

Sleepers Unfairly Maligns Catholicism

The best-selling book, *Sleepers*, is soon to be a movie. The author, Lorenzo Carcaterra, claims that the book is a true account of his years at Sacred Heart School, a Catholic elementary school in New York's Hell's Kitchen area. According to Carcaterra, he and three of his friends were sent to a New York State reform school in the 1960s for engaging in a prank that left a street vendor injured. While at the upstate reform school, the four youths were allegedly brutalized and sexually assaulted by four guards.

Sometime around 1980, two of the youths (both street criminals by then) met one of the guards and killed him. The book, which is published by the Random House subsidiary, Ballantine Books, alleges that one of the other two youths, who had since become an Assistant District Attorney in New York, arranged to get assigned to the case so that he could sabotage it for his friends. The remaining youth, Carcaterra (then a reporter for the *Daily News*), supposedly arranged for the parish priest at Sacred Heart to provide alibi testimony for the two youths charged with murder. Both of them were subsequently acquitted.

The book is soon to be a movie starring Robert De Niro and Dustin Hoffman, and is being released by Propaganda Films.

When confronted with the charge that the book is a work of fiction, none of the principals to the work—author Carcaterra, editor Peter Gethers, or anyone else associated with the script—is willing to make public any evidence that the account is true.

Catholic League president William A. Donohue offered the following remarks to the press about the case:

"I am convinced that *Sleepers* is a fraud. If I am wrong, then

Lorenzo Carcaterra and Peter Gethers can prove me wrong by providing a sworn affidavit that the account is true and will provide me with the names of the priest and the Assistant District Attorney they allege were involved in this caper.

“To exploit a Catholic parish and school for financial gain and notoriety is despicable. Rev. Kevin Nelan, the pastor of Sacred Heart, and Father John Duffell, who served at Sacred Heart while Carcaterra attended school there, know that the work is a fiction, and so does the Catholic League. This is a matter for New York Attorney General Dennis Vacca; we will see to it.”

Within minutes of sending the news release, New York Attorney General Vacca’s office called Dr. Donohue regarding this case. The Catholic League is working closely with Bill Callahan, a former federal prosecutor who now heads an investigative firm, and Thomas Harvey, attorney for Sacred Heart. The U.S. Attorney ‘s office has also been drawn into the case.

On November 8, Dr. Donohue, Bill Callahan, and Thomas Harvey, met with with a representative of the New York State Attorney General’s Office.

Now it may be that for technical reasons, this case cannot be prosecuted. But that doesn’t mean that wrongdoing hasn’t been done and that the Catholic religion hasn’t been unfairly maligned. As far as the Catholic League is concerned, this is an open case, and that is why it will pursue this matter to the end.