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

Sarah Palin Comments on Tucson

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 12, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

Sarah Palin?s video statement on the shootings in Tuscon, and the response to that tragedy, demonstrates why people love her and why others hate her. If you are a fan, it is pithy. If you are not a fan it is simplistic. It is vintage Palin.

"Sarah Palin:? America?s Enduring Strength" [1] from Sarah Palin [2] on Vimeo [3].

What most surprised about Palin?s comments was the way she harkened back to the kind of tough, law-and-order, language denying any relationship between societal conditions and criminal acts. ?Acts of monstrous criminality stand on their own. They begin and end with the criminals who commit them,? Palin said. This comes right out of the Nixon playbook, no? (Although she quotes Reagan on the issue.) Of course, it is not exactly true and was mostly used by Nixon and Reagan to appeal to white, working class voters, mostly southerners, who would understand that by ?law-breaker,? they meant black guys from the ghetto just as when Reagan denounced ?welfare queens,? he was not addressing a real political problem, he was merely stoking racial hatred for electoral gain. But, no matter what Reagan believed or Nixon cynically signed on to, there are clear correlations between soci-economic conditions and crime rates. There are, sometimes, conspiracies. Sometimes criminal acts stand on their own and sometimes they do not.

It is curious that Palin calls the attacks on her and other conservatives a ?blood libel.? For starters, ?blood libel? is one of the ugliest stains on Western culture, not least because of its power to endure. It is the specific belief that Jews kill Christian children and drink their blood as part of their religious rituals and it is always intertwined with the belief that the Jews killed Jesus and that His blood is on them and their children. Of course, this blood libel, too, was demonstrably false, but that did not keep people from believing it. Certainly, Christian anti-Semitism through the centuries at least plowed the field for the exterminationist anti-Semitism that came from non-Christian Nazis. There were pogroms before there was Hitler, which is not to say that pogroms caused Hitler. To deny any linkage is ridiculous. In fact, what makes Palin?s invocation of this analogy so strange is twofold: First, no evil really compares to the evil of anti-Semitism in Western culture, and, second, why point to precisely the kind of cultural influence that you now deny for your metaphor. The phrase has a powerful ring to it, but Palin needs a historian to vet her speechwriters products.

Palin, of course, takes liberties as well with her own very recent history. Now, she states, ?We will come out of this stronger and more united in our desire to peacefully engage in the great debates of our time, to respectfully embrace our differences in a positive manner, and to unite in the knowledge that, though our ideas may be different, we must all strive for a better future for our country.? But, it was just last week that she appeared on the Laura Ingraham show and leveled the charge that President Obama was intentionally weakening America. Which is it Ms. Palin?

This video shows why Palin is both the leading candidate for the GOP nod in 2012 and why she is simultaneously so vulnerable. On the one hand, if Mitt Romney or Tim Pawlenty released a similar video, would anyone watch? In a few brief minutes, she touches all the core tenets of contemporary conservatism. American exceptionalism? Check. Law-abiding gun owners? Check. Hyper-individualism? Check. &c. But, Palin?s vulnerability comes through as well in the mere fact of this video. Why do it? A smart political consultant would have said: Let Limbaugh become the focus on this thing. He must talk about it because he has a contract to talk. She could have layed low and issued anodyne statements about the tragedy. Instead, she issued a statement that reassures her base but keeps her face attached to a tragedy in a way that is not likely to

appeal to swing voters in the middle who tell pollsters time and time again that the thing that hate most about politics is the vitriol. Palin wanted to stay as far away from this thing as possible but has now guaranteed that every hour on the hour, clips of her message will be played on the television and radio.
Later tonight, after President Obama speaks at a memorial service for the victims, networks will start comparing his words with Palin?s. But, the pictures of the President will show him embracing the victims? families, visiting Congresswoman Giffords in the hospital, shaking hands with the clergy. It is the President who will speak of binding the nation?s wounds and demonstrate it by binding the families? wounds. That is the image to which Palin?s will be contrasted. And that is not a good place for the sage of Wasilla to be.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/22/2014 - 22:33*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/sarah-palin-comments-tucson

Links:
[1] http://vimeo.com/18698532
[2] http://vimeo.com/user5713437
[3] http://vimeo.com