NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Dolan, Abortion & NOW

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 10, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York spoke at a press conference [1]in Manhattan last Thursday about the outrageously high abortion rate in his see city. 39 percent of all pregnancies are terminated. Archbishop Dolan pledged the services of the Catholic Church to help any woman who did not want to have an abortion but felt compelled to do so by circumstance, economic or otherwise, noting that the Church has a vast network of social services to help women face crisis pregnancies. The interfaith event quite explicitly did not involve any political advocacy, not even a call for the overturning of Roe, but instead focused on the need to provide alternatives to abortion for women.

Outside the event, protesters from the National Organization for Women denounced Dolan and the other religious leaders gathered for the event. What exactly were they protesting? Their website notes [2]that the Catholic Church opposes contraception, making the Church's opposition to abortion "hypocritical." Say what you want about *Humanae Vitae*, it is not evidence of hypocrisy! I am sure there was the usual cant about men, especially celibate men, having no right to tell women what to do with their bodies. Archbishop Dolan, I suspect, is not a burglar and has never been burgled, but he is permitted to oppose burglary, is he not?

In writing about the abortion issue, I make it a point to identify organizations the way they identify themselves. I know some on both the left and the right refuse such self-identifications, so that "pro-choice" groups are labeled "pro-abortion" groups and "pro-life" groups get named as "anti-choice" groups. Following my rule, I have always labeled NOW a "pro-choice" group. But, their protest outside Archbishop Dolan's presser raises the question: Are they really in favor of honoring a woman's choice or ar they now advocating for one particular choice? The Archbishop pledged the assistance of the Church to help women who choose not to have an abortion. How does that infringe on anyone's liberty? I am afraid NOW is dangerously close to becoming a "pro-abortion" group and not a "pro-choice" one.

One other point. In his comments, Archbishop Dolan noted that, among other things, the Church was involved with "lobbying on behalf of pregnant women, mothers and infants, support of life-giving alternatives." He may recal that the health care reform law that the USCCB opposed last year included $250 million for women facing crisis pregnancies. And, in his new post as President of the USCCB, Archbishop Dolan might want to ask his staff if they have any evidence of any abortion being paid for with federal funds under the new law. I understand that Archbishop Dolan will not overturn the stance taken by his predecessor Cardinal George. When the Church makes a change, the announcement always begins with the words, "As the Church has always taught..." But, he can begin to move away from the stance of opposition to the health care law that the USCCB embraced last year, and he can start by nixing any effort to lobby on behalf of this foolish "repeal" effort that is nothing more than a publicity stunt by the House GOP.

Archbishop Dolan is entirely right to be appalled by the latest statistics on the abortion rate in New York. They are truly alarming. And, he is right to pledge the full faith and credit of the Catholic Church to help women facing crisis pregnancies. We should put our money where our mouth is. These kinds of interventions in the culture, interventions that focus on helping women rather than changing laws, might do more to change the

culture than all the lobbying in the world. We are right to insist that Roe was an unjust decision and to fight tooth and nail against a culture that acquiesces in its own solipsism was too easily. But, I wonder if the culture might not listen better if all of our methods were non-coercive, if we abandoned the effort to change the law and only concentrated on changing the culture? I repeat - I wonder. I could be persuaded either way. Unlike many other social attitudes, opposition to abortion has not crumbled and the culture might even be getting more pro-life, and the Church's steadfast opposition, the annual marches, the Rosary prayed at clinics, etc., all of that has something to do with the fact that societal attitudes have not changed on this issue. But, still, I wonder. Readers may recall this article [3]from last year, in which I outlined an alternative pro-life strategy.

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[1] http://www.catholicsun.org/2011/january/07/dolan-abortion.html
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