

## In Defense of Boehner

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 2, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

I rise to defend John Boehner, the leader of the Republican minority in U.S. House of Representatives. Not for his ridiculous comment about the financial reform legislation being akin to using a nuclear weapon on an ant. That was stupid. And not for his defensive and petty attacks on President Obama. And, not for his politics of obstruction. I rise to defend him against the charge that he does not work hard enough and has been known to frequent bars.

Cong. Barney Frank, who is the smartest and one of the hardest working members of Congress, declined to comment on Boehner's work habits, but he did suggest that Boehner did not know what he is talking about regarding the financial reforms. Fair enough. But, to be a good leader of one's party in the House, it is emotional intelligence that matters most. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has not been as successful as she has been because of her intellectual wattage, but because she listens, she takes the time to learn about the needs of her caucus, and she can get everyone, or enough of everyone, on board to pass legislation. Whether she herself understands the legislation is a different question.

I think there is nothing wrong with a person who, around about 5 p.m., thinks that it is time to be finished with work and look for a cocktail. Cardinal Baum would famously leave his office in Washington around 2 p.m., saying to the staff, "If I stay any longer I shall do harm."

But, the attacks on Boehner for cocktailing while his colleagues labor over legislation is about more than different habits of work and play. It gets to the heart of what it means to be a representative of the people. I recall a quote of Chesterton about the British Parliament: "There is one really good defense of the House of Lords, though admirers of the peerage are strangely coy about using it; and that is, that the House of Lords, in its full and proper strength, consists of stupid men. It really would be a plausible defense of that otherwise indefensible body to point out that the clever men in the Commons, who owed their power to cleverness, ought in the last resort to be checked by the average men in the Lords, who owed their power to accident." No, Boehner's post is not hereditary, but there is something in the idea that his ordinariness should not be held against him.

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