

AP STORY ON CLERGY ABUSE IS A SCAM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue addresses a story by the Associated Press (AP) on mandatory reporting laws:

An AP story last week on mandatory reporting laws didn't get much traction. That's because it broke no new ground.

Written by Jason Dearen and Michael Rezendes, they found that 33 states exempt the clergy from mandatory reporting laws governing the sexual abuse of minors. "This loophole has resulted in an unknown number of predators being allowed to continue abusing children for years despite having confessed behavior to religious officials."

The reason why no one knows how many predators have continued to abuse children for years "despite having confessed behavior to religious officials" is because no one has been able to identify a singular instance when this has happened. The real story here has less to do with legal loopholes than it does with crashing the confessional.

The AP story mentions legislation on this issue that was sponsored in recent years by Democrats. Utah Rep. Angela Romero, and California state Sen. Jerry Hill, both sought to close the loophole, but ran into fierce resistance. They both lost. The Catholic League played a major role in both victories.

I wrote to Romero in January 2020. "You are treading on dangerous territory. When the government seeks to police the sacraments of the Catholic Church—or encroach on the tenets and practices of any world religion—it is gearing up for a court fight. The First Amendment secures religious liberty, and that entails separation of church and state."

In my letter to Romero, I said there was “*no evidence*” showing that breaking the seal of the Confession would result in prosecuting molesters. Just as I expected, she provided none.

The year before I wrote to Hill. His bill said that “the clergy-penitent privilege has been abused on a large scale, resulting in the unreported and systemic abuse of thousands of children across multiple denominations and faiths.” I asked him for the evidence that supports this outrageous claim. He offered none.

There’s a political game going on here. For years, Family Planning Advocates, the lobbying arm of Planned Parenthood, fought legislation in New York State that would require its counselors to report instances of statutory rape to the authorities. It was supported by the New York Civil Liberties Union. Yet there was no AP story or public outcry about their effort.

Moreover, in 2015 the Alliance Defending Freedom issued a report documenting “multiple instances” where Planned Parenthood failed to report statutory rapes to the authorities. Why didn’t the AP do a story on this?

The AP stance is untenable. Consider the 2014 study published by the University of Michigan Law School. Two professors, one from Michigan Law School and one from New York University School of Medicine, authored, “Effects of Clergy Reporting Laws on Child Maltreatment Report Rates.” They found that states that mandated religious leaders to report cases of child maltreatment had 10 percent *fewer* confirmed reports of child maltreatment.

Father Roger Landry, a well-respected priest and writer, says it is preposterous to think that a child abuser is going to confess his sin in the confessional. “No abuser, not to mention others guilty of serious crimes, would come to confession if he knew that the confessor was basically a state

informant who would betray his confidence.”

On September 29, I asked our communications director, Mike McDonald, to email AP reporter Rezendes (he was part of the Boston Globe “Spotlight” team that reported on clergy abuse in the Boston archdiocese). I wanted to know his response to two questions.

“Do you know how many cases have been reported by the clergy, especially priests, to the authorities of cases involving the sexual abuse of minors in the 17 states that do not afford such an exemption? Has anyone ever been prosecuted after the clergy reported the abuse?”

I knew he had no evidence and that explains why he never answered. This is a scam. The AP’s record of reporting on the Catholic Church has long evinced a bias.

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