News



by NCR Staff

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May 8, 2020

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In the past two weeks, the involvement of Catholic clergy in political causes has been a hot topic at NCR. It stems from a phone call President Donald Trump held with several Catholic bishops, and other leaders, supposedly about Catholic education. Reports say that the call was about much more than that, and New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan's participation in that conversation, as well as his response afterward, has been called into question. NCR posted several columns and stories on the controversy and we'll concentrate on those in this dispatch. Next week, we will publish responses to our editorial, "Dolan delivers the church to Trump and the GOP

." Letters have been edited for length and clarity.

My first reading of Michael Sean Winters' column, "The president and the prelates: parody or parable?," left me thinking this was describing an actual event wherein New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan became a member of President Donald Trump's re-election committee.

The cynicism which I feel at this point likely mirrors that of many progressive Catholics who feel our church has drifted into the GOP camp. In spite of Trump's history as a serial adulterer, misogynist, racist, xenophobe and one whose administration has done nothing substantial to promote life, the bishops appear to have an inexhaustible supply of mulligans to excuse his behavior.



The bishops need to work overtime to convince me and those who think as I do that their seemingly too close affinity to the GOP is not deliberately intended to result in more political polarization of our church. Such polarization can only result in further erosion of both attendance and contributions. That scenario does not portend well for any church which is struggling to retain not just adults with a history of participation but younger people who are weighing their own options.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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Having New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan head up President Donald Trump's campaign may not be all bad. Asking to be "relieved of his spiritual responsibilities" could be interpreted as being asked to leave the priesthood and being "busted" down to the laity. It could be an opportunity to get rid of both Dolan and Trump.

ANN WINGERT

Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania

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I am appalled at New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan's decision to sell his soul for the inhumanity and corruption that occupies the Oval Office. The Gospel message appears to mean nothing to this so-called Christian leader!

MIKE RICCI, SR.

Rosemount, Minnesota

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The church left me a long time ago. Today, I have a new faith community. Why continue to read NCR?

Michael Sean Winters. His humorous takedowns of the American ecclesiastical bureaucracy are delicious reading.

GENE ROMAN

Bronx, New York

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While Michael Sean Winters' opinion may well be parody or a parable, reading of the increasing involvement of Roman Catholic clergymen in President Donald Trump's re-election campaign raises concern as to their spiritual base, morality and ethics as well as the separation of church and state and 501(c)(3) designation.

Generations of Catholic efforts for immigration, to reduce economic inequality, to improve the status of minorities and women and to promote social justice and the corporate works of mercy have been jettisoned to the four winds by this president. In America magazine, Michael J. O'Loughlin wrote of New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan, "The cardinal's appearance on Fox News follows a weekend during which he praised the president on a conference call hosted by the White House with 600 other Catholic leaders and then prayed for Mr. Trump during a live-streamed Sunday Mass from Saint Patrick's Cathedral."

In my humble opinion, this is a violation of the Catholic Church's 501(c)(3) designation. It would seem that for Catholic clergy to support Trump's re-election as Dolan and others have done through the phone call and public prayer, the church should give up its 501(c)(3) designation or meet the federal tax code requirements, "Under the Internal Revenue Code, all section 501(c)(3) organizations are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office."

CECILE G. BETIT

East Wallingford, Vermont

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I have not felt this depressed about an influential cleric's public remarks in the face of a national crisis since Cardinal Bernard Law's calling God's wrath down upon the Boston Globe for exposing the clerical sex abuse scandal in our now hearing Cardinal Timothy Dolan's praise of President Donald Trump for some supposed sensitivity about religious education while the worst pandemic in 100 years afflicts his city in their nation! To praise this incompetent president and administration for anything in his response to this crisis is scandalous and insensitive beyond belief.

This particularly smacks of a toadyism that has become too characteristic of the comfortable relationship the cardinal has tried to sustain in bargaining away so many issues of justice to preserve some small gains.

As an active Catholic, a former priest and someone who just cares about the institution of the presidency that is being attacked daily through lying and narcissism, the cardinal disappoints me beyond description.

