

BISHOPS ASSEMBLE IN DALLAS; REFORMS FORTHCOMING

All eyes will be on Dallas when the U.S. bishops meet June 13-15 to discuss the sex abuse scandal that has rocked the Church. National guidelines are expected though the details are still in dispute.

Virtually every media outlet in the nation will cover the event. Indeed, every room in every hotel will be booked as thousands descend upon Dallas. Amid high expectations, some are worried that the meeting has been oversold, thus setting the stage for disappointment. At stake is the credibility of the hierarchy to settle this matter once and for all.

On the table for discussion are policies governing “zero tolerance,” a “one-strike-and-you’re out” rule and what to do about old cases. Some, like Cardinal George, have expressed reservations over what is meant by zero tolerance. Others, like Cardinal Bevilacqua, have been pressing for very strict measures. It remains to be seen how tightly written the guidelines will be.

The meeting in Dallas follows the events of Rome. In April, 12 U.S. cardinals met with the Holy Father regarding the sex abuse scandal in the U.S. When the meeting was concluded, William Donohue issued the following comment to the media:

“The meeting of the U.S. cardinals in Rome proved to be fruitful if incomplete. No one realistically thought that this serious matter would be resolved in a few days, and that is why Bishop Wilton Gregory was right to dub the letters ‘skeletal’ in nature. It was reassuring to hear Bishop Gregory say that there was a growing consensus towards a

zero tolerance policy for sexual abuse.”

Donohue also said he was glad that the cardinals drew a distinction between the Church’s proposed response to child molesters and to cases that are less egregious. “There is a profound difference,” Donohue said, “between a predatory priest who victimizes minors and a priest who, straight or gay, drops his guard one evening with an adult. While the latter is patently wrong and inexcusable it would smack of an obscene moral equivalency to treat both instances the same.”

In what was perhaps the most significant statement made by the cardinals was the recognition that the Pastors of the Church must “promote the correct moral teaching of the Church”; it also called for bishops to publicly “reprimand individuals who spread dissent and groups which advance ambiguous approaches to pastoral care.”

BILL ALLOWS EXEMPTION

The outcome was in doubt but reason prevailed. A law governing child sexual abuse in Connecticut allowed for an exemption for allegations heard in the confessional.

In the first part of May, the Connecticut state House passed a bill that would require Catholic priests to report allegations of child sexual abuse disclosed in the confessional. But then the state Senate struck down this provision arguing that an exemption must be made for the confessional. The final fate of the bill was determined on May 8. The exemption was allowed.

The Catholic League entered the fray by calling on

all legislators to provide for the exemption. "Not to do so," we said, "would be to allow the legitimate concerns over child sexual abuse to devolve into a church-state scandal of its own." We called attention to the fact that "it has long been respected that what is said between a penitent and a priest is no one else's business. That would certainly include agents of the state."

While we were happy with the final outcome, we were disturbed that the bill passed by the state House—the one that did not allow for an exemption for the confessional—was 144-2. Constitutional guarantees should not be suspended simply because of an ensuing scandal.

We also expressed our concerns over reports that an anti-Catholic tone was evident during the debate in the House. There is no excuse for bigotry.

A CRISIS OF FAITH

William A. Donohue

No figure in the Church sexual abuse scandal is more notorious than Rev. Paul Shanley. Though defrocked priest John Geoghan may be the biggest pervert (he is accused of molesting 130 children), Shanley is the real All Star of sexual deviants. Unlike Geoghan, he publicly advocated the merits of sexual deviance. What shaped Shanley more than anything else was an utter lack of faith.

To understand the crisis in faith, consider what some seminarians were being taught at the time. For example, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, one of the most popular books used

in the seminaries was *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought*. Written by Rev. Anthony Kosnik, it is a very sophisticated case for moral relativism. For Kosnik, there was no such thing as truth or absolutes. It follows that it makes no rational sense to declare anything taboo.

Now imagine how sweet this must have sounded to the likes of Shanley. Although the bishops eventually withdrew the book, the idea that there is no reality save for what culture delivers was firmly embedded in the seminaries.

