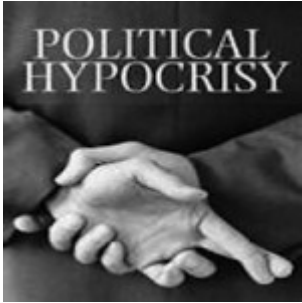


NYS POLS AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT



Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on how the New York State Legislature is handling charges of sexual harassment against Brooklyn Assemblyman Vito Lopez:

Assemblyman Lopez says he is innocent of physically abusing female aides. I have no way of telling. He is also charged with giving hush money. The real issue for the Catholic League is the incredible duplicity at work: we have one rule for priests accused of sexual abuse, and another for lawmakers.

The New York Archdiocese, following the rules established by the bishops' conference, makes it clear that it must "cooperate with public authorities about reporting cases [of sexual abuse] even when the person is no longer a minor." That's what "zero tolerance" means.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver says, "The Assembly has a zero tolerance policy when it comes to sexual harassment." Really? Then why weren't the cops called? Why did he not initially insist, as he was supposed to do, that the case be given to the Assembly Ethics Commission? Instead, he apologizes for not doing so, while still insisting that what he did was "both legally correct and ethical."

Why did Silver allow what is arguably a criminal case to be handled internally by his colleagues? After all, the Assembly policy on sexual harassment in the workplace explicitly says it "is against the law."

If a priest were accused of sliding his hand up a woman's dress, as Lopez has (he is accused of many more offenses), and

this were treated as an internal matter by the archdiocese, lawmakers would go ballistic. Yet when it comes to one of their own, they are content to do very little: Lopez's initial punishment consisted of things like cutting his budget, and ordering him and his staff to attend classes on sexual harassment.

What is needed is a "zero tolerance" policy for lawmakers modeled on the one adopted by the bishops.