

# COVER-UP AT SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on troubles at the Southern Poverty Law Center:

Is there a cover-up in play at the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)? Why was its famous co-founder, Morris Dees, fired? Why are the media not demanding transparency? This matters to the Catholic League because SPLC has a long record of targeting legitimate Protestant and Catholic organizations.

So far at least, the *Alabama Political Reporter*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times* are the only media outlets that are doing the kind of digging we would expect from serious journalists. SPLC is content to say that undisclosed problems have arisen which led to Dees' firing.

Internal emails obtained by the *Alabama Political Reporter* show that "the problems—which employees said spanned from sexual harassment to gender- and race-based discrimination—were more systemic and widespread, creating an atmosphere over several years in which female and minority employees felt mistreated. The employees also said that they felt their complaints were either not heard or resulted in retaliation from senior staff."

The *Los Angeles Times* found something similar. "One letter—signed by about two dozen employees and sent to the board of directors before news broke of Dees' firing—said that internal 'allegations of mistreatment, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and racism threaten the moral authority of this organization and our integrity along with it.'"

Charges of sexual harassment are of primary interest to the Catholic League: SPLC has been a relentless foe of traditional sexual morality. It also brands as hate speech comments that

reflect the Judeo-Christian understanding of sexual ethics.

Worse, it even lists some legitimate Christian organizations, most prominently the Family Research Council (FRC), as hate groups, simply because they adhere to such precepts. In the case of FRC, being listed as a hate group inspired a madman to go on a shooting rampage at its headquarters.

Then there is the double standard. No bishop could ever be removed from office without a public accounting. Moreover, Dees himself has been mentioned as allegedly engaging in some sort of misconduct. What did he do? When did he do it? Who knew all along?

Imagine a news release issued by a diocese saying its bishop has been asked to step down, saying only that workplace problems such as sexual harassment have been noted by many employees. Imagine further that the media are told "nothing more is going to be said!"

That's what's going on with SPLC. "Asked about the nature of Dees' alleged misconduct," the *Los Angeles Times* reports, "a spokesman for the organization said in an email: 'We can't comment on the details of individual personnel decisions.'"

The next time some "in your face" reporter demands that a diocese be more transparent about a priest who has been removed from ministry, it should say it is taking a page out of the SPLC playbook and say, "We can't comment on the details of individual personnel decisions." And then walk away. Let them all howl.

Contact Richard Cohen, president of SPLC:  
[richard.cohen@splcenter.org](mailto:richard.cohen@splcenter.org)