It is indisputable that Shanley has been advocating pedophilia, homosexuality, incest and bestiality for decades. We know this because the information comes straight from the files kept on him by the Archdiocese of Boston. After this was known, and after he publicly advocated sex between men and boys (he was at the formative meeting of the North American Man/Boy Love Association in 1978), he was promoted to pastor. NAMBLA's motto, by the way, is "eight is too late."

The person who got Shanley going was Humberto Cardinal Medeiros. In 1970, three years after accusations of sexual abuse by Shanley were reported to the archdiocese, Cardinal Medeiros appointed Shanley his "representative for sexual minorities." To be sure, Shanley was not selected at random for this bizarre position. He was selected because he could be trusted to do the job.

Throughout the decade, Shanley would lecture around the country on the merits of man-boy sex, incest and bestiality. When the bishop of Dallas, Thomas Tschoepe, heard Shanley promote pedophilia, he roared laughing, and he did so in front of third and fourth year seminarians. We know this because this is the testimony of a great priest, Father Joseph Wilson, currently serving in Queens, New York.

Thanks to Peggy Moen of the Wanderer, we know that Shanley believed there were 34 sexual minorities. No doubt those who

exercise their sexual preference by fornicating with corpses (necrophiliacs) were among those whom he ministered to in an official capacity.

While this was happening, Shanley served as a chaplain to Dignity, a homosexual group that claims to be Catholic notwithstanding the fact that its members totally reject every Church teaching on sexuality. He was also selected by the United States Catholic Conference (until recently the civil arm of the bishops) to serve on the Young Adult Ministry Board. His role was to educate young people about the plight of sexual minorities.

In 1979, Cardinal Medeiros put an end to Shanley's "special ministry." Shanley's response was to publicly condemn Medeiros for the cardinal's admonition that gays should abstain from sex. Shanley branded this "virtually useless advice." His boldness worsened when ten years later he criticized the revision of two new oaths issued by the Vatican: the Profession of Faith and the Oath of Fidelity. When this was made public, the Archdiocese of Boston excused Shanley saying no priest had to take the new oath.

Shanley did what he did for several reasons. But it is wrong to dismiss him as simply a sick person (though he surely is). To do so lets him off the hook. Shanley knew exactly what he was doing. Difficult as it is for us to believe, he did what he did because he liked it. And he knew there would be no consequences.

To this something else must be added. He did what he did because his faith had collapsed. Worse, some in the hierarchy had lost their faith as well, which explains why they didn't have the fortitude to censure him. Had Shanley been an open advocate of racism or anti-Semitism, he would have been removed. But because his sins were sins of the flesh, and because sexual deviance was quietly tolerated, he continued to act with abandon.

Shanley should have been stopped decades ago. He openly defied Church teachings—rhetorically and behaviorally—and nothing was done about it. That it took the media to find him and the civil authorities to stop him is embarrassing.

So after the bishops meet in Dallas, and after the guidelines are written, there will still be something left on the table: the crisis of faith. There will be no real progress until this issue is squarely addressed.

FULTON J. SHEEN, CATHOLIC CHAMPION

by Thomas C. Reeves

When American history textbooks mention Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen at all, it is briefly and in connection with the allegedly “feel good” Christianity of the 1950s. To some Americans, Sheen was merely a glib, superficial television performer and pop writer who blossomed briefly on the national scene and rapidly disappeared.

Many orthodox Catholics have a clearer understanding of Sheen, for more than a dozen of his books remain in print, several anthologies of his writings are for sale, and his television shows and tapes continue to be popular. The Eternal Word Television Network regularly features Sheen videotapes. Moreover, an effort is underway, formally inaugurated by the late Cardinal O'Connor of New York, to have the Archbishop canonized.

In preparing *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen* (Encounter Books, 2001) I discovered a brilliant,

charismatic, and holy man who has been underestimated by historians, largely overlooked by the contemporary mass media, and forgotten by too many Catholics. Indeed, I came to the conclusion that Fulton J. Sheen was the most important Catholic of twentieth century America.

Sheen was born in tiny El Paso, Illinois, in the north central part of the state, in 1895. His father was a modestly prosperous farmer in the Peoria region, his mother a hard-working and popular farm wife and mother of four boys. The Sheen children were gifted with high intelligence (one, Tom, had a photographic memory), trained to work hard (for most of his life Fulton would work a nineteen hour day, seven days a week), and encouraged to advance themselves through education. The parents also stressed the importance of their Catholic faith. The Sheen boys went to parochial schools, and the family attended church regularly and said the Rosary together nightly.

