

Illinois bishops, governor meet, discuss conscience

Robert McClory | Jan. 3, 2012

CHICAGO -- Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn and nine of the state's bishops remain at least on talking terms but far from agreement on many things after a mid-December meeting to discuss Catholic conscience. It is still unclear who called for the meeting, Quinn or Chicago Cardinal Francis George.

Quinn said the conversation was mainly about the needs of the poor. George said they did talk about the poor but from our point of view this was a meeting to discuss the principles of faith, not the works of faith.

George told reporters, "As Catholic pastors we wanted to remind the governor that conscience, while always free, is properly formed in harmony with the tradition of the church as defined by scripture and authentic teaching authority. A personal conscience that is not consistent with authentic Catholic teaching is not a Catholic conscience."

Quinn has been at odds with the bishops since supporting a civil union law last year and since the state ended contracts with Catholic Charities in Illinois dioceses because the organizations refused to place foster and adoptive children in the homes of gay couples.

The meeting between Quinn and the bishops was triggered by Quinn's presence at a pro-abortion organization event in mid-November. He was there to present an award to a rape victim who has become a leader in helping countless other victims of rape overcome the trauma and remake their lives.

Apparently unaware of the reason for the award, George, on behalf of the Catholic Conference of Illinois, lashed out at Quinn for "supporting the legal right to kill children in their mothers' wombs."

Subsequently, he apologized to the awardee, adding that his statement was "not about her, it is about Gov. Quinn, who on one hand identifies himself as a member of the Catholic church and on the other hand is identifying himself strongly with a group that supports the killing of unborn children in their mothers' wombs."

This insistence that a Catholic cannot deviate from mainline teaching has been a hallmark of George's thought for years. In his book, *The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion, and Culture*, he urged the faithful to be "simply Catholic," following the rules and interpretations of the hierarchy without quibbling.

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