

ATTACK ON BISHOP MORLINO IS SCURRILOUS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on recent attacks on Bishop Robert Morlino of the Diocese of Madison (Wisconsin):

Catholics in the Diocese of Madison are very fortunate to have such a brilliant and courageous leader in Bishop Robert Morlino. He is currently under attack by dissident Catholics, ex-Catholics, and those who never were Catholic, for merely upholding the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The uproar is wholly unjustified, and is indeed scurrilous. It was occasioned when the vicar general of the Diocese of Madison, James Bartylla, recently told his priests how to handle funeral rites for persons known publicly to have been involved in a homosexual relationship. His remarks were not meant as “official diocesan policy,” though they certainly had the backing of the bishop.

One would think from the reaction by DignityUSA, an organization that has long been in open defiance of the Church’s teachings on sexuality, and Faithful America, a left-wing group frequently at war with the bishops, that Bartylla had condemned homosexuals, barring them from a Catholic burial. That is a lie. He did nothing of the sort.

The vicar general’s comments were entirely measured. To begin with, he was not talking about the burial of homosexuals, *per se*; rather, he was addressing those instances where a homosexual was involved in a *public union* with his partner. What should a priest do when confronted by the family of the deceased about a person who was in such a relationship? Bartylla instructed them to “think through the issue thoroughly and prudently.”

The micro issue involved in this matter is the funeral rites for homosexuals known to be engaged in a public relationship. The macro issue is scandal.

Citing canon law, Bartylla said that “ecclesiastical funeral rites may be denied for manifest sinners in which public scandal of the faithful can’t be avoided....” Scandal, as defined by the *Catechism*, is “a grave offense if by deed or omission another is deliberately led into a grave offense.” In other words, causing scandal—inviting others to believe that it is morally acceptable to engage in sinful behavior—is the big issue.

The *Catholic Herald* offered a cogent statement on this subject two years ago. “Canon law makes it clear that funerals should be refused to manifest sinners to whom a Church funeral could not be granted without public scandal to the faithful.”

In 2014, Pope Francis illuminated the macro issue involved when he excommunicated members of the Mafia: their public profile made them “manifest sinners,” thus offering “public scandal to the faithful.” The central concern for the pope had nothing to do with crime—never mind public declarations of homosexuality—it had to do with sending the wrong signal to the faithful by acquiescing in the deeds of “manifest sinners.”

I know Bishop Morlino as a kind person who holds no animus against any person or group of persons. He deserves our support. Shame on those agenda-ridden activists who are out to smear him.

Let Bishop Morlino know of your support:
officeofbishop@madisondiocese.org