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Who speaks for the \"Catholic left\"?

Heidi Schlumpf | Jan. 24, 2012 NCR Today

The blog post headline caught my eye: "Obama offends the Catholic left [1]." I wondered what he had done now--but was surprised to find this piece was about the recent HHS contraceptive mandate [2] decision.

The Catholic left is mad about that? As a self-described "leftie," I was hardly offended by the decision, so I delved into the piece.

The blog post was written by Wall Street Journal columnist William McGurn, a VP at News Corp. who writes speeches for CEO Rupert Murdoch. He is certainly not "left," nor does he claim to be.

Whom does he cite as willing to wage "war" over the contraceptive mandate? Well, in addition to a few bishops, McGurn's main evidence is a piece written by NCR's own Michael Sean Winters [3]. In it, the "Distinctly Catholic" columnist admits he will not vote for Obama because of this decision. Winters' post has received more than 300 comments, and I admit that I haven't read every one. But I assure you that a number of people farther left than Winters disagree with him on this one.

My intent here is not to publicly disagree with my fellow columnist on this issue, but rather to wonder why McGurn assumes this one person speaks for the "Catholic Left" (an admittedly problematic label, like all labels, to be sure)? Why didn't McGurn see what Call to Action had to say about the decision? Or the very left Catholics for Choice?

Instead, he quotes retired Cardinal Roger Mahony, Bishop Robert Lynch, NCR's Winters and University of Notre Dame President Father John Jenkins--all of whom are disappointed in the decision.

What do those four people have in common? Winters is a lay person, so it's not ordination, though three out of four are. They are, however, all men.

An interesting choice, given the topic involves women's health, no?

CORRECTED: Catholics for a Free Choice changed its name to Catholics for Choice [4] in 2007. I apologize for the error.

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