

# BISHOP TOBIN PUTS A KENNEDY IN HIS PLACE

Congressman Patrick Kennedy of Rhode Island started it, and Providence Bishop Thomas Tobin finished it. The loser was clearly Kennedy.

The late Senator Ted Kennedy was, like his son, an ardent champion of abortion rights, never having found one he couldn't justify. But he never sought a direct confrontation, either. Patrick did. In an interview he gave in October, Rep. Patrick Kennedy said, "I can't understand for the life of me how the Catholic Church could be against the biggest social justice issue of our time." He further charged that the Church—not him—was fanning "flames of dissent and discord."

Kennedy made these remarks at this time because he wanted to derail attempts by Catholic bishops to successfully promote an amendment to the health care bill that banned federal funding of abortion. He failed. The Stupak amendment passed in the House, though the Senate version did not adopt the kind of language contained in this amendment. No matter, Kennedy's remarks were so incendiary that Bishop Tobin rightfully felt pressured to respond.

Bishop Tobin did not allow Kennedy to hijack the Catholic mantle. He pointedly accused the congressman of "false advertising." Indeed, he said, "If you freely choose to be a Catholic, it means you believe certain things, you do certain things. If you cannot do all that in conscience, then you should perhaps feel free to go somewhere else." Exactly. Like join any of the pro-abortion mainline Protestant denominations: they would love to have Kennedy as everyone else is running out their doors.

Kennedy then played the "Communion Card." Back in November

2006, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement saying that Catholics who consistently and obstinately oppose Church teachings on issues like abortion should refrain from going to Communion. Three months later, in February 2007, Bishop Tobin wrote to Kennedy advising him not to go to Communion.

This letter, which was private (it was not shared with other priests), and which never formally banned Kennedy from going to Communion, was seized upon by Kennedy in November 2009 to score political points against Tobin. It was Kennedy, not Tobin, who aired this private matter in public, forcing the bishop to go public with his remarks.

The media, of course, had a field day with this issue. While most were predictably sympathetic to Kennedy, most were also respectful of Tobin. There was one glaring exception: Chris Matthews of MSNBC.

On November 24, Bill Donohue issued the following press release:

"We were deluged with phone calls, faxes and e-mails after what happened yesterday on 'Hardball.' After watching the first portion of the interview between Chris Matthews and Bishop Tobin, I wondered what all the fuss was all about: Chris was just being his usual aggressive self. But it didn't take long before Matthews literally spun out of control.