

THE POLITICS OF TRANSPARENCY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a blatant double standard:

The media insist that when a priest is suspected of wrongdoing, Catholic bishops must turn over every last item found in the priest's personnel file. Nothing is to be sealed, and full public disclosure is demanded. But reporters, editorial writers, and pundits don't hold everyone to the same standard.

On January 29, actor Jussie Smollett told the Chicago police that two men attacked him around 2:00 a.m. near a hotel, yelling racial and anti-gay slurs at him. He said he was doused with bleach and had a noose roped around his neck. The men allegedly shouted, "This is MAGA country," a reference to a pro-Trump slogan. The police, however, found that he had staged the event by paying the men to partake in this stunt to advance his career.

Now, out of nowhere, the public learns that Smollett's case has been dismissed. To make matters worse, prosecutors did not alert Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson and Mayor Rahm Emanuel that they were going to drop the case.

According to the *Chicago Tribune*, "Johnson said this decision allowed Smollett to hide behind a secret deal." This is what concerns the Catholic League. Even worse, Smollett's case has been sealed by a judge, without explanation. In other words, the public will never know the evidence.

Morris Dees was recently fired by the organization he co-founded, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). Complaints of racism and sexual harassment at the far-left organization have been noted internally for some time but only surfaced this year. More important, Dees himself was named as someone who allegedly engaged in misconduct.

A few weeks ago, a spokesman for SPLC said of Dees' misconduct, "We can't comment on the details of individual personnel decisions." Of course he can—he simply chose not to answer. Similarly, in the March 26 edition of the *New York Times*, an SPLC official told an inquiring reporter, "We will not respond to individual allegations publicly."

Last week, the *New York Times* ran a story about Kevin O'Brien, a top aide to New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio. He was allowed to exit from his job last year without fanfare, even though the offenses involved sexual harassment. The news story mentioned that there were at least three other cases in recent years where employees of the parks department were pushed out the door for sexually harassing co-workers; all of the cases had been substantiated.

Why were O'Brien and the others allowed to keep their departures a secret? The reporter wrote that "the city agreed to conceal the behavior from future employers who might inquire as part of a reference check." All of the men agreed to resign "after securing assurances that the city would provide a 'neutral reference' to prospective employers seeking information. If asked, city officials would verify only basic details, such as employment dates, job title and description."

If Smollett were a priest, he would never have been allowed to walk, and his case would never have been sealed. If Dees were a priest, the media would never have allowed his bishop to keep his case confidential. If O'Brien were a priest, he would never have been allowed to quit in secret. But none of them are priests—they are celebrities, activists, and government workers—so the same rules do not apply.

These cases are not an anomaly. Regarding the city employees who were quietly let go, consider what a specialist in city labor cases, Richard Washington, told the *Times* (he represented the three parks department men). He admitted that "neutral reference agreements are 'something that most

attorneys in this field would be requesting,' adding that they were relatively common in cases where employees agree to resign after accusations of misbehavior."

There was a time in the last century when some bishops moved a molesting priest from one parish to another, without notifying the new parish of his offense. In the public schools, this is so common—it is going on right now—that it is called "passing the trash." This is exactly what this labor law attorney is saying is routine in city government today: the new employer hasn't a clue he is hiring a sexual abuser.

This is the politics of transparency. It not only shows how unfair the legal system and the media are to priests, it shows how little they really care about sexual misconduct. It's not the offense that bothers them; it's the status of the offender.