

Apology needed for falsely accusing priests in milk scandal

THANK you for your editorial opinion calling for an apology from the health departments and police for falsely accusing and publicising the church for being involved in a milk scam. I hope they heed your call.

Considering the police claim that they were investigating a very serious crime, it is a serious concern that they proceeded to charge priests without investigating all the facts.

Yes, one of these cases was dismissed but the damage has been done. One just needed to read some of the offensive and insulting responses by people on the Internet to realise the extent of the harm caused by this careless charge. Had the police done their work well, the church would have been spared such insults.

Eastern Cape Roman Catholic Church vicar-general Father Heinrich Schöder was right in demanding an apology, but did the church get it? No.

It is unsettling that those in authority can flaunt their powers and spoil other people's good names and be let off the hook so easily.

I would also like to point out that it is not the priests who got "off the hook" as your edition of May 7 claims, but the police and the health department. "Off the hook" normally implies having one's faults or transgressions forgiven or dismissed so that the wrongdoer no longer has to bear the consequences.

Your initial report also stated that "the priest confessed that other Catholic Churches in Lady Frere, Cofimvaba and Dutywa were also selling the milk". But the priest did not see himself as having committed any offence by selling the milk. So when he made reference to other priests doing the same thing, he was not "confessing", but proving there was nothing wrong with what he was doing.

Questionable also was the Dispatch's decision to publish the withdrawal of the case in a Saturday edition, which probably has a lower readership than the Friday edition in which the first report was printed. My point is that the way you handled this story casts doubts about the impartiality of your paper.

The church is not asking for protection from the Dispatch, but for fair reporting. The manner in which

you reported this "story", even if unwittingly, contributed to the harm caused by these unfounded allegations. If I cannot succeed in asking your paper to apologise may I kindly plead with you to report fairly and to check your facts as your profession demands.

— **Bishop Sithembelwe Sipuka, Bishop of Mthatha**

□ **HAS** any investigation been conducted by the Daily Dispatch to get to the bottom of the story about the milk formula?

It would appear that instead of acting improperly, the priests were demonstrating compassion for the communities, who are, presumably, suffering from the state of unemployment and failure of the State to deliver adequate health and perhaps



WHOOOPS: Detective Constable Lefty Coetzee of Queenstown station in front of infant milk formula seized at St Theresa's Catholic Church.

welfare services.

The MEC for Health, Sicelo Gqobana, called on Nestlé to apologise for the arrest of the priests, although I assume that the police did the arresting. It is not clear on whose instructions the police made the arrests.

The Roman Catholic Church's vicar-general for the Eastern Cape, Father Heinrich Schöder, has called on the department of health to apologise.

It would appear that the following actions would be fitting:

● The Daily Dispatch clarifies how the information for this story came to its attention and what steps they took to verify the information.

● The Department of Health should clarify why it had stopped providing, what appears to be urgently needed food aid to children of poor families. If necessary, the department should provide an apology.

● The supplier of the milk, Nestlé, should investigate the matter and if incorrect information or actions have been taken by their officials, they should provide an apology.

● The Catholic Church should clarify what steps it is taking to avoid any form of profiteering.

One thing that appears clear in this debacle is that the whole truth is not yet known, so this matter has not yet been settled. — **Jos te Braake, Gonubie**

□ **I HAVE** had problems with two headlines in the Daily Dispatch and the Saturday Dispatch recently.

The first says *Priests off hook* (SD, May 7).

Reading the entire story from the time the priests were arrested until they were freed by the police due to lack of evidence, it would have been better to say either say *Priests exonerated* or *Health blunders in arrest of priests*. "Off the hook" creates the impression that the priests were indeed guilty but were freed on technicalities.

This was never so.

The second headline, *Health boss kicked out* (DD, May 4) gave the impression that the former CEO of the East London Hospital Complex (ELHC), Luvuyo Mosana, had been sacked from the Department of Health. "Kicked out" in its common use means expelled.

And it is a strong phrase with a negative connotation especially for the person affected.

But Mosana was never "kicked out" but merely reassigned to a new position in the head office of Department of Health.

A better headline could have been *Hospital head back to head office*.

For the sensational headlines, which might have caused unnecessary distress to both the former CEO and the Catholic priests, an unreserved apology by Daily Dispatch may be appropriate. — **P K Boateng, Berea**