

## Advice for the laity from a new cardinal

Joe Ferullo | Mar. 5, 2012 NCR Today

The controversy on contraception has entered a new, ever more absurd phase where it seems some major actors in the drama are trying to one-up each other with outrageous or inaccurate statements.

By now, many have heard about conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh's distasteful comments regarding a female Georgetown law student who advocates contraceptive health insurance coverage. Leading advertisers on his program -- who, one must imagine, are no strangers to the Limbaugh brand -- began to yank commercials off his air at a pace so rapid Rush [was actually compelled to apologize](#) [1].

Some Republicans brushed off his irrational comments as the exaggerations of an "entertainer." OK, sure. But what, then, is one supposed to make of comments by the very-much-not-an-entertainer archbishop of New York, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops?

According to [The New York Times](#) [2], Dolan addressed a gathering of diocesan public policy specialists in New York and spoke about the contraception issue in a tone that sounded like an homage to a certain overwrought radio personality: "Now we hear there is a right to sterilization, abortion and chemical contraceptives. I suppose there might be a doctor who would say to a man who's suffering some type of sexual dysfunction, 'You ought to visit a prostitute to help you.'"

Dolan did go on to urge Catholic laity to "be more active" in the contraception issue, but before you organize a sit-in at the Archdiocese office -- that's not what he meant. At all. The *Times* reported:

Cardinal Dolan said that the prelates, though, might not be the church's most persuasive advocates. He told a story about bishops hiring an "attractive, articulate, intelligent" laywoman to speak against abortion and said it was "the best thing we ever did," adding, "In the public square, I hate to tell you, the days of fat, balding Irish bishops are over." Instead he emphasized the role of the laity. While priests and bishops "stick to principles," he said, "we leave a lot of the messiness of politics up to you."

The person-in-the-pew is best used as a fun frontman (or woman), to help put an attractive face on a controversial issue, Dolan asserts. But, all right, he's just being a smart media manager -- a real requirement for any New York archbishop. That doesn't preclude the laity from also expressing a deeper voice on such issues. Right?

Dolan [in a recent blog](#) [3] noted that the Obama administration had urged bishops to listen to "the enlightened voices of accommodation" within the church, including -- I'm guessing -- the 85 percent or more of sexually active Catholics who use contraception. Then, at a news conference following his weekend address, Dolan said: "We kind of got our Irish up when leaders in government seemed to be assigning an authoritative voice to Catholic groups that are not the bishops."

He added: "If you want an authoritative voice, go to the bishops. They're the ones that speak for the truths of the faith."

Just to review quickly, then -- a guide for all of us in the pews: smile, wave, look attractive, sell the message, then sit down and quiet down.

Gives you a warm feeling all over, doesn't it?

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[1] <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Elections/Vox-News/2012/0304/Does-Rush-Limbaugh-s-apology-put-his-slut-comment-behind-him-Not-likely>

[2] <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/04/nyregion/cardinal-timothy-m-dolan-urges-catholics-to-become-more-politically-active.html>

[3] <http://blog.archny.org/?p=2291>