

MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE – HYPOCRISY AT ITS WORST

Thomas P. Doyle, J.C.D., C.A.D.C.

May 26, 2015

Recently a prominent psychologist with over two decades of intense experience helping clergy abuse victims said that the most morally compromised group of people he knew of were the attorneys who represent the Catholic Church in the abuse cases. The recent pronouncement of Francis LoCoco, lead lawyer for the Milwaukee Archdiocese, confirms this opinion. “*Let’s spend the money*” he is quoted as saying, in reference to the 56 million dollars that Cardinal Dolan illegally and immorally tried to divert in the notorious Milwaukee bankruptcy proceedings. Lest the lawyers bear the brunt of the blame, the main culprits are the present archbishop, Listecky, and his predecessor, Dolan. The squadron of attorneys work for them and not the other way around.

When abuse survivors call attention to the stonewalling tactics and often-vicious attitudes of the Church’s lawyers, its not uncommon for the bishops to plead innocence, claiming that it’s the lawyers doing their job. But the lawyers are hired by and work for the bishop and not vice versa. The disgusting charade going on in Milwaukee was cooked up by and has been sustained by Dolan and Listecky. Thus far the Milwaukee lawyers have spent over \$20 million dollars to stonewall the victims. Some bishops and church cheerleaders in this case and others have regularly tried to blame the victims and their lawyers, claiming they are only in it for the money. This is nonsense. The Church lawyers get paid by the hour, win or lose. Victims’ lawyers are paid on the contingency that the case will end in favor of the victim. I have known lawyers who represented victims who took major cuts so that their clients would end up with some respectable compensation. How many of the Church lawyers work sex abuse cases pro bono? The money the archbishop is encouraging his lawyers to squander comes from the People of God of the archdiocese.

The bankruptcy process was initiated over four years ago, on January 4, 2011 to be exact, two days before the archbishop was scheduled to be

deposed. The church's lawyers are challenging each and every claim of the 570 victims who have come forward. Many of the claimants were among the 200 deaf boys sexually violated by Fr. Lawrence Murphy at St. John's School for the Deaf. These victims have been fighting for decades for some form of justice and what they have received instead has been vicious, dishonest and certainly unchristian revictimization.

The archbishops of Milwaukee going back to Cardinal Albert Meyer have all played a key role in making the Milwaukee Church unique in its hypocritical and narcissistic response to the havoc caused by its priests. Meyer was told about Lawrence Murphy way back in the mid fifties and sent him on retreat for a month. The Redemptorist priest who reported Murphy to Cardinal Meyer also reported his behavior to the Apostolic delegate in Washington so the Holy See effectively knew about Murphy way back then.

Archbishop Cousins, whose tenure lasted from 1958 to 1977, knew about Murphy and not only did nothing, but he threatened one of the deaf boys who reported Murphy and forced him to sign a letter of retraction.

Rembert Weakland was archbishop from 1977 to 2002. He was faced with reports not only about Murphy but several other Milwaukee priests. Weakland's track record in responding to victims is far from stellar but at least he tried to get Murphy laicized with no success, thanks to former Pope Benedict and his cohort, Cardinal Bertone who refused Weakland's request and allowed Murphy to live out his days in the dignity of his priesthood while his victims lived out their days in the agony of his abuse. Then came Dolan in 2002.

Dolan tried to deal with the sex abuse nightmare primarily with his "hail fellow well met" personality but his rhetoric and back-slapping fell flat in the face of what he was really up to. Bankruptcy was being used by some bishops as a way to avoid trials and the revelation of the truth that comes with them, as well as a way to limit the compensation given to victims. Although he would be gone when the bankruptcy process started Dolan obviously knew where it was all going. He diverted approximately \$56 million dollars into a cemetery trust in 2007. When accused of trying to hide the money in 2011, he lashed out at victims' attorney Jeff Anderson and accused him of spreading "*groundless gossip*." Dolan's lie was discovered when a letter he wrote to the Vatican in 2007 came to light....a letter in

which he sought permission to transfer the \$56 million to a restricted trust.

Why? To quote his own words *“I foresee an improved protection of these funds from and legal claim and liability.”* A local judge, Rudolph Randa, ruled that the transfer was protected by the first amendment and that *“removing some or all of these funds from the trust and placing them in the bankruptcy estate would undoubtedly put substantial pressure on Archbishop ListECKI to modify his behavior and violate his beliefs.”* Over two years later a federal appeals court ruled that Randa was not only wrong but should have removed himself from the case. The \$56 million was back on the table. Now LoCoco and his fellow lawyers have declared that they plan on spending it all in litigation. Is this protracted and obscenely expensive process about achieving justice and assuring fair compensation for victims, as Archbishop ListECKI has claimed in attempting to justify it? Not by a long shot!

In his narcissistic arrogance ListECKI openly invited all who were sexually abused to step forward: *“nothing will prevent me from making every possible effort at moving forward toward healing and resolution with those who have been harmed.”* His real plan was to get them all to step up so that he could have his lawyers do everything possible to have their cases thrown out of court. The best comment on this comes from one of the victims: *“These victims have already been betrayed by the Church in the most damaging ways imaginable. How could the archbishop, a man of God, then proceed to try to throw each and every one of their cases out of court? This action in effect re-abused and betrayed these fragile victims yet again.”*

Judge Randa said that putting the cemetery trust millions back on the table would put pressure on ListECKI to violate his beliefs. What beliefs? There is nothing even remotely Christian or even Catholic about the travesty he is presiding over. He’s a civil lawyer himself so he knows well that the millions spent thus far represent countless billable hours for the lawyers defending his strategy. This is tons of money they will take home whether they win or lose. The only belief that seems to be in danger of violation is the belief that the victims whose lives have already been severely damaged by the negligence of his predecessor, must now be pounded into the ground and defeated once and for all.

The Milwaukee bankruptcy has been a mockery of the American judicial process. It is an unconscionable abuse and subversion of the legal process, using it as a weapon to punish and further traumatize the victims. It has surely justified the pessimistic and negative image of civil attorneys and it has also made a mockery of the office of bishop. It is an example of the virus of clericalism at its virulent worst. What Dolan, Listecky and the phalanx of attorneys have completely lost sight of, in addition to the objective meaning of justice, is what this is really all about: several hundred young boys and girls who were believing and trusting Catholics and who were betrayed and violated in the worst imaginable ways by the very men they trusted. As their lives unfolded they had the courage to take the risk of confronting the Archdiocese. Rather than act like the Body of Christ, the leaders of this Church have come at the victims with every resource available to punish them for having had the audacity to demand that which their Church incessantly preaches about, justice and charity.