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

WeinerGate

Michael Sean Winters | Jun. 7, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

I have tried to avoid writing about whether or not those boxers in the famous tweeted photo belonged to Congressman Anthony Weiner. Somehow, I had it in my mind that there were more important issues for the nation to face. With his stunning news conference yesterday, however, Congressman Weiner changed the stakes. This is no longer about boxers. It is about deceit.

America?s puritanical heritage is not something of which we should be very proud, and this for a variety of reasons. First, as noted, just because an issue is salacious does not mean it is important. Second, a fixation on sins of the flesh can lead us to be indiscriminate in our evaluations of different sins of the flesh. For example, earlier this year, the revelations about Arnold Schwarzenegger?s out-of-wedlock child coincided with the charges of rape against then-IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn. But, there is a difference, and a big difference, between having a love child and rape, and too many commentators simply lumped the two stories together because both involved men behaving badly. True, both behaved badly, but one also behaved criminally and, if the charges are true, should go to jail. For American Catholics, the Jansenism of the Irish-American Catholic Church, along with a desire to join the mainstream culture, has disposed some of us to be more puritanical than the Puritans!

So, when the news broke that a ?crotch shot in boxers? had been sent to a teenage girl on Cong. Weiner?s twitter feed, I was determined to buck to media frenzy. His wife may care. The teenage girl may care. Anderson Cooper surely cares. But, why should the rest of us care? With the economy anemic, significant decisions about the future of the war in Afghanistan looming, and the nation engaged with a profound debate about the future of the social contract, surely it doesn?t much matter what anyone did on their twitter account, does it?

Weiner may be a lout. Franklin Roosevelt cheated on Eleanor, but that detracts not one iota from his leadership of the nation, only from our estimation of the man, and who amongst us is without sin? Conversely, for all I know, Joseph Goebbels was good to his pets. A man?s private failings concern himself and his family, not the rest of us.

Of course, in the time it took to find the television clicker and change channels, it was impossible to avoid learning that Cong. Weiner alleged he was the target of dirty tricks, that maybe his twitter account had been hacked, and that he was not sure if the ?crotch shot? photo was of him or not. This last struck me as especially odd: Wouldn?t you remember taking a photograph of yourself in your underwear? So, even while I was trying to avoid the story and flipping to the History Channel or the NBA Finals, I could not avoid the story. Nor did it seem implausible that Andrew Breitbart, who broke the story, might be up to dirty tricks. This was the man who edited video of a speech by USDA official Shirley Sherrod in such a way as to completely reverse the meaning of her speech. Breitbart is shameless and Weiner was denying the heart of the story, that he had sent the picture to the teenage girl.

Yesterday, the story changed. Weiner admitted he had lied all along, that he had sent the photo, and indeed had engaged in other inappropriate electronic flirting. It is bizarre that he should do so. He has a beautiful wife and a beautiful life. Why risk it all for?.for what? Electronic titillation? And, Anthony Weiner has been around

politics long enough to know that the truth will always come out. Here we see questions about his judgment and veracity that are explicitly public, not merely private. He lied on camera, repeatedly, to anyone who would listen. How, then, are we to estimate the worth of his oath to uphold the Constitution? How are we to assess the value of his public commitments?

Congressman Weiner is still in denial. Otherwise he would have resigned yesterday. Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi was praised for calling for an Ethics investigation, but she should have demanded his resignation. Earlier this year, when Cong. Christopher Lee was caught exchanging suggestive photos with someone other than his wife, Speaker Boehner told him to resign within 24 hours. The nation?s public business cannot tolerate these kinds of distractions. And Weiner, like Lee, has no one to blame but himself. He should go. He should go now.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/04/2015 - 21:04*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/weinergate