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

Voices that balance the political/religious conversation

Tom Roberts | Nov. 17, 2011 NCR Today

Don't wish to be redundant, but for those who haven't caught the latest on colleague Michael Sean Winters' blog [1], I'd like to call attention to the recent appearance by John Gehring, senior writer and Catholic outreach coordinator for Faith in Public Life, on MSNBC.

He was interviewed [2] about the U.S. bishops' initiative on religious freedom. The point is, agree or not -- and in this case I more agree with Gehring than not -- he has become one of the public voices in the Catholic world that has come to the fore in the aftermath of the 2004 election when the far right seemed to own the only religious interpretation of events.

Another of those groups is Catholic Democrats, who issued a detailed plea [3] that was posted elsewhere on these pages to the U.S. bishops to address poverty.

Such groups provide a healthy counterweight at times -- at others a healthy agreement -- to the declarations of both religious and civil authorities. They keep on the public agenda items that each of those worlds, civil and religious, at times would rather have out of the limelight.

On the matter of religious liberty, the bishops may see and understand a great deal more than this writer's admittedly limited vision allows. But the point made editorially in *NCR* at other points seems apt, at least as a question. How can the bishops claim a threat to religious liberty, particularly Catholic beliefs, in the culture when:

- a majority of the justices on the Supreme Court are Catholic;
- Catholics make up the largest single religious denomination in Congress;
- we have a Catholic vice president;
- the governors and mayors of some of the most important states and cities are Catholic;
- Catholics arguably inhabit more positions of power in influential institutions, from the military to Wall Street, than ever before?

I can understand that the bishops have been unsuccessful in convincing people -- Catholics and otherwise -- of certain of their points of view, especially on matters of sex, but is that primarily the result of anti-religious forces or is there something else entirely in the mix?

Source URL (retrieved on *12/11/2013 - 01:48*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/voices-balance-politicalreligious-conversation

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/gehring-msnbc
[2] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQymP1ZIE58

[3] http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/catholic-democrats-ask-bishops-address-poverty