

VATICAN REMOVES SHADY PANEL MEMBER

YANKED!

Bill Donohue comments on the Vatican's suspension of one of the members of its commission on priestly sexual abuse:

The Vatican has announced that Peter Saunders, one of two representatives of abuse victims on its Commission for the Protection of Minors, has been suspended from the commission.

Saunders refuses to go quietly, however, saying only Pope Francis can dismiss him from the commission—even though, by his own statement, the commission's vote to suspend him was unanimous, save for one abstention. So unless we are to assume bad faith on the part of *every one* of the 16 other commission members—beginning with its president, Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston—there must be some merit to the members' conclusion that they could not work with Saunders.

We have long had our own concerns about Saunders. From his savage attack last June on Australian Cardinal George Pell—whom Saunders never met—branding him as “callous,” “coldhearted,” “almost sociopathic”—to seeming inconsistencies in Saunders' personal tale of abuse, we have good reason to question his character.

Our own research found that Saunders began his story by describing abuse at the hands of one man, alternately identified as “a family member,” “a family friend,” and, finally, his brother-in-law. Abuse by priests was only later—and sporadically—added to the story. Then, in a story in the *New Statesman* in September of 2010—just prior to Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Britain—Saunders described abuse by

the head teacher of his Catholic primary school and two Jesuit priests at his secondary school.

For these reasons alone, it makes no sense to have Saunders on this commission. If we knew more about what the Vatican has determined, our position would no doubt be strengthened.