

RIGHTEOUS ANGER DOESN'T JUSTIFY USING RICO

Catholic League News Release

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It is alleged that thirty-two years ago a man (whose identity is unknown) was sexually abused by former bishop Anthony O'Connell; O'Connell recently resigned as Bishop of Palm Beach after admitting he abused a teenager, Christopher Dixon, in the 1970s. The man who is filing suit is suing O'Connell and the three dioceses where he worked: Jefferson City, Missouri; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Palm Beach, Florida. The bishop and the three dioceses are being sued under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO).

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

"If I were abused by a priest I would sue him. Fortunately, almost all the priests I know are good men. But some, as Cardinal O'Connor admitted, are evil.

"Righteous anger, however, doesn't justify the use of RICO. G. Robert Blakely, the Notre Dame professor who wrote the law, said it was aimed at organized crime. Notwithstanding its intent, RICO has become one of the most free-wielding legal clubs of our time. It has been used by the ACLU to punish pro-life activists who were simply invoking their First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Interestingly, although RICO was written to stop the kind of racketeering that exists in the pornography industry, the ACLU has recommended against using it on the war on pornography. In short, this is the wrong remedy for an admittedly outrageous crime.

“As the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church unfolds, it is important that people cool their jets. Just as it is wrong for the guilty to go free, it is equally important that the innocent not be punished. To sue the three dioceses where O’Connell worked is wrong: the men and women who work there should not pay for the sins of their former priest. Casting the net too wide is just as bad as dropping it altogether.”