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Today in Staten Island History Taking up the defense of our Catholic schools

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A 2006 report by the New York State comptroller revealed that about 15 percent of students statewide and 21 percent in New York City attend non-public schools. The assumption, therefore, is that government officials in Albany understand the nightmarish consequences for public education should these institutions be forced to close.

Nevertheless, they concoct, with impunity, discriminatory schemes that significantly burden non-public schools on the apparent assumption that these facilities will somehow manage to survive.

At least insofar as Catholic schools are concerned, however, these assumptions may be wrong. In fact, some politicians may actually want Catholic schools to shut down.

Granted, the proposition seems far-fetched. In a 2008 article published by the New York Post, Adam B. Schaeffer, a policy analyst for the **Cato Institute's** Center for Educational Freedom, reported that a reduction of just 1 percent in non-public school enrollment would cost governments throughout the state about \$ 100 million annually. Since the state is already facing a monumental budgetary crisis, why would politicians in their right mind actually want to see the end of Catholic education in New York?

Here are three things to consider: The first is the legal principle that people are presumed to have intended the natural consequences of their actions; the second is a resolution passed in 2006 by the San Francisco City Council, and the third is a letter written last month by a District of Columbia council member to Dick Durbin, chairman of the Senate subcommittee on financial services and general government.

For three consecutive years, the Democratic-controlled Assembly passed legislation that would have created a one-year window within which anybody claiming to have been sexually abused as a child could sue for monetary damages regardless of how long ago the act supposedly occurred. That the bill was targeted squarely at the Catholic Church was obvious when the legislation, as then drafted, excluded from its scope those abused at public facilities, including public schools. Equally obvious was the fact that its goal was to bankrupt the Catholic Church, since defending such lawsuits decades after the fact would be virtually impossible. All of this, despite the findings of a study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education that sexual abuse by public school personnel is 100 times greater than that perpetrated by Catholic priests.

Next, consider that not only has New York illegally short-changed Catholic schools by millions of dollars for services that the state requires them to perform, but Gov. Paterson has now ordered further cuts in reimbursement for these mandated services.

FARRELL RALLY

And two weeks ago, approximately 1,000 people attended a rally at Monsignor Farrell High School to protest the state government's latest salvo, a payroll tax enacted last May as part of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority bailout, that would significantly burden Catholic schools while, once again, leaving public schools unaffected.

Catholic school enrollment is down 5 percent over last year statewide and, in Staten Island's elementary schools, 14 percent over the last 5 years. Local Catholic high schools have seen a decrease of 10.5 percent over the same period. These natural consequences of what's been going on in Albany vis-à-vis Catholic schools are, of course, significantly magnified by the nation's economic woes. Since political leaders, like the rest of us, are presumed to have intended the natural consequences of their actions, the proposition that some of them want Catholic schools to close actually becomes quite tenable.

Underlying this desire is a simmering hostility toward the Catholic Church because of its position regarding such matters as abortion and same-sex marriage. In some places, this hostility has already boiled over in a manner that raises constitutional red flags.

For example, on March 21, 2006, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors overwhelmingly adopted a shocking resolution condemning the Vatican as a "foreign country" whose Catholic teaching is "hateful," "callous," "insulting," and "ignorant." This unprecedented, direct attack on a specific religion by government precipitated a suit against the city by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights alleging that the resolution violated the neutrality mandated by the First Amendment. Oral arguments were entertained by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit last week.

On Nov. 30, D.C. Council member Tommy Wells wrote to Sen. Durbin vehemently opposing renewal of the district's school voucher program because some parents are using them to send their children to Catholic schools. This was offensive, Wells maintained, because Catholicism opposes same-sex marriages and might convey what he called their "doctrine" to students in an unacceptable manner.

Speaking at that rally at Farrell High School, state Sen. Andrew Lanza declared, "There are a lot of people in government today who, unfortunately, have something against us."

Right. And that something is that they despise, and therefore are bigotedly intolerant of, the sincerely-held beliefs of the Catholic Church. Some also hate Catholic schools enough to want to see them shut down. Don't be surprised when a few of them feel emboldened enough to say so. Their actions have been doing that for years.

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