

SHOULD PRACTICING CATHOLICS HOLD PUBLIC OFFICE?

In today's edition of *Newsday*, the Long Island daily, columnist Paul Vitello questions the propriety of allowing Nassau County District Attorney Denis Dillon to investigate allegations of sexual misconduct against priests. Dillon is a practicing Catholic. For Vitello, this is sufficient grounds to disqualify Dillon from any further investigation into these matters. Dillon concluded yesterday that all allegations against priests in the Diocese of Rockville Centre occurred beyond the state's five-year statute of limitations, making moot further inquiry.

Vitello charges that Dillon is active in his religion and that his spokesman, Rick Hinshaw, writes for the *Long Island Catholic*.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

"In one sense, what Paul Vitello has done is welcome: it removes any doubt as to his motives. In his world, practicing Catholics who hold public office need to be treated as suspect characters. Just Catholics. Nothing is said about Protestants, Jews or Muslims. They can attend church services, go to synagogue, frequent mosques, be actively engaged in their religion and still hold public office. But Catholics are not to be trusted. They're different from the rest of us.

"Article VI of the U.S. Constitution holds that 'no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.' To the extent that New York State law reflects this understanding, no doubt Vitello would like to insert a caveat exempting coverage for

practicing Catholics. As he said in his article, it is Dillon's 'attitude' about his religion that is most objectionable.

"Finally, I would like to add to Vitello's paranoia: Rick Hinshaw previously served as director of communications for the Catholic League. Though Vitello will suffer apoplexy when he learns this, he should also know that Rick served us with distinction."