

CHURCH IS RIGHT TO HIRE LOBBYISTS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a report that criticizes the Catholic Church for hiring lobbyists:

The Catholic Church has come under fire by wealthy lawyers who are attacking the Church for paying lobbyists to defend its interests. Their goal is to rile the faithful, hoping they will insist that their money be spent on other matters.

We hope the bishops spend more money on lobbyists. It is only moral to do so.

Given all the spin by those who work at the law firms of Seeger Weiss, Williams Cedar, Abraham Watkins and Simpson Tuegel—it is their report that the media have picked up on—it is imperative that the Church not be intimidated by these bullies.

The report notes that between 2011 and 2018, the Church spent \$10.6 million on lobbyists to defend itself against proposed laws on sexual abuse. NBC News ran a headline that said the lobbyists were paid to “stymie priest sex abuse suits.” Another headline from the same media outlet read, “Sunday Collections Went to Pay for Lobbyists.” CBS also did a story on this issue.

Is the Catholic Church the only institution that is not supposed to defend itself from rapacious lawyers? That is what the report and the media are saying. It is totally misleading to say that the Church was trying to “stymie priest sex abuse suits.” No, it was trying to establish a level playing field and stop the cherry picking. And yes, the cause of justice demands that the faithful pay the bill.

What the report does not mention, and the news stories gloss

over, is the fact that the laws the lobbyists were opposing were rooted in bigotry: the proposed revisions to the statute of limitations that allowed for a “look-back provision” (allowing old cases to be prosecuted), singled out the Catholic Church. The bills did not apply to the public sector.

The only exception was in New York where, after years of berating politicians for not blanketing the public schools, the bills were amended to be inclusive. We are happy to note the role we played in this campaign. It should be noted that once the public schools were covered in the final bill, the New York Catholic Conference dropped its opposition.

One of the report’s lawyers, Gerald Williams, said, “The church has yet to implement meaningful reforms, and by working to prevent laws from passing, the church is clearly demonstrating that it does not stand with survivors.”

Williams is either ignorant or a liar. Is he aware of the latest data on clergy sexual abuse? There were 26 new allegations made against over 50,000 members of the clergy between July 1, 2017 and June 30, 2018. Of the 26, *three* were substantiated; the three were removed from ministry.

There is not a single institution in the nation, religious or secular, which has less of a problem with the sexual abuse of minors today than the Roman Catholic Church.

Moreover, many dioceses have implemented programs to compensate those who have been abused. What other institution has done likewise? Not one. Yet the sexual abuse of minors is rampant in places like Hollywood, to say nothing about what is going on in the public schools.

If we include sexual misconduct in the workplace, NBC and CBS are among the worst (NBC refused to hire an outside law firm to investigate Matt Lauer and Tom Brokaw—it was all done in house). They are not alone. Two years ago it was reported that U.S. companies paid out nearly \$300 million in public

penalties over sexual harassment claims.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro, who released a grand jury report last year on clergy abuse—none of the accused had an opportunity to contest anything—said that by paying for lobbyists, the Church proves it “cannot be trusted to police itself.” It would be more accurate to say that he cannot be trusted to tell the truth: of the 301 priests named in his report, he succeeded in prosecuting two of them. What a colossal waste of the taxpayers’ money.

Not to be outdone, New York State Senator Brad Hoylman chided the Church for spending money on lobbyists, saying that in his district, “a Catholic school that is closing might perhaps have stayed open if that money had been used for better causes.” The man is insincere. If he really cared about Catholic schools, he would promote school choice, not work against it.

The report issued by the law firms never mentions the amount of money

spent in New York by lobbyists for the public school establishment—it got worried once the law applied to them. Nor does it cite the money spent in other states by lobbyists for Orthodox Jews, the insurance industry, and others. Most important, it does not report on all the money that lawyers like them have made chasing one institution—the Catholic Church.

These are not mere attorneys—they are activist lawyers with an agenda. And they are dishonest.

Contact Gerald Williams (who said the Church has done nothing about this issue): gwilliams@williamscedar.com