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Cardinal Dolan at the Republican Convention

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Talk about political signals. Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, is slated to give the formal benediction at the Republican National Convention the night Mitt Romney gives his acceptance speech. Yikes.

Now, granted, Dolan said it was not an endorsement, and according to the New York *Daily News* [1], "Dolan's spokesman, Joseph Zwiling, said the cardinal told both the Republican and Democratic parties that he would accept any invitation to offer a prayer at their conventions."

But all the rhetoric in the world does not erase what will look to the general public, including Catholics, like a blatantly partisan political appearance. It even smells like payback to President Barack Obama for not going along with Dolan's complaints about religious freedom when it comes to covering contraception in health care plans. On the other hand, maybe he's trying to salve the critics who castigated him for inviting Obama to the annual Al Smith Dinner. But of course, that was even-handed protocol: Romney will be there as well.

Yet 2012 would seem like a logical year for the Catholic bishops to steer clear of partisan politics. They agree with the Republicans on social issues, but not economic justice. They have the reverse stand with the Democrats. So why go to either convention?

Shouldn't bishops pronounce themselves on issues, not parties and candidates, however indirectly?

But since Dolan is going to the RNC, his appearance just feeds the impression, already widespread, that the only issues the bishops really care about are the "culture war" issues: abortion, same-sex marriage and contraception. It reinforces the idea that the bishops merely give lip service to issues of economic justice.

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[1] http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/dailypolitics/2012/08/cardinal-timothy-dolan-to-give-benediction-at-republican-national-convention