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MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE
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Archbishop Vincent Nicholas' admission (News from Britain and Ireland, 8 July) that he is "very frustrated" in not being able to find out the truth behind allegations of child abuse is no consolation to those priests whose lives are devastated by unsubstantiated charges. His reported statement that priests who have been only accused of child abuse are "very unlikely" to be reinstated is a travesty of justice in a Church that preaches it day in and day out.

The priests I am referring to have had allegations made against them which have been investigated by all the statutory authorities. These authorities have then decided that no further action should be taken. These cases are then referred to the local diocesan child protection office set up under the Nolan Rules. The staff of these offices then decide if a priest should be put on so-called "administrative leave." This can last anything up to four years and can be indefinite. In other words, a life sentence. There is no appeal against these decisions because the bishops have abdicated their responsibility to these unaccountable quasi-judicial quangos up and down the country that have no standing in Canon Law and do not have the recognition of the Holy See.

The priests are allowed to know neither who has made the allegations against them nor what has been alleged and is often required to undergo intrusive risk assessment with convicted pedophiles. No finance is made available for civil defence lawyers on the grounds that since there is no civil or criminal action no defence is necessary. However, a man's human right to his good name is removed and he is left often friendless and alone without even the semblance of due process to inflict this penalty. The men must find a canon lawyer willing to defend them, by which time invariably their rights under canon law have been completely compromised.

The Bishops' Conference has recently announced that there is to be a Commission appointed under the leadership of Baroness Cumberiege and Dame Elizabeth Butler-Schloss to review the Nolan Rules. I hope they will address these very serious miscarriages of justice. The rules are fast becoming not a matter of the protection of children, but more of protection of bishops.

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