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On Credulity

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 5, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Credulity has become an issue in America?s political life.

One of the great things about coming home to Connecticut is that in a really small town ? population about 1600 ? you encounter all types relatively easily. The neighborhood self-selection that goes on in urban and suburban areas, the self-selection that guarantees you will only encounter people of similar socio-economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds when you make a walk, that has not come to northeastern Connecticut. Here you meet uber-liberals and uber-conservatives at the General Store, the only commercial enterprise on our Main Street.

One of the women I have gotten to know in the past few years is a great aficionado of Fox News. She is eighty-one years old. She believes and repeats whatever she hears on the faux-news network. She refers to the President of the United States as ?the communist negro.? She, like Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann and TV host Glenn Beck, believes that the U.S. government has dispatched a tenth of our naval forces to India to accompany the President and that the trip will cost $200 million per day. She believed the bit about ?death panels? in the health care reform. She believes her taxes have gone up and her Medicare has gone down, although she can point to no piece of evidence proving either fact.

Yesterday, this woman believed something different. She called my father, who was away from the house, to tell him that if she sent $2,500 by Western Union to a certain bank account, they had guaranteed ? guaranteed! ? that they would secure her $250 million prize that she had won. The $2,500 was a transfer fee, or some such. She was very excited, of course. When my Dad got home, he called this woman to try and explain to her that she was being scammed, that the call had not come from the ?Bank of America? as the caller had indicated, that there was no $250 million payoff awaiting her. To help this woman understand that she was being scammed, my dad took down the number she had been given to call when she had transferred the money, and asked them for their names and a mailing address. He then called the Attorney General?s office. He called the Bank of America which was well aware of this particular scam. He called the woman?s daughter to tell her to see if there might not be a way to tip off her mother?s bank about the situation and have them prevent any sudden withdrawal of funds. This woman accused my Dad of being jealous of her, because she had won such a large amount of money. He was trying to prevent her happiness. He was evil.

The attitude is the same, and in its way, so is the scam. Some people are immune to evidence. It is difficult to think of ways to break a partisan impasse when, against all facts, people are determined to believe only what they wish to believe. Whoever said ignorance is bliss must have invested in Fox News.

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