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DNC Prayer: Day 3

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As Obama's acceptance speech ended last night, I found myself a little nervous as I waited for Cardinal Timothy Dolan to take the stage for the closing benediction. I was worried about what he might say and how it would be interpreted by the media and by non-Catholics. And I was a little worried about how some at the convention might treat Dolan, who has become something of a political lightning-rod.

In the end, there was little to be worried about. Democrats treated Dolan the same way they did the other religious leaders—which is to say that many of them left, while those who stayed listened respectfully and/or prayed along.

Although he had said his appearance was not political, it's not surprising that Dolan alluded to issues where he disagrees with the Democratic platform: abortion, same-sex marriage and whether or not requiring church-related employers to include contraception in their coverage is a "religious liberty" issue.

"We praise you for the gift of life," Dolan prayed. "Grant us the courage to defend it, life, without which no other rights are secure. We ask your benediction on those waiting to be born, that they may be welcomed and protected."

He also thanked God for the gifts of freedom and liberty. "Renew in all our people a profound respect for religious liberty: the first, most cherished freedom bequeathed upon us at our founding."

And in an apparent reference to same-sex marriage: "Show us anew that happiness is found only in respecting the laws of nature and nature's God. Empower us with your grace so that we might resist the temptation to replace the moral law with idols of our own making, or to remake those institutions you have given us for the nurturing of life and community."

Some have criticized the networks for not covering Dolan's prayer, seeing a conspiracy because of his opposition to Democratic policies. Yet those same networks did not cover the other two closing benedictions either. Only CSPAN did not cut away. Full video of Dolan's prayer is here.

Dolan's prayer did not differ much from the one he gave a week earlier at the Republican National Convention. It was somewhat different from the other two closing benedictions at the DNC, both of which emphasized the importance of unity and coming together.

Conservative Catholics, not surprisingly, are praising Dolan for the courage to pray his values to a group that may not share all of them. Few of those conservatives, however, are praising the Democrats for allowing him to do so.

Some have accused the Democrats of initially refusing to allow Dolan to appear at the convention. That's not true, though they did wait a few days to accept Dolan's offer to speak. Curiously, it is unlikely that any of the others who prayed at the DNC "offered" their services; I would assume they were invited.

The Republican National Convention also featured a pastor who has disagreed with a portion of the party's platform. The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, who opposes the Republican Party's stance on immigration and the DREAM Act, gave the closing benediction on the first night of the RNC. He did not, however, reference immigration in his prayer.

Although the Republicans hosted the first Sikh to pray at a national political convention, neither party invited a Muslim to offer the opening or closing benediction or to give any official speech at the conventions.

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