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Gehring on the Phoenix Situation

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

John Gehring, of the group Faith in Public Life, has a thoughtful commentary on the situation in Phoenix where, according to reports in the Arizona Republic, Bishop Thomas Olmstead is threatening to remove the Catholic designation from the hospital where the now famous abortion took place to save the life of a mother.

I have less of a problem with "dogmatic certitude" than I do with an "imperial style." But, as Gehring points out, the issue is not dogmatic certitude but the application of the moral law to a concrete situation which is complicated to say the least.

Complications, of course, do not require us to set aside our moral teaching. On the contrary, it is precisely in the difficult situations where the moral law is itself most pastoral, providing clear guidance when emotions and values are in conflict.

If Bishop Olmstead had made that point, instead of insisting on his own authority in a way that is clumsy at best, and counter-productive, he might get a better hearing. To take up Gehring's analogy, even a general, if he be a good general, listens to his subordinates in a council of war before deciding how to proceed.

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