

ILLINOIS AG REPORT REEKS OF POLITICS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a report by the Office of the Illinois Attorney General on the Catholic Church:

Catholics are being played again, this time in Illinois.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan has released a report by her office on sexual abuse by the Catholic clergy in Illinois. Before addressing her report, consider the backdrop to her investigation.

A few years ago, one teacher at a Northwestern Pennsylvania high school, Brother Stephen Baker, was reported to the authorities on grounds that he allegedly molested a minor in the 1990s. Who reported him? His bishop, Altoona-Johnstown Bishop Mark Bartchak.

What happened next? The Pennsylvania Attorney General, who is now in prison, launched a state-wide probe of six of the eight dioceses in the state. That was all it took—one old case to ignite a huge probe of nearly all Catholic dioceses in the state extending back to World War II.

Illinois Attorney General Madigan said it was that grand jury report that inspired her to launch her investigation. The Pennsylvania grand jury report was released in August. Which begs the question: Why didn't Madigan launch an investigation of the public schools throughout the state following revelations of a *Chicago Tribune* report on sexual abuse in Chicago? That report was released in June.

The *Chicago Tribune* found that there were 523 credible cases of rape and sexual abuse of Chicago students over the past decade. Even more astounding, in the last three months—between

September and December—Chicago public school officials fielded 624 new complaints, including a teen track star who was allegedly raped 40 times by her coach. Worse again, these school officials “knew about these abuse cases and hid them from the public for eight years.”

Why didn't Illinois Attorney General Madigan insist on a probe of every public school in the state, dating back decades?

Kids are being raped by public school teachers right now in Illinois, but this does not concern her. There is no “Teacher Abuse Hotline” posted on her website, but there is a “Clergy Abuse Hotline.” Furthermore, we know that she is not interested in cases of abuse committed by the clergy in all religions. Just one.

This is why I say Catholics are being played.

Catholics, and the public, are being led to believe that the Catholic Church owns this problem. It does not. It is widespread, but few prosecutors have any interest in examining current cases of sexual abuse in the public schools, never mind cases of abuse committed by the clergy in other religions. They are too busy uncovering decades-old cases of abuse committed by priests.

Regarding the Illinois Attorney General's report, there are many unanswered questions.

Why is the report being touted as an examination of alleged sexual abuse in Illinois, when that is only partly true? The Clergy Abuse Hotline allows callers to report instances outside the state, or, as the report says, “in Illinois and elsewhere.”

Who called the Hotline? They were “survivors who were abused decades ago.” Why are they not referred to as *alleged* survivors? Did they ever report their alleged offense? “Survivors informed the Office [of the Illinois Attorney

General] that, at various times over the years, they reported the abuse they suffered to one of the Illinois Dioceses.”

Did all of the alleged survivors register a complaint at the time of the offense, or just some? If some, how many? More important, there is no evidence that the Attorney General’s office sought to verify any of these accusations. Yet it takes Church officials to task for disregarding allegations brought to their attention.

The report says that “The Illinois Dioceses often disregarded survivors’ allegations by either not investigating the allegations, or finding reasons not to substantiate the allegations.”

Perhaps some of the allegations were not found credible on the face of it (e.g., the accused priest wasn’t even in the parish where his alleged offense occurred at that time). The report shows its true colors when it accuses Church officials of “*finding* reasons not to substantiate the allegations” (my italic.) Does the Attorney General’s office have evidence that Church officials contrived their conclusions? If not, why the stab?

The report acknowledges that in some cases the alleged victim chose not to have his name made public (a not uncommon practice). In other cases, a criminal investigation was already underway. In still others, the clergy had fled the country. These are all plausible reasons why Church officials decided not to launch a probe. But the authors of the report do not see it that way, and act as though non-Church officials typically start probes in similar instances. This is nonsense.

Perhaps most unconvincing of all, the report concludes that “Based on its review, the Office believes that additional allegations should be deemed ‘credible’ or ‘substantiated’ by the Illinois Dioceses.” On what grounds? On what basis does the Attorney General’s office make such a determination? It

provides not one iota of evidence to make such a claim.

To say it “believes” this to be true means nothing. What specific cases did it find that should have been deemed credible or substantiated by Church officials? In other words, can the Attorney General’s office *substantiate its claim*?

There was a time when the Illinois Attorney General’s office raised questions about sexual abuse in the public schools. For example, it was distressed to learn that school officials did not accept its recommendation that cases of sexual abuse should be reported to the authorities. Instead, these officials insisted on doing their own probes first, arguing, quite persuasively, that in more than half the cases they examined, there was nothing to the charges.

That time was the mid-1980s. “Teachers Slip Through Abuse Law Loophole” was the headline of this December 8, 1985 story in the *Chicago Tribune*.

To this day, there has never been a grand jury investigation of the public schools in Illinois, *or in any other state*. Which is why Catholics are being played. We don’t own this problem, but the elites in government, the media, and education would like everyone to think we do.

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