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Bp Tobin \"Unimpressed\" With Obama's Tucson Speech

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 20, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

Bishop Tobin of Providence, Rhode Island, has penned a column [1]in his diocesan paper in which he writes why he was "unimpressed" with President Obama's speech in Tucson at the memorial service for those killed in the assassination attempt on Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords.

He writes, "The problem, at least for me, is that President Obama?s persistent and willful promotion of abortion renders his compassionate gestures and soaring rhetoric completely disingenuous....And, I confess, abortion policy is the prism through which I view everything this president says and does."

The adjective "disingenuous" means "insincere" and Tobin's use of that adjective shows why he and his like-minded bishops have failed to evangelize the culture with the Gospel of Life. Instead of asking the complicated question of why liberals, so historically attuned to speak for those who have no voice, saw no need to raise their voice - and their votes - on behalf of the unborn, he simply casts an aspersion at the President's motives. Obama is not wrong, he is insincere, the bishop tells us.

I think the President is wrong in his commitment to Roe. But, it is mistaken to think the President is any different in this regard from most liberal politicians - and most lawyers - whose understanding of the relationship of the law to human life got sidetracked, not out of malice, but out of a genuine sympathy for women facing crisis pregnancies and for whom, mistakenly I believe, abortion is seen as a remedy. By attributing a complicated socio-political phenomenon merely to ill will, Tobin becomes incapable of trying to figure out how to persuade people to think more intelligently and clearly about why Roe was wrong. But, Tobin would rather beat his head against the wall than evangelize the culture. How's that working for you Bishop Tobin?

Fortunately, in his recent letter to the new Congress, USCCB President Archbishop Timothy Dolan declined to see the entire political agenda through the lens of abortion policy. He certainly, and appropriately, placed that issue at the top of the USCCB's concerns, but his letter did not end there because politics does not end there.

The bishop of Providence, like the previous bishop of Scranton, has become an embarrassment. His attack on Obama's speech at Tucson is inappropriate, unnecessary, ill-conceived. Such statements harm the Church in this country, making the Church appear foolish. Even if you share the bishop's concern about abortion, which I do, linking that tragedy to the tragedy in Tucson by means of an attack on President Obama's sincerity is not the way to address that concern. Bishop Tobin owes the President an apology - and he owes the Church one too.

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[1] http://www.thericatholic.com/opinion/detail.html?sub_id=3779