

WASHINGTON POST GETS IT WRONG ON ABUSE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on an editorial in today's *Washington Post*:

No one can fault the *Washington Post* for criticizing the Vatican summit on clergy abuse for being short on concrete prescriptions for reform. That much is true. But at the end of the editorial in today's paper it makes two accusations that are simply not true, and one that is misleading.

The editorial takes the Church to task for its "steadfast opposition to changes in state laws that prohibit survivors of pedophile priests from filing lawsuits years after the abuse took place," citing the Church's "unique history as a haven for abusers."

The misleading comment is the remark about the Church opposing changes in state laws that allow for prosecuting old cases. In virtually every instance where this has happened, those state laws have exempted the public sector.

In other words, state laws that allow for a "look back" provision *almost never* apply to students raped by public school teachers: those students have only 90 days to file a complaint. This is because of the antiquated doctrine of sovereign immunity. When the law applies equally to the public sector, there is no Catholic opposition, as recently evidenced in New York.

Thus, the editorial unfairly characterizes the Church's opposition. Would not the *Washington Post* condemn a state law that allowed for a "look back" provision for students abused in the public schools but did not apply to private [read: Catholic] ones? Moreover, would the editorial page blast the public school establishment for opposing such a law on the

basis of selective enforcement?

One of the two errors in the editorial, "Fine Words, Flimsy Deeds," is the reference to "pedophile priests." It is a fiction to charge that the Catholic Church has a pedophile problem. More than 19 of 20 accused clergy members *are not pedophiles*. Most of them—8 in 10—are homosexuals. This cover up by the editorial page is unconscionable.

Finally, there is *zero* evidence that the Church has a "unique history as a haven for abusers." No institution has a unique history of harboring abusers, but if there is one that leads the way it surely is the family—that's where most of the abuse takes place—followed by the public schools.

The *Washington Post* needs to get up to speed with these issues before lecturing the Catholic Church. We don't own this problem, and we never did.

Contact Fred Hiatt, editorial page editor:
Fred.Hiatt@washpost.com