

AMERICAN ATHEISTS FIRES ITS PRESIDENT

Bill Donohue

The board of directors of American Atheists has fired its president, David Silverman. The decision was made the night of April 12. With the exception of a few Internet sites, there have been zero news stories on this development.

The statement of April 13 that is posted on the website of American Atheists simply says that on April 10 Silverman was placed on leave, pending a review of his conduct. The review ended with his firing. "The Board of Directors has reviewed internal documents and communications related to the initial complaint as well as evidence relating to the additional allegations brought to the Board's attention."

The board's April 13 statement gave no details about Silverman's conduct. But the website BuzzFeed did. The board statement cited the BuzzFeed story, suggesting that it does not find it to be inaccurate. The following is taken from the BuzzFeed account.

Silverman was removed because of "explosive written allegations of sexual assault and undisclosed conflicts of interest." Silverman's lawyer says his client denies any wrongdoing and "has never had a non-consensual sexual encounter." He added that at the time of the alleged incidents, Silverman and his wife were in an "open marriage."

Silverman is being investigated by the board for allegedly not disclosing "financial and personal conflicts of interest relating to the promotion of his book, *Fighting God: An Atheist Manifesto for a Religious World*, and the appointment to a senior position of a woman with whom Silverman was allegedly having a sexual relationship. (That appointment has

been rescinded.)”

The sexual assault charges are more specific. One woman said that at an American Atheists convention in 2015, Silverman forced himself on her after everyone else had left the room. “He physically pressed me to the wall and began to kiss me forcefully, grabbed my breasts, and put his hand into my leggings where there was actual penetration of my vagina,” she wrote.

Silverman continued the assault at the Memphis hotel, she says, by calling her a “dirty little whore.” He pushed her to her knees, “where his penis briefly made contact with my mouth,” she said. She stood up and told him “no.” He responded by slapping her, saying, “You don’t get to say no to me.” Her account was verified by two prominent atheists who just days later said the woman told them what happened.

In 2012, an undergraduate student who was attending the annual Secular Student Alliance convention in Columbus, Ohio, said she got drunk with Silverman, and in his room he “pressured her into having anal sex.” She told a female friend about the incident, and the two of them wrote to American Atheists about what happened.

There is obviously something wrong, seriously wrong, about not only Silverman, but about the organization. The founder, Madalyn Murray O’Hair, whose lawsuit banning school prayer proved successful, was a scatological queen, a sexual deviant, and a thief.

“I will defecate and urinate when I damn well please and as the spirit—and the physical necessity—moves me.” She also said, “I will engage in sexual activity with a consenting male any time and any place I damn well please.” The refrain, “Not in My Backyard” never sounded more persuasive.

O’Hair also ripped off her own members by absconding with more than \$600,000. Six years after she disappeared, the FBI

revealed in 2001 that it had found the bones of her mutilated body. She was murdered by David Waters, a convicted felon out on parole. He was once an office manager at American Atheists; he also ripped off the organization by stealing \$54,000.

There are two outstanding issues that deserve a public airing.

Why is the board of directors of American Atheists refusing to offer any details about Silverman? Whatever happened to transparency? American Atheists has been quick to pounce on the Catholic Church for holding back information about wayward priests. Why the double standard?

Secondly, why the media blackout? Why has not one newspaper, wire service, or broadcast news outlet covered Silverman's firing? Why are they not questioning the absence of transparency? Will criminal charges be brought against Silverman?

I debated Silverman several times and always found him to be intellectually shallow and mean-spirited. But I had no idea that he was this bad.