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Hudson Attacks John Allen & Chris Matthews

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 10, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

Deal Hudson, the force behind InsideCatholic.com, has attacked my colleague and friend John Allen [1] for his use of the term "Taliban Catholics" to describe certain conservative Catholics. And, he also attacks Chris Matthews, whom I also consider a friend, for drawing an analogy between the Tea Party and the Muslim Brotherhood. Both Allen and Matthews are employing strong terms to be sure, but a bit of history would help Hudson understand better why the designations fit.

The Taliban is hardly the source of a "worldwide terrorist network." That would be Al-Qaeda, and while they were in bed with the Taliban to be sure, that bed had recently been crowded with a different paramour: The CIA. Hudson may recall that once upon a time the Taliban were known as the mujahideen, when they were fighting the Soviet Union with ample, if covert, support from Uncle Sam. Indeed, Uncle Sam is back in bed with at least some of the Taliban in Afghanistan today, trying to separate those conservative, locally focused groups who might bring stability to that war-torn country from their jihadist brethren whose violence is for export.

Ditto for Matthews' comparison of the Tea Party with Muslim Brotherhood. Matthews is not suggesting that the two groups align in all particulars, which they obviously do not. But, it should be clear to Hudson that just because some of the foundational writings of the Muslim Brotherhood are extreme, not everyone within the Muslim Brotherhood is similarly extreme, nor extreme in all circumstances. I am sure there are some quotes from Thomas Jefferson that would make Hudson squirm - and me too. But, that does not mean he should be ripped from the pantheon of the Americans Founders.

Still, it is a fair question whether the analogies ring true. It is always difficult to compare cultures. To be anti-female in America is different from being anti-female in Afghanistan. Even Afghani liberals might be shocked at some of the achievements of the women's rights' movement here in the States. But, a dismissive attitude towards women is a shared characteristic of both conservative Catholics and the Taliban. So is a concern for orthodoxy. Now, mind you, I am concerned for orthodoxy too, my liberalism causes me to shrink from the idea of using the government to enforce it. Those unconcerned with liberalism's tenets, be they in Kabul or in Kentucky, share something that is worthy of note and of comparison.

The phrase "Taliban Catholics" is useful not because it is inflammatory and not because it is precise but because it intstantly identifies of highly identifiable cast of mind. It is like the phrase "working families" adopted by Democratic candidates in the late 1990s. I hate the phrase. Families love, they don't work, but you know immediately who is referenced by that phrase, even if the phrase itself is clunky.

My advice to Hudson is not to deride Allen for using the phrase but to think, and think deeply, about why it resonates so.

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[1] http://www.insidecatholic.com/feature/chris-matthews-john-allen-and-odious-comparisons.html