Fulton excelled in his school work from the start, and was an extremely popular youngster. Rather short (five foot seven) and slim, he was unable to compete effectively in athletics and so poured his energy into becoming a skilled collegiate debater. His beautiful speaking voice, penetrating eyes (inherited from his mother), pleasing personality, and outstanding academic preparation proved effective in competitions.

From Fulton's earliest years, there seemed to be a consensus of opinion in the family that he would become a priest. After graduating from St. Viator College in Bourbonnais, Illinois, he went to seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. From there he went to the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. to earn a doctorate in philosophy. After ordination in 1919 and receiving two degrees from CUA in 1920, Sheen went to the prestigious Louvain University in Belgium. Here he earned a Ph.D. in philosophy with the highest distinction and was invited to try for a "super doctorate," the *agregé en*

Philosophie. He was the first American ever to receive such an offer. Sheen earned the honor in 1925, again passing with the highest distinction. He transformed his dissertation into a prize-winning book and won the respect and admiration of G. K. Chesterton, among others.

After a brief and successful stint in a slum church in Peoria (a test given by his bishop to see if he would be obedient), Sheen became an instructor at Catholic University. He was to remain on the CUA faculty, teaching philosophy and theology, from 1926 until 1950.

While proving to be a popular professor, Sheen's interests were primarily off-campus. After writing two scholarly books, he began publishing a lengthy list of more or less popular books and articles that would earn him honors and praise throughout the country. In 1928, he went on the "Catholic Hour," a nationally broadcast radio program. He quickly became the program's most popular preacher and for more than two decades was asked to preach during Lent and at Holy Days. Vast quantities of letters and financial donations poured in on "Catholic Hour" officials whenever Sheen spoke.

Sheen was soon in demand throughout the country and Western Europe as a preacher, retreat leader, and teacher. He preached annually at St. Patrick's Cathedral, where he packed the huge church and received much attention in the press.

Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, one of the most powerful figures in the Roman Catholic Church, took Sheen under his wing after World War II, and in 1948 invited him to join a world-wide tour and assume the bulk of the journey's preaching duties. The two men greatly appreciated each other's talents (the Cardinal was a superb administrator and fundraiser), and in 1950 Spellman had Sheen named to head the American branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Church's principal source of missionary funds. The appointment came with a miter, and in 1951, Sheen was

consecrated in Rome. Sheen flung himself into his new duties, revealing his great skill as a fund-raiser. He continued to produce books, articles, and newspaper columns at an astonishing rate, and accepted invitations to preach throughout the country and across the world. Sheen's personal success at winning converts—the list included writer Clare Boothe Luce, industrialist Henry Ford II, and ex-Communist Louis Budenz—attracted national attention. Unmentioned in the press were the thousands of average Americans who came into the Church because of Sheen's efforts.

When, in 1951, the Archdiocese of New York decided to enter the world of television, Sheen was a natural choice to appear on screen. The initial half-hour lectures were broadcast on the tiny Dumont Network, opposite big budget programs by comedian Milton Berle, "Mr. Television," and singer-actor Frank Sinatra. No one gave Sheen a chance to compete effectively. Soon, however, Sheen took the country by storm, winning an Emmy, appearing on the cover of Time magazine, and entering the "most admired" list of Americans. In its second year, "Life Is Worth Living" moved to the ABC Network and had a sponsor, the Admiral Corporation.

Sheen's talks, delivered in the full regalia of a bishop, were masterful. He worked on each presentation for 35 hours, delivering it in Italian and French to clarify his thoughts before going on television. He at no time used notes or cue cards, and always ended on time. The set was a study with a desk, a few chairs, and some books; the only prop was a blackboard. A four-foot statue of Madonna and Child on a pedestal was clearly visible. Sheen's humor, charm, intelligence, and considerable acting skill radiated throughout the "Live Is Worth Living" series, captivating millions eager to hear Christian (only indirectly Catholic) answers to life's common problems.

Some of Sheen's talks and writings dealt with Communism, which the Bishop, a student of Marxism and a personal friend of FBI

Director J. Edgar Hoover, thought a dire threat to the nation and the world. But at no time did Sheen appear with or praise Senator Joe McCarthy (he had little use for politicians of any stripe) or directly support the Second Red Scare, which swept through the country during the early 1950s.

