



Written by [James Heiser](#) on October 4, 2011

Bishops Form Council to Uphold Marriage

Facing criticism from a prominent leader of the Roman Catholic Church because of the President's unwillingness to uphold federal laws defending traditional marriage, the Obama administration appears bent on supporting same-sex unions — while simply ignoring both law and public opinion.

As [reported for *The New American* on September 30](#), New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan took issue with President Obama's unwillingness to uphold the 1996 "Defense of Marriage Act," which was signed into law by President Clinton. Dolan's September 26 talk — "The Ring Makes a Difference" — denounced Obama's effort to "redefine" marriage through his support of "same-sex" unions, declaring Obama's policy to be an "ominous threat to religious liberty." As the *Poughkeepsie Journal* [noted](#) after Dolan's speech:



Dolan said the defense of marriage was not simply a religious issue, but an American issue. He defined marriage as a "natural law" created by God for the purpose of procreating children.

"Anything that tampers with this natural law places the human race in peril," he said, addressing a crowd of about 800 people. ...

Dolan framed criticism aimed at the Catholic Church and opponents of same-sex marriage as an "ominous threat to religious liberty," warning of what he called "aggressive secularism."

He said, "America needs and depends upon a vigorous free exercise of religion."

However, the Obama administration's approach to the "vigorous free exercise of religion" has been marked by an insidious shift in terminology, choosing to speak of "[freedom of worship](#)" instead of "freedom of religion." Defending only "freedom of worship" would express a limitation of such freedom strictly to the confines of worship services and private devotion; "freedom of religion" is a vastly more expansive concept, recognizing that what the adherents of a religion believe has implications for every aspect of their lives.

While Archbishop Dolan spoke about the dangers posed by President Obama's decision to abandon a defense of the Defense of Marriage Act, the administration appears to be meeting such criticism with stonewalling and obfuscation. [According to an article from CNSNews](#), Obama's Press Secretary attempted to avoid giving a substantive answer to CNSNews' inquiries regarding the President's reaction to the archbishop's criticism:

At the White House on Monday, CNSNews.com asked Press Secretary Jay Carney: "Archbishop Timothy Dolan, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, recently wrote a letter,



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Sept. 20, to the president in which he said that for the administration and the Justice Department to equate support for DOMA with unconstitutional discrimination would — quoting from the letter — ‘precipitate a national conflict between church and state.’ Does the president support fully the DOJ and HHS policies that some Catholic leaders take issues with?”

Without addressing the letter from Dolan directly, Carney repeated the president’s support for not defending DOMA, which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1996. Carney said that Obama “supports the policies of his administration. He supports the position we’ve taken on not defending DOMA. So I’m not sure what positions —.”

While the President’s Press Secretary hems and haws in his defense of Obama’s unwillingness to uphold the law, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is organizing to confront the administration. As David Gibson wrote in an article ([“Catholic bishops up the ante in fight with Obama”](#)) for *Christian Century*:

U.S. Catholic bishops, concerned about Obama administration policies on birth control and gay rights that they say see as an unprecedented "assault" on the rights of faith groups, have established a watchdog panel to combat threats to "religious freedom."

The new Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty was launched by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and unveiled by the USCCB’s president, Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, on Friday (Sept. 30).

The establishment of a committee — which signals a top priority for the hierarchy — represents another escalation in the Catholic bishops’ increasingly tense and public battle with President Obama as the 2012 presidential campaign season gets underway.

Citing the famous preamble to the Declaration of Independence, Dolan wrote that the rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are now "increasingly and in unprecedented ways under assault in America" because of administration policies.

Bishop William Lori of Bridgeport, Conn. [photo above], will chair the new committee, which will include two full-time staffers, a lawyer with expertise in religious freedom, and a lobbyist "who will handle both religious liberty and marriage issues," the USCCB said.

Lori, who like Dolan lost a bid to stop legalized gay marriage in his state, said the committee aims to protect "the rights of believers of any religious persuasion or none."

However, contrary to Gibson’s assertion that the action undertaken by the bishops constitutes an “escalation,” the fact is that the Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty is an attempt to respond to President Obama’s ongoing assault on traditional marriage. Although Gibson seeks to frame the committee in terms of the upcoming presidential election year, the crises which Barack Obama has initiated on numerous fronts — including the faith and morals of American Christians of many denominations — is responsible for an inevitable reaction by Roman Catholic bishops and other religious leaders who are appalled that the elected leader of these United States has so far departed from his oath of office that he has declared himself unwilling to uphold a law which even one of his most liberal predecessors signed and upheld.

As the implications of Obama’s reduction of “freedom of religion” to mere “freedom of worship” become more readily apparent, it can only be hoped that Americans will not remain impassive in the face of a further erosion of their fundamental liberties.

Photo: Bishop William Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., who is also the Supreme Chaplain of the Knights of Columbus, will chair the new committee.



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