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

No, I'm Not Becoming a Republican

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 24, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

The response to my article announcing that I could not vote for President Obama again, in light of his decision to keep an exceedingly narrow conscience exemption to the HHS mandates, has certainly garnered a great deal of attention. I thank everyone who has commented.

But, one of the more frequent comments seems to me misplaced, namely, those that suggest I shall now be a Republican.

Indeed, the issue came up at a dinner party I hosted that same evening. Perhaps I was not clear enough in my article, or perhaps a dinner party conversation is more likely to produce pithiness, but when asked by my friends if I was about to join the GOP, I replied, ?I said I had lost my respect for the President, not my mind, nor my moral compass.?

Last night?s debate confirmed for me, if there was any doubt, that I could no more find a political home within the ranks of today?s Republican Party than I could vote for a President who has just exhibited such disregard for religious liberty.

The debate was actually pretty boring, which I attribute to the fact that Brian Williams is simply so even-tempered, the candidates found it next to impossible to get all worked up in his presence. Williams is like a Buddha statue, or one of those little bedside fountains that provide a sleeper with the soothing sounds of falling water. But, whatever the reason, Mitt Romney lost an opportunity to really take on and take down his chief rival now, Newt Gingrich, and there may not be many such chances again.

The scariest part of the debate came when the subject turned to Iran. I have no illusions about the regime in Teheran. It is evil, to be sure. But, no one on the stage had the courage to say that America?s options for influencing that regime are few, and that the idea of embarking on a third war in that part of the world is beyond distasteful to the American people. Of course, whatever public opinion demands, the role of a statesman is to pursue the nation?s interest, even adopting an unpopular course if necessary. That is why we speak the name of Stanley Baldwin with derision. But, to listen to Rick Santorum tell it, stopping Iran?s attempt to acquire a nuclear weapon will be a cakewalk. If we have learned anything from our involvement with Iran?s neighbor to the south, Iraq, it is that the law of unintended consequences often rules supreme in foreign affairs.

The GOP mantra that Obama has been weak in dealing with Iran is also misplaced. When the people of Iran took to the streets to protest the regime two years ago, the Obama administration decided that voicing public support for the protesters might actually backfire, allowing the regime to paint these Iranian patriots as stooges for America, aka ?the great Satan? in Iranian mullah parlance. (Certainly, Fidel Castro has dined out for fifty years by blaming America for the ills his regime has inflicted on his people. More on Castro in a bit.) You may think the administration was wrong not to voice support for the protesters, or you may think he was right, but it had nothing to do with being weak.

This being Florida, America?s relationship to Fidel was bound to come up and, again, all the candidates except

Ron Paul clung to the demonstrably failed policy of isolating Cuba. It has never made sense to me that Republicans advocated for ?constructive engagement? with China but opposed it with Cuba, except and only insofar as the latter policy would cost them votes in Miami. It is time to end the embargo of Cuba and flood that island with ideas and investment.

The Republicans? tenacious commitment to the idolatry of the market was on full display. It is funny. The other night, I had to do a segment for Current TV?s ?Young Turks? show: I was asked about the effect of evangelical endorsements of Santorum?s candidacy. Just before they got to me, the panel discussed whether or not politicians were bought. They decried the way politicians rely on the contributions of special interests to fund their campaigns and then govern with a view towards securing high-paying jobs on K Street after they leave office. No one applauds graft, to be sure, but I felt at the time a certain nostalgia for the days when the Republicans favored lower taxes because they were rich and pursuing their own interests, the days when the Republican Party was the party of the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers. Today?s GOP embraces laissez-faire, lower-tax policies as a matter of orthodoxy, and the party is more identified with the high priests at the Club for Growth than with the Chamber of Commerce. You can bargain with someone who is only in it for the money. You can?t cut a deal with Grover Norquist. It takes a lot for a pro-labor guy like me to miss the days when NAM ruled the Republican roost. Gingrich recalled that he worked with Jack kemp and Arthur Laffer to devise supply-side economics, and he also noted that the Republican establishment at the time characterized their invention as ?voodoo economics.? It was voodoo then and it is voodoo now.

In the issue of immigration, the Republicans continued to mouth their hateful, impossible, stance, failing to recognize the complicity of American companies and the American government in bringing undocumented workers across the border in the first place, and calling for mass deportations or, as Mr. Romney put it, ?self-deportation,? whatever that means.

I do not believe in one-issue politics, but I do believe that a candidate can take a stand on one issue that makes it impossible to vote for them. For me, the HHS decision was one such issue for Obama. For the Republicans, I have half a dozen reasons I could never vote for them in good conscience. I should add that in 1996 I was unable to vote for Mr. Clinton?s re-election either, after he did nothing during the siege of Bihac and vetoed the partial-birth abortion bill.

So, no, I can?t see myself voting for a Republican candidate anytime soon. Their party seems completely unalert to the vision of Catholic social teaching and such core concepts as the common good and solidarity. Their stances on particular issues like Iran are frightening. Their reading of history is tendentious. Their worship at the temple of the Austrian economists too thorough-going. Obama may no longer be my candidate, but the GOP is not my party either.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/03/2015 - 07:53*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/no-im-not-becoming-republican