DAVE PASINSKI

Fayetteville, New York

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Many, maybe most U.S. bishops crave power and prestige. They've lost their prestige as their past and ongoing misconduct involving predatory clergy has been exposed. Their power has also been diminished. They have turned to politics to gain power and this president offers them an opportunity. They will do as they did during the last election and endorse and support the GOP to varying degrees. What profit to gain the world if the cost is your soul? Ask the U.S. bishops' conference. They're willing to make that deal.

Continue to pretend they are men of God if you wish, but they are not. They are seekers of worldly power. It's high time we openly reject them and demand they be replaced with men less contemptible.

NICHOLAS PARMA

San Antonio, Texas

In one of her best and most important columns, "On a call with President Trump, Cardinal Dolan reveals his true colors" (and Lord knows she has hit quite a few nails on the head), Jamie Manson calls out a most heinous abuse of ecclesiastical power exhibited by New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan. He and his hierarchical ilk have already made their Faustian bargain with the current administration.

Now, in the midst of the sea of suffering caused by his majesty, President Donald Trump, Dolan and others have the temerity to curry favor once more. Why? What is the gain? Where is the prophetic spirit? Where is the call of conscience? How can Dolan look out his window at New York City suffering at his feet and dare as a follower of Jesus to thank this president. I am ashamed. The angels weep.

Thank you, Jamie, for your column. While we still have a U.S. Postal Service, all of us who subscribe to NCR should pour letters of disgust and disdain into the mail slot of His Eminence. Help us and save us!

CULLEN SCHIPPE

Albuquerque, New Mexico

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I write to thank Jamie Manson for her recent column on New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan and his obsequious behavior toward President Donald Trump.

Although we all bear the burden of living under a Trump presidency, we are fortunate to live in a time when journalists can report on those who choose to cow tow to a fascist leader. Dolan is a charismatic man and I wish he were honorable as well, but he seems to be willing to trade an opportunity to speak for the poor and the oppressed for the opportunity to flatter a person he perceives to be a celebrity.

At least, with the help of ethical journalists, we are aware of this behavior and can turn away from Dolan and find others who will ethically and honestly guide us through these dangerous times.

JENNIFER SYMONS

Green Valley, Arizona

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I find it hard at times to read Jamie Manson's columns, not because I disagree with them, but because they are so powerfully — but painfully — clear, honest, intelligent and direct. The damage that these men (largely) and women are doing to humanity is heartbreaking. For every good thing they do (and they do use their power for good at times), they make 10 damaging choices.

Excellent column Jamie. I will continue to take a deep breath as I open your next prophetic column. In the meantime, the following quote from this column will stay with me. I wonder if Mr. (purposefully) Dolan will pay any attention at all.

> … this shepherd of the church is also a cynical, political operative, as willing to manipulate as he is to be manipulated. This might be easier to bear if he were just another one of Trump's dupes, but Dolan has shown too many times that he is eagerly complicit.

Long after the president finds his rightful place in the trash heap of history, one question will still linger over New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan: what did it profit you to gain Trump's utterly corrupt world?

TERI CORSO

Newton, New Jersey

Advertisement

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I appreciated very much Jamie Manson's comments about the conversation and apparent mutual admiration between New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan and President Donald Trump, as well as your editorial on the same subject.

I especially was struck by Manson's reference to the "Mordor" of 5th Avenue, Trump Tower. Dolan should be aware, if he is not now, that in the construction of that building, or I should say, the destruction of the building that used to stand on that site, Trump authorized the use of undocumented Polish and Ukrainian immigrants to do the demolition. In violation of a union contract and federal and state labor laws, he paid the immigrant workers less than minimum wage, paid no overtime, gave no protective equipment when the building being taken down was filled with asbestos. After many years of litigation, a federal judge found that he was untruthful when he said he did not know about it, and found the workers entitled to back pay.

So that was maybe 40 years ago. In the years since, Trump has perfected the art of misusing and abusing people who work for him.

It is sad and troubling to me what these clerics are doing to the church and the people of the church (who are the church, after all), by allying themselves to a man who has shown himself at his worst and most incapable during the course of the pandemic.

I want to say, it's worse than anything since Cardinal Francis Spellman's defense of the war in Vietnam. But even that was more defensible than this betrayal of all that the church should stand for.

