

SUPREME COURT DELIVERS A BLOW TO STEEPLE-CHASING ATTORNEYS

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled today, 5-4, that a California law that changed the statute of limitations for some sex offenses was unconstitutional. The high court ruled that a 72 year-old man who had been charged with committing child sexual molestation almost 50 years ago could not be prosecuted. At stake were the ex post facto and due process provisions of the Constitution. Commenting on the decision is Catholic League president William Donohue:

"The only surprise in today's decision is the fact that four Supreme Court judges thought it constitutional to retroactively change the statute of limitations. Were this to happen, it is not certain how fundamental due process rights could ever be safeguarded. Sex crimes against children are abhorrent and should be aggressively pursued. Moreover, the guilty should be severely punished. But none of this justifies the suspension of elementary civil liberties.

"Innocent until proven guilty carries with it certain predicates, one of which is that claims made decades after an alleged offense can never be settled in a satisfactory manner. Thus, the court must err on the side of the accused. What the high court did today was to restore the clock to the criminal justice system.

"The implications for the Catholic Church, especially in California, are grave. This now means the Church will properly be safeguarded from steeple-chasing lawyers and their Johnny-come-lately clients. While some of the clients may have indeed been victimized by a priest, others are obviously playing the 'repressed memory' game. No matter, the Catholic Church is not an open cash register that stays in business for an indefinite period of time. It, too, has closing hours."