

POPE REAFFIRMS TEACHING ON CONFESSIONAL SEAL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the pope's statement on the seal of confession:

On July 1, the Vatican released a document on the seal of the confessional that was approved by Pope Francis on June 21. The Holy Father issued a statement of his own on the document. It comes at a time when some civil authorities, such as in California, are seeking to penalize priests for withholding information about the sexual abuse of a minor learned in the confessional.

The Vatican's message to these lawmakers is unmistakable: Under no circumstances will the Catholic Church allow priests to divulge any information about any subject learned in the confessional. "A confessor's defense of the sacramental seal, if necessary, even to the point of shedding blood," the document said, is "obligatory," allowing of no exceptions.

The document, the *Note of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the importance of the internal forum and the inviolability of the sacramental seal*, cites "a worrying negative prejudice" against the Catholic Church that exists in many parts of the world. This prejudice is expressed in the form of public opinion, and is directed at pressuring the Church to change its teachings. The Church's "legal order," the *Note* says, "is expected, at times, to conform to that of the States in which it lives in the name of a supposed correctness and transparency."

California legislators must understand that no state law will ever persuade priests to make public that which is learned in the confessional. "Any political action of legislative initiative aimed at breaking the inviolability of the

confessional seal," the document says, "would be an unacceptable offense against the liberty of the church, which does not receive its legitimacy from individual states, but from God."

Accordingly, the Catholic League will contact every member of the California assembly asking them to reject SB 360; it would be preferable if it were withdrawn. As every honest person must admit, this bill will never meet its objective—the priests are not going to budge.