

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC LAWMAKERS SEEK VICTIM STATUS IN FEUD WITH BISHOP

A Catholic congressman from Wisconsin, and two Catholic state legislators, have received a letter from Bishop Raymond Burke of La Crosse objecting to their voting record on life issues. The bishop, who was named Archbishop of St. Louis this week, said that if the lawmakers continued to vote "anti-life," he would "ask them not to present themselves to receive the sacraments because they would not be Catholics in good standing." The letter has now occasioned a public furor, leading Catholics and non-Catholics alike to criticize Bishop Burke for violating the principle of separation of church and state.

Catholic League president William Donohue defended the bishop today:

"Raymond L. Burke did not lose his right to freedom of speech when he became a bishop. He not only has a First Amendment right to speak his mind, he has a moral obligation to do so on matters of life and death. It is important to note that Bishop Burke did not advise his priests to refuse Communion to anti-life Catholic lawmakers, he simply asked the offending politicians not to seek Communion.

"If the issue were segregation, not abortion, the critics of Bishop Burke would be praising him. For example, when New Orleans Archbishop Joseph Rummel publicly chastised Catholics in the 1950s for stopping an African American priest from celebrating Mass, he was regarded as a hero. When he excommunicated three Catholic leaders and two public office holders in 1962 for promoting segregation, he was praised by elites. In other words, it's the issue that matters, not the

right of a bishop to censure Catholic politicians.

“Regarding separation of church and state, we have a minister running for president and no one complains. Similarly, no one complained when Senator Joseph Lieberman, an orthodox Jew, opined in 2000 that ‘My religion decides what’s right. And what’s right for me as vice president will be what’s right for America.’* Now imagine what would happen if Bishop Burke ran for president and said what Lieberman said?”

* We have learned that the *Washington Times* erred in reporting this alleged comment by Senator Lieberman. The Senator actually said, “Each one of us in my religion decides what’s right. And what’s right for me as vice president will be what’s right for America.” (ABC, “Good Morning America,” August 9, 2000).