

AMERICANS UNITED ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE BISHOPS

Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State sent a letter to the IRS today asking the agency to investigate what he terms “electioneering” by the Diocese of Colorado Springs. Referring to Bishop Michael Sheridan’s recent pastoral letter about politicians receiving Communion, Lynn accuses the letter of using “code language that says ‘Re-elect Bush and vote Republican.’” Lynn also alleges Bishop Sheridan’s actions are “part of a larger trend among some members of the Catholic hierarchy to influence Catholic voters in this election year,” citing the bishops of New Jersey and Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis.

Catholic League president William Donohue responded today:

“It is disingenuous of Lynn to accuse Bishop Sheridan of ‘religious blackmail to steer votes toward the GOP.’ Sheridan never mentions any candidate or political party in his letter. He makes his judgment based on moral issues, on which members of both political parties can come up short. As Sheridan wrote, ‘The Church never directs citizens to vote for any specific candidate. The Church does, however, have the right and the obligation to teach clearly and fully the objective truth about the dignity and rights of the human person.’ Lynn conveniently omits this part of the pastoral letter.

“Lynn joins a growing group of those who cry ‘separation of church and state’ when Catholic bishops venture to speak on public issues. It is hard to take these critics seriously when, with very few exceptions, they wink at campaigning and even political endorsements of candidates by name in some Protestant churches.

"Lynn's remark that Bishop Sheridan's actions are part of a 'larger trend' among some in the Catholic hierarchy is an attempt to intimidate the bishops into silence. And he has shown he is not averse to using the power of the state—the IRS—to do so. So much for separation of church and state."