the press, "We now need to await the outcome of the civil judicial proceedings." That's the way the justice system is supposed to work, priests included.