Sheen was also a student of Freud, and was consistently critical of Freudian psychology. Sheen's best-selling book, *Peace Of Soul*, presented his views on the subject forcefully. At about the same time, the bishop wrote a powerful book on the Virgin Mary, *The World's First Love*, followed a few years later by an equally impressive *Life of Christ*.

For all of his concerns about worldly issues, Sheen was above all a supernaturalist, who fervently believed that God is love, that miracles happen, and that the Catholic Church best taught the divinely revealed truths about life and death. As he put it in *Peace Of Soul*, "nothing *really* matters except the salvation of a soul."

Still, Sheen was not a plaster saint. Vanity was a constant problem for him, and he knew it. As both priest and bishop, Sheen lived and dressed well and enjoyed the publicity he received in the media and the applause of adoring crowds. Perhaps more serious was an offense that was not discovered until twenty years after his death: while a young teacher at Catholic University, in order to expedite his academic career, he invented a second doctorate for himself.

Sheen could also be difficult at times when his authority was challenged. In the early 1950s, he and Cardinal Spellman, a very proud man, engaged in a bitter feud largely over the dispersal of Society funds. The struggle led to a private audience before Pius XII, who sided with Sheen. In a rage, Spellman terminated Sheen's television series, made him a local outcast, and drove him from the Archdiocese. In 1966, Sheen became the Bishop of Rochester.

Bishop Sheen had been an active participant in the Vatican II sessions in Rome and thoroughly endorsed the reforms that followed. He tried to make his diocese the bridge between the old and new Catholicism, enacting sweeping reforms and making headlines in the process. Without administrative skills, Sheen alienated many in Rochester, and in 1969 he resigned and returned to New York.

During the last decade of his life, while battling serious heart disease, Sheen continued at a breathtaking pace to travel, speak, and write. During the course of his more than 50 year career in the Church, he wrote 66 books and countless articles. No other Catholic figure of the century could match his literary productivity. (Book royalties and television fees went almost exclusively to the Society. Sheen estimated that he gave \$10 million of his own money to the organization he headed.)

In October, 1979 Sheen met John Paul II in the sanctuary of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Thunderous applause greeted their embrace. The Pope privately told the 84-year-old Archbishop that he had been a loyal son of the Church. Nothing could have been more pleasing for Fulton Sheen to hear. He died on December 9, in his chapel before the Blessed Sacrament.

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SHOULD PRACTICING CATHOLICS HOLD PUBLIC OFFICE

One of the things the Catholic League has been closely monitoring during these difficult times is the anti-Catholic fallout that has accompanied the sex abuse scandal. Perhaps nothing has incensed us more than the growing skepticism in the media that Catholic district attorneys should not be trusted to investigate diocesan abuse. This has happened in New York and Ohio and may be happening elsewhere.

Anti-Catholicism raised its ugly head on Long Island when *Newsday* columnist Paul Vitello questioned 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 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 charged that Dillon is active in his religion and that his spokesman, Rick Hinshaw, writes for the *Long Island Catholic*.

William Donohue blasted Vitello for his bigotry in the following news release:

"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."

The Ohio example stems from an editorial in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. In the May 7 editorial, "Toward healing," mention was made of Cuyahoga County prosecutor Bill Mason's investigation of the local diocese. Then, in an incredibly bigoted comment, the editorial said, "Mason is a practicing Catholic, which may trouble some people who fear a cover-up."

To this Donohue replied: "So now all Catholics are considered suspect. It would be instructive to know whether the editorial board is just as skeptical about lawyers who are Jewish, black or gay investigating alleged wrongdoing committed by Jews, African Americans and homosexuals."

What is most amazing about these kinds of comments is that they are said in public. It is one thing for those in the media to express over cocktails their reservations about the ability of lay Catholic D.A.'s to do a fair job, quite another to write columns and editorials about their qualms. Don't they realize how this offends Catholics? Or don't they care?

The media have every right to criticize the way the Catholic Church has handled the sexual abuse scandal. But no one has a

right to impugn the character of innocent persons who are just doing their job. Religious profiling is immoral.

