

SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS IN NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS: STATE INVESTIGATION URGED

Catholic League president William Donohue is urging a state investigation of the sexual abuse crisis in the New York City public schools. He explained his reasoning as follows:

“The sexual abuse crisis in the New York City public schools dwarfs the scandal in the Catholic Church, yet state lawmakers are doing nothing about it. This outrageous condition demands a response from Albany.

“In today’s newspapers, it is reported that four teachers with a history of misconduct are being removed from the classroom by New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein because he is convinced that they are a threat to children. Of the three teachers involved in sexual misconduct, one male teacher is accused by male students of paying them \$100 each for the privilege of performing oral sex on them during school hours. Administrators, teachers and students all knew about it for six months. When the teacher was finally investigated, he was allowed to remain in the classroom for three months. Another teacher is charged with fondling a handicapped student; the third teacher is charged with rape and sodomy. And what was the response of teachers union president Randi Weingarten? She blasted Klein for his decision to protect the kids from these teachers.

“These are not isolated incidents. A previous study by the *New York Post* revealed that at least one child is sexually abused by a school employee every day in New York City schools! One third of the accused are repeat offenders and more than 60 percent are simply transferred to desk jobs. And each time reforms are proposed, the unions invoke state law

protecting tenured teachers at the expense of innocent children.

“I am writing today to Governor George Pataki and every member of the New York State legislature to conduct an investigation of this incredible abuse of power and to enact new laws that put the safety of children first. Predator teachers are no more acceptable than predator priests.”

OHIO REPORTING BILL WILL RESPECT CONFSSIONAL

On June 5, Catholic League president William Donohue issued a news release detailing the league's objections to a pending bill in Ohio that would require the clergy to report instances of sexual abuse but did not explicitly protect the sanctity of the confessional. It was the bill submitted by Rep. Lance Mason that raised Donohue's eyebrows. A better bill, he said, was the one introduced by Sen. Robert Spada; it specifically protected the confessional seal.

A staff member from Rep. Mason's office called the Catholic League yesterday to clarify the legislator's intentions. Today, Rep. Mason himself called. Donohue was pleased and commented as follows:

“It is the position of Rep. Lance Mason that he never meant to change the traditional status of the priest-penitent privilege. He strikes us as sincere and thus puts to rest our concerns. Indeed, Rep. Mason went so far as to say that he ‘would never do any harm’ to what he labeled as one of the ‘greatest institutions on earth.’

“We commend Rep. Mason for his quick and decisive statement of clarification. And we thank him for his kind words regarding the Catholic Church.”

RELIGIOUS TEST APPLIED TO BILL PRYOR

On June 11, the Senate Judiciary Committee will hold hearings on the nomination of Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals. The Catholic League is concerned that a quasi-religious test is being applied to Pryor. William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, explained the organization’s position today:

“Bill Pryor’s personal moral beliefs, rooted in Roman Catholicism, should play no role whatsoever in deciding his qualifications for the circuit court of appeals. Unfortunately, there is evidence that he is being subjected to a veiled religious test.

“Those opposed to the nomination of Bill Pryor are not guilty of applying *ade jure* religious test to his nomination. But they are guilty of applying a *de facto* religious test. Take, for example, abortion. It is no secret that Pryor’s personal convictions are also the convictions of Catholicism. But he also understands that civil law must be guided by precedent. So when a broadly-written Alabama law surfaced that banned partial-birth abortions, Pryor noted the statute’s unconstitutionality and advised state officials not to enforce it. In short, he is utterly capable of making critical distinctions between civil and ecclesiastical law.

“But this is of no consequence to his opponents: they still

object to him because of his personal animus to abortion. Thus have they created a quasi-religious test. They may as well post a sign saying, 'No Catholics Need Apply' (save, of course, for dissident Catholics).

"This is an intolerable condition. To apply a judicial filter that screens for practicing Catholics is to institute a *de facto* religious test that is every bit as unconstitutional as a *de jure* application. Indeed, its veiled nature makes it all the more invidious.

"The Catholic League urges the Senate Judiciary Committee to condemn all religious tests for public office, no matter how they are executed."

OHIO REPORTING BILL MUST PROTECT CONFESSIONAL

Bills are pending in Ohio that would require members of the clergy to report suspected cases of child abuse to the authorities. One of those bills, the one introduced by Sen. Robert Spada, would protect the sanctity of the confessional. But there is another bill, introduced by Rep. Lance Mason, that would not allow for the priest-penitent privilege.

Catholic League president William Donohue wrote today to every member of the Ohio House expressing the Catholic League's misgivings over any bill that would sacrifice the confidentiality of the confessional. He offered the following rationale for his position:

"All across the nation we have asked state legislators not to compromise the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation. We have

been very pleased with the results overall. Once lawmakers realize how central this sacrament is to Catholics, they almost always vote to respect the priest-penitent privilege. They should do so in Ohio as well and not just for constitutional reasons: there is no evidence that attempts to break the seal of the confessional would do anything to curtail child abuse. In short, it is a red herring and needs to be labeled as such.

“The Catholic League urges all Ohio lawmakers to embrace the bill introduced by Sen. Spada. We commend Sen. Spada, the Catholic Conference of Ohio and the Ohio Council of Churches for their efforts in preserving religious liberty.”

ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE BISHOPS GROW

The four bishops of Massachusetts have taken a stand against same-sex marriage. Their statement comes at a time when the state’s Supreme Judicial Court is about to render a decision on the constitutionality of homosexual marriage. Yesterday, gay activists objected to the bishops’ position by protesting during Mass in the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston; about a dozen people walked out during the homily given by Monsignor William H. Roche.

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

“More disturbing than the temper tantrum that took place in the Cathedral of the Holy Cross is the political agenda of the activists. Their goal is to silence the bishops, especially on matters of sexual morality.

“Protesters told reporters that Church officials have no right to try to influence public policy. Gary Daffin, a member of the Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus, goes further by saying the Church has ‘no moral authority to be beating up on gay people.’ David Breen, a board member of the group, says the bishops have no credibility to be speaking to the issue of same-sex marriage; he invokes the passage from Scripture about throwing the first stone to make his point. An official from the state’s chapter of NOW says the bishops are trying to deflect attention from internal Church problems. Holly Gunner of the state’s ACLU affiliate questions the right of the bishops to speak to the issue at all, holding that in this country ‘we don’t have one religion using the government’s laws to get everybody else to follow that one religion.’

“These activists are out to silence the Church. Their goal is to intimidate the bishops, and other Catholics, from exercising their free speech rights. They need to be told, in no uncertain terms, that despite the failures of some of the Church’s teachers, there is nothing flawed about the Church’s teachings. This is not the time to lower the bar; rather it is time to help everyone clear it. This is also not the time to allow our foes to muzzle the Church’s voice. Kudos to the bishops of Massachusetts!”