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

Why Romney's \"Joke\" Was Vile, Not Funny

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 27, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

Mitt Romney made a joke the other day, telling a Michigan audience that "No one ever asked to see my birth certificate." Setting aside whether the most scripted man in political memory is capable of an impromptu bit of humor, a range of GOP surrogates took to the airwaves yesterday to say that they thought it was a shame that no one can even tell a joke anymore.

I agree. I detest the culture of political correctness that takes umbrage too quickly. And, I wish with all my heart that Romney's comment could be interpreted merely as a joke, as a source of mirth. It could be so interpreted if birtherism was really a fringe idea held only by the fringe. But this is one fringe idea that, according to a poll last year, 51% of GOP primary voters believed. As in, a majority. In that context, Romney's joke was not funny, it was vile.

The contrast with the 2008 nominee could not be clearer. We all recall the moment towards the end of the campaign when a woman at a GOP rally said she did not trust then-candidate Obama because he was "an Arab." Sen. John McCain took the microphone from the woman and corrected her. He said that his opponent was a fine American, a family man, but that they happened to disagree on the issues. It was a proud moment for Mr. McCain. He stood up to the ugly side of American populism and refused to give it any currency. Mr. Romney, to be sure, has said that he believes President Obama was, in fact, born in this country, is a citizen, and that such questions are a diversion. But, they are more than a diversion. They are the sign of that ugliness that McCain confronted and Romney has not. Indeed, you can Google dozens of images of Romney embracing the Birther-in-Chief, Donald Trump, and at none of their joint appearances has Romney uttered a peep about Trump's crazy fascination with the President's birth certificate.

I do not think of Mr. Romney as a particularly bad person. I think he has the limits of his class on full display at all times, but most people do. But, this was slimy. Very slimy. The next time someone tells me what a good person Romney is, I will be more suspicious than I was before his so-called joke.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/01/2014 - 19:53*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/why-romneys-joke-was-vile-not-funny