AMICUS FILED ON COLUMBINE CASE

The Catholic League has signed on to an amicus brief filed by the Christian Legal Society in the Columbine case. At stake are the free speech rights of believing Christians.

When the Jefferson County school district invited community members to express themselves by painting tiles for Columbine High School, it was done as an art-therapy project that followed the tragedy that befell the school in the 1999 massacre. As it turned out, some chose to make a religious statement. For example, one woman painted a picture that showed a cross over a heart with the name of her son, Daniel Rohrbough, who was killed in the melee. But her contribution never appeared: school officials, fearing a violation of separation of church and state, censored her work.

The brief that the Catholic League is party to argues that the school district is flatly wrong to maintain that free speech is not the issue. Remarkably, the school district is holding that citizens were not really speaking when they painted tiles—it was actually the government speaking.

Oral arguments in this case, which is before the 10th Circuit, have already been heard. We are awaiting a decision and will keep league members

posted.

CATHOLIC BASHERS GO BONKERS OVER SCANDAL

Catholic bashers are coming out of the woodwork over the sexual abuse scandal in the Church. Catholics for a Free Choice, American Atheists and Rainbow Sash have all been ringing the alarms beckoning world bodies to investigate the Church. Even some noted attorneys have jumped on board.

The Catholic League has been keeping a close watch on those attorneys involved in prosecuting sexual abuse cases. Just as no attorney who is prosecuting cases of sexual abuse by Catholic priests should immediately be declared suspect, none should escape examination himself. We have found that, by and large, attorneys involved in these cases have acted professionally and harbor no agenda. But we were troubled when we learned that sex abuse-victim attorney Jeffrey R. Anderson appeared at a press conference hosted by an anti-Catholic group.

The most mainstream of all anti-Catholic organizations in the nation is Catholics for a Free Choice. Its president, Frances Kissling, has long been obsessed with attacking the Catholic Church in every way possible. On May 8, she held a press conference in New York City demanding that the United Nations involve itself in the Church scandal. This was hardly newsworthy—Kissling has been pressing to downgrade the Holy See's U.N. status as a permanent observer for the past several years—but it did mark something disturbing

when the most prolific litigant against the Church stood side-by-side with her. Anderson has handled more than 500 cases against the Church, more than any other attorney.

We were wary of Anderson even before this event. He has a penchant for casting wide nets and for dabbling in conspiracy theories. For example, unlike other lawyers involved in these cases, Anderson has resorted to the widely discredited RICO law to sue the Vatican and Pope John Paul II, as well as several dioceses. Indeed, his fascination with the Vatican antedates the current scandal: in 1993 he publicly denounced the late Pope Paul VI for being legally responsible for the behavior of a sex-abusing priest, James Porter, simply because Porter admitted his conduct to the pope.

For these reasons, we are suspect about the motives and behavior of Jeffrey R. Anderson.

American Atheists also want to cast a big net. They issued a news release calling on the federal, state and local authorities to investigate the Catholic Church. They want the RICO law to be invoked as well. In a particularly vicious letter printed in the Chicago Sun-Times, Larry Darby, the Alabama state director of American Atheists, branded the Church a "totalitarian church-state government."

Rainbow Sash is a national organization of mostly gay Catholics. On May 10, they called upon the U.S. Justice Department to appoint a Special Prosecutor to determine if any federal laws have been broken by the Catholic Church.

None of these organizations received big coverage by the media. Most in the media are aware that these groups have an agenda and are only too quick to exploit the press for their own self-serving cause. Nonetheless, their behavior deserves to be

monitored and that is exactly what the Catholic League has been doing.

PHILADELPHIA D.A. LAUNCHES WITCH HUNT AGAINST PHILADELPHIA ARCHDIOCESE

District Attorney Lynne Abraham is on a witch hunt. She wants to convene a grand jury to investigate allegations of sexual abuse by priests in Philadelphia. She said the grand jury will investigate “all allegations involving priests whether they are dead, dismissed or retired.” The Archdiocese of Philadelphia, though surprised by her decision, said it will cooperate with the investigation.

