

IS QUOTING SCRIPTURE A HATE CRIME?

On April 22, the House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to mark-up a hate crimes bill sponsored by Rep. John Conyers. Serious questions have been raised by religious leaders about this legislation, especially as it pertains to religious pronouncements against homosexuality.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue addressed this issue today:

“The idea of being prosecuted for reading Scripture may seem delirious, but it is just as crazy to think it couldn’t happen. Consider the facts. When this bill was being considered in 2007, Rep. Louie Gohmert of Texas asked Alabama Rep. Art Davis (his amendment is in the bill) the following question: ‘If a minister preaches that sexual relations outside of marriage of a man and a woman is wrong, and somebody within that congregation goes out and does an act of violence, and that person says that that minister counseled or induced him through the sermon to commit that act, are you saying under your amendment that in no way could that ever be introduced against the minister?’ Davis, who supports the bill, replied, ‘No.’

“In other words, if a deranged person hears a priest, minister or rabbi quote Leviticus 18:22, ‘Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination,’ and he then proceeds to assault a homosexual at a gay event—telling the arresting officer he was just following through on what he heard in his house of worship—the clergyman could arguably be charged with a hate crime. The very prospect of something like this happening should be enough to make any reasonable person wonder what is going on.

"The problem in general with hate crimes legislation is that it invites the government to probe way beyond motive. And in instances like this, it trespasses on free speech and religious liberty. This is a road no defender of liberty should ever want to go down."