

CENSORING SPEECH IN JOHNSON COUNTY, KANSAS

The Mainstream Coalition, based in Johnson County, Kansas, is sending recruits into area churches to see if IRS guidelines are being followed. The group, which bills itself as committed to separation of church and state, is concerned that local clergymen may be violating their tax-exempt status by endorsing candidates for elective office. What prompted the campaign was a public meeting where Evangelical ministers spoke out against homosexual marriage.

Catholic League president William Donohue is wary of the group's tactics and released the following statement today:

"To conduct a covert operation in houses of worship for the purpose of monitoring homilies is not the kind of operation conducted by friends of the First Amendment. This is not the first time such a raid has been held by the enemies of religion: the ACLU dispatched an attorney to follow Rep. Henry Hyde of Illinois into a Roman Catholic Church in the 1970s to spy on his activities (the ACLU was trying to show that Hyde's Catholic views were unfairly affecting his views on abortion). Hyde was not surprised by the ACLU's action: 'I suppose the Nazis did that—observed Jews going into the synagogues in Hitler's Germany—but I had hoped that we would have gotten past that kind of fascist tactic.' Interestingly, the ACLU is one of the organizations linked to the Mainstream Coalition's website.

"The Catholic League is sending this news release to all 400 churches in Johnson County, Kansas. Our advice is fourfold: a) abide by the IRS guidelines by not endorsing from the pulpit any candidate for public office or any party (it is legal to make endorsements as *individuals*) b) speak freely about any issue you want, including opposition to homosexual

marriage, from the pulpit c) do not be intimidated by the enemies of religion from exercising your First Amendment right to freedom of speech and d) contact the Catholic League if you feel you have been in any way harassed by these spies.

“The bottom line is this: the censors of religious speech must be defeated.”