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Hudson Still Wants an RC Tea Party

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

My friend Deal Hudson, editor of InsideCatholic, continues his call for a "Catholic Tea Party," intent on taking back the Church the way the secular Tea Party wishes to take back the government. The problem in this formulation is obvious: It begs the question, from whom do we need to take it back?

The secular Tea Party wants to take back the government from President Obama. Instead of idolatrously worshipping the Constitution, they should read the thing and realize that Obama got more votes than the other guy, and so he holds his office by right, not by theft. But, because Obama has been remarkably effective, a thing you would not know from the ads of Democratic candidates this year, passing health care reform, passing reform of the financial industry, saving the auto industry and hundreds of thousands of jobs with it, saving the economy from tipping into a depression, because he has delivered when previous Democrats could not, he is perceived as a threat to the Constitution.

From whom does Mr. Hudson wish to take back the Church? It is hard to tell. He directs some invective at Sr. Carol Keehan, DC, who is not only my friend but my hero. He wonders why she has not been disciplined for her stance in favor of the health care reform and he laments that there have been "no consequences for open dissent on the preeminent moral issues." There have been no consequences because there was no dissent on moral issues. There was disagreement over whether the statutory language was sufficiently restrictive of federal funds going to pay for elective abortions. Hudson has made this charge before, as have others, that Sr. Carol disagrees with the bishops on the morality of abortion. They have yet to find "they can't find because it doesn't exist" a single sentence of hers where she disagrees with the bishops on the morality of abortion. It is disingenuous to keep suggesting that she holds a position she manifestly does not hold.

But, Hudson's target is not Sr. Carol. He is concerned that the bishops have not done their job. It is

strange, I admit, that he faults Sr. Carol for disobedience to the bishops but then goes on to criticize them so thoroughly for neglect of their duty. I think most bishops have come to realize what Hudson cannot bring himself to realize, that Sr. Carol might have been right, that there is no abortion funding in the health care overhaul, and that attacks on this servant of the Church who has done more for the poor and the aged and the destitute than most Catholics is not only misplaced, it is unjust.

Hudson also throws some rhetorical spears at the USCCB, which is also strange, because he just published an article by Bishop Vasa which showed how intimately the bishops and the USCCB work together. This idea that there is some measurable difference between the bishops and their conference is absurd. What differences exist are within the body of bishops. Hudson may listen to those who want a more aggressive stance on some issues, but there are other bishops who worry about appearing overly partisan, a worry that Hudson, who worked for George W. Bush, does not share.

Many of my liberal friends wonder how I can call Hudson a friend. I have not met him, but we exchange pleasant emails, filled with disagreement of course. I think he is sincere in his ambitions, but I think the zero-sum game methods of politics have infected his intra-ecclesial vision. (I confess, that sometimes happens to me too. I suspect it happens to all of us.) And, invoking the model of the Tea Party which, whatever else it is, is fuelled by anger, is definitely not the model for debate within the Church. Anger is, last time I checked, one of the seven deadly sins. There is such a thing as righteous anger, to be sure, but righteousness requires justice to the facts, and here Hudson disappoints consistently. Sr. Carol is not pro-abortion. The USCCB is not a rogue outfit. Not all bishops want a culture war. The last thing the Catholic Church needs is its own Tea Party.

I call Hudson a friend because he shares the Catholic faith, which is about things more important than political disagreement. Hudson should remember that the next time he attacks Sr. Carol, the good people at the USCCB, and those bishops who do not share his political agenda.

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