

AL SMITH DINNER SPARKS DEBATE



Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the debate over this year's Al Smith Dinner:

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. This year both candidates will be there. Some are 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" (Fox Business Channel), I vigorously defended Cardinal Dolan's decision. I talked with him earlier that day about this issue and found, unsurprisingly, that the New York Archbishop wasn't budging in his conviction that the HHS mandate must be fought with every tool we have. His resolve is unflinching. For me, that was the bottom line. But not for others.

If Catholics want to change the culture, they need to engage it. Practically speaking, this means that we invite local 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. It 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 from yesterday knows, he is not caving in; indeed he is incapable of doing so.

Finally, though I am not going to the dinner (I have never been to any of these dinners), my defense of the New York Archbishop has led to a barrage of vile comments directed at me. So be it. But Cardinal Dolan deserves better.