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

Immigration & The Tsarnaev Brothers

Michael Sean Winters | Apr. 22, 2013 Distinctly Catholic

Last week, after the authorities in Boston released the photos of the two suspects in the Marathon bombing case, a black friend of mine stopped by. ?Thank God they are Caucasian,? he said. If you are in America and you are black, an instance of violence triggers the fear that the still-current prejudice against you and your race might get a fresh jolt of ugly enthusiasm if the perpetrator of the violence is black.

As it turned out, the two suspects were not only Caucasian in the racial sense, they were from the Caucasus. And they were Muslim. So, while my black friend was breathing easier over the weekend, Muslims in America had reason to be nervous.

In his homily at Mass yesterday at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Boston?s Cardinal Sean O?Malley said, ?Jesus teaches us in the Gospel that we must care for each other, especially the most vulnerable; the hungry, the sick, the homeless, the foreigner; all have a special claim on our love. We must be a people of reconciliation, not revenge. The crimes of the two young men must not be the justification for prejudice against Muslims and against immigrants.?

Sadly, the cardinal?s message, which was really not his message but the message of the Lord Jesus, has already fallen on deaf ears. Conservative opponents of immigration reform were quick to argue that the events in Boston should serve to slow down the Congress? consideration of immigration reform. I have heard conflicting reports about the legal status of the two suspects. One report said the older brother was a naturalized citizen and the younger brother had a green card but was not yet a citizen. Another report had that reversed. But, no report has indicated that either of the two brothers were in the United States illegally.

?You usually end up with bad policy if you do it in an emotional way or an emotional reaction,? was how Sen. Dan Coats of Indiana put it in suggesting the Senate slow down its consideration of immigration reform. Of course, he was in the act of committing the mistake he was warning about. It is Coats and his conservative friends who were jumping on the emotional bandwagon to affect a policy debate. I will note as well that it is these same conservatives who tend to claim to support a traditional society, who speak of America as a ?Christian nation,? and who champion traditional values. What does Sen. Coats make of Cardinal O?Malley?s words?

It should be clear that there are few traditions in America as obvious and as beneficial as our openness to immigration through most of our history. It should be clear that welcoming the stranger is at the heart of the Hebrew Scripture and the Christian Gospel. And, it should be clear that few values are as ?traditional? ? that is, not supported necessarily by the market or even at times by democratically elected legislatures, but rooted in the Christian Scriptures ? than the idea that reconciliation, not revenge, is the task of believers.

It is also clear from those Scriptures that violence is not an acceptable response to injustice for the Christian. Yet, I have not heard any of these conservative commentators talk about the violence of our society during the

debate over gun control, except to inflame fears against improbable home invasions, as if such home invasions were the principal instance of gun violence compared to, say, domestic violence or street crime. We have not heard Mr. Limbaugh ? or Sen. Coats - ask why these young men in Boston were able to buy guns and ammunition with impunity. No, that would be un-American.

We may never know if anything could have been done to stop the Tsarnaev brothers from becoming so radicalized that they turned to indiscriminate violence. Indeed, we may never know what demons lurked in their minds. The Devil roams the earth looking for assistance, that we know. The Muslim immigrants I got to know, from Bosnia in the mid-1990s, had fled their country because they were being persecuted and killed because of their religion, yet they were not radicalized. They told me how much they used to like going to Midnight Mass with their Catholic friends in Sarajevo, so I took them to Midnight Mass at St. Matthew?s Cathedral. They were excited for their city when Archbishop Puljic was named a cardinal. Some of my Bosnian friends were not Muslim, but you could not tell who was Catholic or Orthodox or Muslim from watching them interact with each other. When we sponsored a Bosnian chanteuse to sing at the café, they all came out and sang along. At the end of the day, they all came to the espresso bar to have coffee and smoke and talk about the day?s adventures. Some of my Bosnian Muslim friends were more Christian in their behavior than many of our self-styled American Christians! I wonder if anyone in the Tsarnaev's neighborhood brought them to the Cambridge, Mass. equivalent of the cafe where I made so many Bosnian friends. I wonder if anyone offered them a helping hand. I wonder if anyone took them to their homes for a holiday. Perhaps, it would not have made a difference, perhaps the demons were already in their heads, but perhaps, too, we forget that it is our job to fight the Devil with love whenever we can.

To be clear: Conservatives who oppose immigration reform will use any argument to stop it. Washington politics has, unfortunately, become a zero-sum game. The fact that two Chechen brothers radicalized or self-radicalized has virtually nothing to do with the debate on immigration. Sadly, too many Washington politicians, encouraged by the Tea Party?s polemics about who is, and who is not, a real American, have also self-radicalized. The debate on immigration will be ugly, and there is nothing we can do about it. But, there is something the leaders of the Christian churches can do. They can insist that while conservative opponents of immigration reform are entitled to their opinions, they are not entitled to drape themselves in the cloak of ?Christian values? when voicing those opinions.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/03/2015 - 22:50*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/immigration-tsarnaev-brothers