

CHURCH CHAT

BY

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AN EPISCOPAL WOODSHED?

Maybe I missed it. I hope so. But I see no response from other Bishops, Cardinals, the Apostolic Nuncio, the US Catholic Conference of Bishops, Vatican, or Pope concerning the alleged criminal activity of Bishop Robert Finn of the Kansas City – St. Joseph diocese.

You probably know that Bishop Finn has been indicted by a Grand Jury on misdemeanor charges of failure to report child abuse in a case involving a priest accused of child pornography. Some people called for felony charges but they went easy on him. In any case, the Bishop is now the highest-ranking Catholic official in the country to face criminal prosecution in the decades-old child sexual abuse scandal.

This case is significant on multiple grounds one of which is the indefensible position that the clergy, even bishops, are immune from civil and criminal law. Not anymore! The gates are open, and I can see the stampede heading our way.

But my question here centers on Bishop Finn's status within the Church. What sanctions and penalties has he violated in canon law? What steps can the Church take to discipline him regardless of the criminal process? And even more importantly, what will the Church do with and to him?

These questions are above my pay grade and expertise. We need a canon lawyer to figure out the answers. I'm just chatting, but I do know something about canon law and I do have a Code of Canon Law which I just looked up. Under the section on sanctions, I see lots of references to the Ordinary (Bishop) doing stuff about other people but I can't find what the upper hierarchy does about errant bishops.

We know somebody can do something because Bishop Morris of Australia was publicly criticized, sanctioned, forced to resign, whatever, - but he was punished because he called for an open discussion about ordaining women. So, obviously, somebody can do something about some bishops on some issues.

So, who can and will do something about Bishop Finn? Who will take him to the Episcopal Woodshed and mete out appropriate disciplinary action?

The criminal case will run its own course but, among other things, Finn obviously violated the Bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

Let me see, how does this work? The Bishops hash out a Charter but individual bishops can exempt themselves from following their own rules, disregarding common sense and clear moral law. Do bishops claim a divine right to total immunity from any consequences of their actions? Each bishop is

an independent sovereign, feudal lord of the diocese he temporarily leads? Is that how it works in practice? Once a bishop you get to run any and everything just the way you want to?

Somebody, show me it's different than that in practice. Please!

Other professions police themselves. Doctors, lawyers, plumbers, electricians all have associations which discipline people who do not follow standard, acceptable practice. My heavens, even Congress has an ethics committee which periodically sanctions some of its own members!

The only ethics the bishops monitor is other people's behavior. Who monitors and sanctions them? And it is getting clearer and clearer every day that they need monitoring.

Maybe someone who wears a red hat called Finn and politely told him he screwed up big time. Or perhaps he got chewed out in capital letters privately. I hope so but I doubt it.

The point is the reprimand and the punishment must be public. Not just by the criminal court but by the Church. Bishop Finn is a public figure leading the Catholic community in his diocese. Justice demands that he receives some public condemnation by the Church.

You know what, now that I think about it – it's already too late. The bottom-line protectionism of the hierarchy has already been blatantly exposed. There should have been an immediate, public statement denouncing Finn's cover-up and Charter violation by someone who has a bigger crosier than he does.

That Episcopal Woodshed needs to be built right next to the Episcopal Mansion with cameras linked to every HD, flat screen TV in America. That would be a reality show worth watching.