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Catholic Key is Out of Tune Again

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 21, 2009 NCR Today

In his address to the Knights of Columbus [1], Cardinal Francis George called for a renewed commitment to unity among Catholics. ?The Church?s unity today is severely strained, as we all know, and alternative Catholicisms are claiming authenticity even sometimes against the Holy Father and bishops,? he said and called for prayers for, and reflection upon, the ways we all can better stitch together the unity that we should enjoy as Catholics Christians.

In a statement on the issue of health care [2], delivered on the even of his installation as the Archbishop of New Orleans, Archbishop Gregory Aymond had this to say: ?Strident or shrill rhetoric does not help us to engage in civil and respectful deliberation about a serious social issue with significant moral implications. God grant us the wisdom to discern what is right and the courage to do it.? The new archbishop?s words were a perfect application of Cardinal George?s call.

The same day that Archbishop Aymond called attention to the danger of strident and shrill rhetoric, the following headline appeared in the Catholic Key blog, [3] the online blog of the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocesan newspaper: ?Obama Lies about Abortion Coverage at Staged Event with Fake Faith Groups.? The final paragraph of that post, which was submitted by the newspaper?s editor, Jack Smith, certainly fit the bill for ?strident and shrill? and added to the ?severely strained? unity of the Church. Smith wrote, ?The administration's ploy throughout the campaign and his presidency has been to seek or invent amenable decoys for the actual voices in faith communities that oppose his radical anti-life agenda. Many of these decoys are pure hacks like the folks at Catholics United and Catholics in Alliance. This is a shameful exercise by an American administration to displace legitimate political opposition by substituting staged conversations with supporters faking as faith groups - and presenting an in-house love fest as consensus building.?

The phrase ?faking as faith groups? is especially curious. The ?staged event? was sponsored by, among others, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Sisters of Mercy of America, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the evangelical group Sojourners, and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good. Mr. Smith always has a bee in his bonnet about Catholics in Alliance, but on what grounds does he assert that the Lutherans, the Sisters of Mercy, the Jews, and the Evangelicals are ?fake?? During Archbishop Aymond?s installation, as soon as he was seated in his cathedra, he received representatives from other faith communities as well as from his Catholic flock. It is always beautiful to see a minister of another denomination show ? and receive ? this mark of respect. But, maybe that rabbi embracing the new archbishop was a fake. And Catholics in Alliance was founded by a woman who spent most of her career working for the USCCB?s Campaign for Human Development which seeks to alleviate poverty. Alas, fake work that. And the Sisters ? hell, they only vow poverty, chastity and obedience. Fakers one and all.

It is fine to disagree with the public policy pronouncements of any of these groups. It is fine to disagree with the President. I even think it is fine to call the President a liar when you think he is lying. But, it is impossible for me to see how questioning the faith of fellow Catholics and fellow believers ?fake? does much to advance the discussion on health care, still less to bind up the unity of the Church.

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[1] http://www.kofc.org/un/eb/en/convention_2009/addresses/index.html
[2] http://www.arch-no.org/News.php?mode=read&id=522&title=A+Joint+Statement+of+Archbishops+Aymond+and+Hughes+on
[3] http://catholickey.blogspot.com/2009/08/obama-lies-about-abortion-coverage-at.html