

STAR-LEDGER'S WAR ON ARCHBISHOP MYERS

The following is an excerpt from a report by Bill Donohue on the Newark Star-Ledger's war on Archbishop John Myers; it was sent to all of the bishops.

On April 28, an editorial in the Newark *Star-Ledger* called on Newark Archbishop John J. Myers to resign. There should be a resignation, but it should not be limited to one person: the entire editorial board of the newspaper should resign immediately.

The occasion of the editorial is the alleged failure of the Newark Archdiocese to police Father Michael Fugee. In 2001, he was charged with groping a teenager while wrestling. After initially being found guilty, the verdict was overthrown by an appellate panel of judges. Fugee agreed to certain conditions, which the newspaper says have been violated. The *Star-Ledger* wants Archbishop Myers to resign because he allegedly did not hold Fugee to the terms of the agreement. As will soon be disclosed, this accusation is patently false.

Accompanying the editorial was a front-page story on Father Fugee. The Sunday article, which ran over 2,000 words, recounted various aspects of this issue. It did not mention, however, that in addition to being cleared by the civil courts, the archdiocesan review board cleared Fugee of any wrongdoing. Nor did it mention that the case was sent to Rome for review; no charges were brought against him. In other words, Fugee's case was thrice thrown out. Also, the newspaper failed to mention that there has not been one allegation made against this priest in the past 12 years. So why is the *Star-Ledger* going ballistic?

The following two paragraphs from the editorial explain the

basis of its complaint:

“Part of the [court] deal was an agreement that Fugee signed, along with the archdiocese, committing all parties to keeping

Fugee away from minors. Fugee was not to work in any position involving children, or have any affiliation with youth groups. He could not attend youth retreats, or even hear the confession of minors.

“With the full knowledge and approval of Myers, Fugee did all of those things. Look at the picture of him clowning around with children [whose faces were obscured] in today’s paper, and it makes you want to scream a warning. The agreement was designed to prevent exactly that.”

Here is exactly what the agreement said:

“It is agreed and understood that the Archdiocese shall not assign or otherwise place Michael Fugee in any position within the Archdiocese that allows him to have *any unsupervised contact* with or to supervise or minister to any minor/child under the age of 18 or work in any position in which children are involved.” (My italics.) [Note: In the next paragraph, the identical language is used to hold Father Fugee to these terms.]

Fugee later admitted that he violated the agreement. But at the time the story broke, this was not known.

What is really going on here is an attempt to sunder Archbishop Myers—Fugee is not the man they want. They want Myers, and that is because they detest what he stands for.

The first editorial on Archbishop Myers was published by the *Star-Ledger* on April 17, 2002; it took him to task for his views on how best to handle allegations of sexual abuse. It said he “apparently still believes the church ought to decide

first who is suspect before notifying civil authorities." Let's hope he always does. What should he do? Call 911 whenever someone drops a dime making an accusation against a priest?

In 2003, Archbishop Myers released a set of strict procedures and guidelines that affected every employee in the archdiocese. The rules were a comprehensive code of conduct that should have been welcomed by everyone, including critics of the Catholic Church. Instead, the newspaper made fun of it.

On May 7, 2004, it took him to task for saying that pro-abortion politicians should refrain from receiving Communion. Does the *Star-Ledger* think it has the right to police Myers, or that he should check in with them before making house rules?

Not surprisingly, the groups cited by the *Star-Ledger* who are upset with Archbishop Myers are all dissidents. Consider Theresa Padovano, who heads Voice of the Faithful in New Jersey. Voice is described as a "lay reform group." In fact, it is a small collection of elderly Catholics and ex-Catholics who are at war with the Church over many issues. By the way, Theresa Padovano is an ex-nun activist married to Anthony Padovano, an ex-priest activist who is also at odds with Catholicism.

The next group cited is the New Jersey chapter of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). It is labeled "a national advocacy and support group." What it advocates is a war on the Catholic Church and what it supports is unlicensed counseling of alleged abuse victims.

The third group, bishopaccountability.org, is branded by the newspaper as a "watchdog group." Attack dog would be more accurate. It posts the names of accused priests on its website, admitting that it "does not confirm the veracity of any actual allegation."

It is one thing to criticize a bishop, quite another to demand his resignation. The facts in this case do not warrant such a conclusion.