

CALIFORNIA CONFESSIONAL BILL UPDATE

In the last *Catalyst*, we said progress was being made on the California Confessional bill. Instead of requiring priests to divulge any information on the sexual abuse of a minor learned in the confessional from any source, it was limited to penitents such as a co-worker or a priest. Catholic League members helped drive this progress. Below is the text of a letter by Bill Donohue to Sen. Jerry Hill, the bill's sponsor, on June 12.

Dear Sen. Hill:

Regarding SB 360, you have been quoted as saying that "the clergy-penitent privilege has been abused on a large scale, resulting in underreported and systemic abuse of thousands of children across multiple denominations and faiths."

Could you please provide my office with documentation to support that claim? I will not be coy: I don't believe you can. But go ahead and prove me wrong.

There have been several inaccurate reports in the secular and Catholic media about the number of states that do not honor the clergy-penitent privilege in cases involving the sexual abuse of minors. There are six: New Hampshire, West Virginia, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Texas (See "Clergy As Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect," www.childwelfare.gov).

If you are right, then these states must have a trove of evidence showing how "the systemic abuse of thousands of children" has been uncovered now that the clergy-penitent privilege is no longer operative. I don't believe you have such data, and that's because it doesn't exist.

The sexual abuse of minors is an outrageous crime. It is also outrageous to sponsor a bill that allows the state to encroach on religion while doing nothing to resolve this issue. That's a lose-lose. That is why I am asking you to withdraw your bill.

On June 25, Donohue wrote the following letter to Assemblyman Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, chairman of the Public Safety Committee in charge of the bill.

Dear Assemblyman Jones-Sawyer:

The California confessional bill has national implications, which is why Catholics across the country are deeply concerned about this legislation. We all agree that those who violate a youngster—in any profession—should have the book thrown at him. But to violate a sacrament of the Catholic Church in the course of doing so is unjust. Please reconsider this bill. It is not only the wrong remedy, it is unenforceable as well. Moreover, it will spur needless lawsuits. Surely there is a more prudent way to address this matter.

Thank you for your consideration.

See the September *Catalyst* for more on this subject.