NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Are Latinos \"Liberal\" on Gay Marriage?

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 26, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Over at the Washington Post?s ?On Faith? column, they have an article [1]entitled ?U.S. Catholic Latinos: liberal on gay marriage?? by Joseph M. Palacios. I am guessing that Professor Palacios did not write that headline because it is exceedingly misleading and gets to one of the perennial problems of nomenclature in press coverage of religion.

Palacios notes that Latino Catholics in California are significantly more likely to support gay marriage than Latino Protestants according to a new survey. 57 percent of Catholic Latinos are inclined to support gay marriage as opposed to only 22 percent of Protestant Latinos. But, the reasons he cites have nothing to do with liberalism. Palacios notes that Catholics place a heavy emphasis on the family, both as a cohesive social unit and, more importantly, as the bearer of religious tradition and teachings. He notes that Catholic familial and social norms are more tolerant ? it is hard to hate someone you have breakfast with ? and that the communitarian ethic of Catholicism leads to a greater concern with justice than is common among Latino Protestants who tend to focus on issues of personal morality. All of this is true. None of it has anything to do with being liberal.

One of my difficulties with the pro-gay marriage movement is that it views marriage through the lens of individual rights. I recall working on a campaign during which a gay marriage advocate spoke to a group of prominent Democratic Party activists. She said, ?What is marriage? Marriage is 642 [I don?t recall the actual number] provisions of the federal code that confer benefits.? I turned to the person sitting next to me and observed, ?That?s funny. I thought marriage was the old ball and chain.? The point is that the best argument for gay marriage is not one rooted in the legal language of rights but in the lived experiences of gay men and women who do not experience homosexuality the way, for example, the Jewish and early Christian writers of the Bible experienced it. They do not see homosexuality as an aberrant choice made by a straight person. They experience it as constitutional, as a part of their personhood. I wonder how different the debate would be if we all viewed the gay marriage issue through that lens, rather than through the rights-based language of civil law.

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[1] http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/guestvoices/2010/07/us_catholic_latinos_liberal_on_gay_marriage.html