

“Credible”

It is a word that most people do not often think about, yet it is a word that those who target the Church find very useful.

Even though a priest may work tirelessly to clear his name after a false accusation, there is often a public spectacle when a diocese returns him to a parish. Although objective information may undoubtedly refute an accusation, those determined to attack the return of a priest will still assert that the pastor received a “credible” allegation of abuse.

Credible simply means “capable of being believed.”¹ The media and advocacy groups such as SNAP have powerfully utilized this word when approaching cases of accused priests.

When an accuser comes forward to allege abuse from decades earlier, one can deem the accusation as “credible” simply because the accuser can show that he or she lived at a given time in the same general geographical area of a priest.

Veteran canon lawyer Michael Ritty confirms this. “That level of being ‘credible’ is a low level of certainty,” Ritty told Catholic writer Joe Feuerherd in 2007. “I have seen it as low as the priest happened to be in the [same] parish at the time this person made this allegation – that it was geographically possible. That might have been the only proof [necessary] to go forward.”²

In other words, unless a person claims that a priest molested him or her on an alien spaceship circling a distant galaxy, one can easily stamp an accusation as “credible.”

SNAP frequently utilizes this word to its advantage to lambaste the Church.

For example, in April of 2010, SNAP summoned the media and alarmed churchgoers at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Newhall, California, by claiming that a “credibly accused” cleric had recently been placed in the parish.

The target for SNAP was Msgr. Richard Martini. Until 2003, with over two decades in ministry, no one had ever accused the popular cleric of any wrongdoing whatsoever. Yet a convicted felon serving lengthy time in California’s notorious Corcoran State Prison came forward to claim that the monsignor had “fondled” him at a water polo event in the early 1990’s. Utilizing former F.B.I. agents and other investigators, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles learned that the accuser’s claim was completely without fact. The felon’s charge was unsupported “even by [his] own witnesses.”³

Yet SNAP’s frenetic “Southwest Director,” Joelle Casteix, descended upon unsuspecting parishioners at Msgr. Martini’s new parish to attack the cleric and the Catholic Church. Casteix misleadingly applied the claim that the senior priest had been “credibly accused.”⁴ Of course, there was very little that was the least bit “credible” about the convicted felon’s claim. Yet Casteix’s actions caused great confusion, chaos, and hurt among the local parishioners and the community.

Confusion. Chaos. Hurt. This is what the misleading word “credible” can generate when utilized by unscrupulous individuals.

Consumers of media should be very wary of the word “credible” when examining stories of clergy abuse.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/credible>

² Joe Feuerherd, “Clergy witch hunt? – Due process for accused priests is a sham, critics say,” *National Catholic Reporter*, April 25, 2007.

³ “An Open Letter from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to the People of Santa Clarita Concerning Msgr. Richard Martini,” April 9, 2010. Available at http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2010/03_04/2010_04_12_Tidings_AnOpen.htm

⁴ SNAP press release, April 11, 2010, “Abuse Victims to Leaflet Parish Where Accused Cleric Will Work,” at http://www.snapnetwork.org/snap_press_releases/2010_press_releases/041110_abuse_victims_to_leaflet_parish_where_accused_cleric_will_work.htm