

# AL SMITH DINNER SPARKS DEBATE

When the Al Smith Foundation announced that both President Barack Obama and Gov. Mitt Romney would attend its annual dinner, a large debate ignited.

It is customary, though not compulsory, for the New York Archbishop to invite the presidential candidates from the two major political parties to the annual Al Smith Dinner in New York City. Some were not happy with these choices, especially the decision to invite President Obama. Cardinal Timothy Dolan has not been shy about his criticisms of the Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate, yet he decided to rise above the politics of the moment and allow the presidential candidates to partake in this charitable event.

On the August 9 edition of "Lou Dobbs Tonight," Bill Donohue vigorously defended Dolan's decision. He had talked with him earlier that day and found that the cardinal wasn't budging in his conviction that the HHS mandate must be fought with every tool we have. Dolan's unflinching resolve was the bottom line for Donohue. This was not the case for others.

If Catholics want to change the culture, they need to engage it. This means that we invite political figures to Midnight Mass at Christmas, regardless of their religion or politics; it means we break bread with our adversaries at commemorative events; it means we fraternize with those with whom we disagree with at city, state and federal functions. Doing so does not mean that we are selling out.

Acting diplomatically may at times make for a hard swallow. But following protocol is not analogous to prostituting one's principles. As anyone who read Cardinal Dolan's statement about the dinner knows, he is not caving in; indeed he is incapable of doing so.

Finally, though Donohue was not going to the Al Smith Dinner

(he has never been to the event), his defense of the New York Archbishop led to a barrage of vile comments directed at him. "So be it," he said, "But Cardinal Dolan deserves better."