We did not hold back in condemning this decision by Abraham. Here is the news release we sent to the media:

“This is the clearest example of a witch hunt against Catholic priests we’ve seen thus far. D.A. Abraham has no real interest in safeguarding the welfare of children. If she did, she not only would empanel a grand jury to investigate sexual abuse by priests, she would go after rabbis who molest children, and ministers who molest children, and imams who molest children, as well as every person of the cloth in the hundreds of other religions that exist in the Philadelphia area.

“Indeed, if Abraham were sincere, she would go after all sexual abusers throughout society: she

would go after teachers, social workers and therapists and every other profession where adults mix with kids. And don't forget about lifeguards. In fact, if she had pure motives, she would begin by inquiring whether there is anyone in her own office who is currently a molester. Then she should extend her office inquiry to staff members who are 'dead, dismissed or retired.'"

We ended by saying, "This is exactly the kind of anti-Catholic bigotry that the Catholic League has feared all along."

ACLU LAWSUIT IN SEX ED CASE MASKS ITS REAL GOAL

On May 9, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed suit challenging the way the state of Louisiana has used taxpayers' money to promote sexual abstinence. The ACLU contends that Louisiana is allowing government funds to promote religion; it cites examples where a religious theme has been evident in some instances where the program has been used. Funding comes from the 1996 welfare reform law: states may receive block grants teaching abstinence in sex education programs.

The Catholic League released the following comment to the press on this issue:

"The ACLU's lawsuit against the state of Louisiana is bogus because it masks the real objective of the organization: to promote a libertine understanding of sexuality. The ACLU's passion for an open-ended, no-holds-barred conception of

sexuality explains why it even went so far as to resort to book banning in 1991. That was the year the ACLU went into court in Wisconsin trying to ban the book, Sex Respect, from use in the classroom. The book, according to the ACLU, promoted one religious perspective regarding the 'spiritual dimension' of sexuality, namely, abstinence. Abstinence, of course, is not an idea peculiar to religion. Even atheists have been known to abstain. In any event, that the ACLU would seek to censor speech it dislikes is proof that even its much-vaunted interest in free speech is suspect.

"The ACLU has also said that schools should not be allowed to teach that monogamous, heterosexual relations in marriage is a traditional value. It said so in 1988. Whether the issue is partial-birth abortion, same-sex marriage or child pornography, the ACLU has long advocated the most libertine vision of sexuality. And it never hesitates to attack religious institutions, most especially the Roman Catholic Church, in the process. That is why its latest foray against the state of Louisiana is so transparent.

"If abuses in this program have taken place, they can be remedied without junking abstinence education altogether."

**"LAW & ORDER: SPECIAL VICTIMS
UNIT" TARGETS CATHOLIC**

PRIESTS IN SEASON FINALE

The NBC show, "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit," targeted Catholic priests in its season finale on May 17. The episode, "Silence," featured a senior priest involved in pedophilia and a subsequent diocesan coverup.

Two days before it aired, we issued a news release that raised serious questions about the decision to run the show.

We took note of the fact that the episode in question was originally scheduled to run in September. Recent events in the Catholic Church, however, coupled with the frenzy over the May sweeps, pushed NBC to switch plans. Word had, too, that this show delights in 'ripping from today's headlines,' hence the decision to go with the pedophile priest-church coverup episode. "This interpretation," we said, "plausible on the face of it, is widely held among Hollywood observers. It is also wrong."

We pointed to a recent story in the *Washington Post* detailing how out-of-control gays in San Francisco have become. Here's what was reported: "More gay men are engaging in risky sex. Cases of venereal disease and HIV infection are soaring. And pleas for caution are being ignored." Also, *New York Magazine* recently reported on the explosion of sex clubs in gay neighborhoods, as well as the "epidemic" use of the deadly drug, crystal-meth, among gays.

We couldn't resist asking, "Now wouldn't these recent events-'ripped from today's headlines'-make for a great episode of 'Law & Order: Special Victims Unit?'"

The executive producer of the show, Dick Wolf, caught our attention as well. "He is not an insensitive man," we noted. "Indeed, he once made a movie, 'School Ties,' that took direct aim at anti-Semitism." Moreover, he has said he would never do a show on teenage suicide or one that exploited the events of

9-11. We added, "Nor will he ever do one on gay bathhouses and AIDS. But when it comes to Catholic priests, Wolf's sensitivity ends."

Phonies do not sit well with us at the Catholic League. Which explains our fondness for Hollywood.