JILL HANSON

Jupiter, Florida

After reading the article "Catholic social justice leaders protest Cardinal Dolan's supportive words for Trump," I took the trouble to watch Jesuit Fr. Matt Malone's event, highlighted in the article, in which he asked New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan about his reaction to the criticisms of his comments on the phone call with President Donald Trump and other bishops. I was amazed at how "Trumpian" his response was.

Dolan began by suggesting that he wasn't aware of any firsthand criticisms of his comments but that he had heard rumors of them. This parallels Trump's contention that the governors of the states were very pleased at his handling of the coronavirus and that he hadn't heard of any complaints. After expressing shock at the news that his comments received negative blow back from Catholics, Dolan immediately shifted the focus of the question to talk about negative comments about his association with Sen. Chuck Schumer and Gov. Andrew Cuomo from other Catholics, rather than address any of the substance of the actual criticism of his remarks about Trump. Anyone who has watched any of the president's briefings on the pandemic, will readily notice how often the president, in the questions from reporters, will quickly deflect any question he doesn't wish to answer by answering a question that he wished they had asked, rather than the actual question.

Dolan continued to address the original question by speaking, in general terms, about criticism he had received in the past from the left and the right and how he felt about them, rather than addressing any specific criticism people may have had about his call with president Trump.

It is these slick evasions of dealing with substantive concerns of the laity about his words and actions that sour the Catholic laity in their dealings with Dolan and other members of the hierarchy like him.

Dolan comes off as just another prototypical politician who is skillful in avoiding answering unpleasant questions posed to him. Is there little wonder why the trust of the laity in their spiritual leaders continues to diminish as they witness disingenuous comments by members of the hierarchy like Dolan?

THOMAS SEVERIN

Connellsville, Pennsylvania

Thank God for the 170 or so women religious who made clear to New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan they disagree strongly with his cozying up to President Donald Trump, "Congregational leaders criticize Cardinal Dolan's remarks on Trump." Their response is in stark contrast to the cowardly silence of the bishops of this country.

When exerting their authority, bishops do not hesitate to claim their power comes from their being "successors of the apostles." But how did we get from Peter, James and John and the others leaving everything to follow Jesus and to eventually die for their belief in him to this timid group that dares not speak out against this amoral president? And we can expect more of the same as the election draws near even if it means further suffering for immigrants, the poor, the unemployed and those in danger of losing their health care.

To me, the actions — or more accurately, the inactions — of these men can best be described as deplorable. But thank God for the courage and witness of our women religious. They are the ones who more seem to be the true successors of the apostles.

BILL KRISTOFCO

Parkville, Maryland

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Kudos to our sisters for speaking out about the conversation between President Donald Trump and New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan. Their response was thoughtful, honest and in keeping with the social justice stance of the church.

My question? Where were the voices of the bishops and priests? These are our church leaders! Really? It amazes me that these selfless women were the ones "investigated" by the church. This has nothing to do with politics, it has to do with our beliefs as church. These women are the ones on the front lines, working on the border, feeding the poor, ministering to the homeless, even being jailed to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

I believe the Lord told us to render to Caesar (put your own name in) what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. I also seem to recall a conversation about who would be first in the kingdom of heaven. I pray it is not two cuff linked men mutually admiring each other!

God bless our courageous sisters, not only the hands and feet of Jesus, but the mouth also.

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

For shame! Supporting articles that concern issues important to all Catholics is good journalism ("US Catholic magazine unpublishes two articles critical of Cardinal Dolan "). Censoring criticism of the clerical elite is terrible journalism. Supporting a cleric who panders to a political figure is encouraging despotism.

No Catholic organization should support the anti-life administration who molests children by separating them from parents, wants to cut food stamps to hungry people, denies responsibility as states in competition try to meet medical needs and encourages rightwing armed protestors.

The anti-life list goes on and on, the "pro-life" promise of the right wing of supporting anti-abortion is a clear lie to get political support without taking care of the causes of abortion.

JANET LATHAN

Takoma Park, Maryland

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If the letter refers to a specific article published at ncronline.org, please send in the headline or the link of the article.

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