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

Anti-Immigrant Prejudice In Search Of A Rationale

Michael Sean Winters | Jun. 19, 2013 Distinctly Catholic

The foes of immigration reform have never had much of a moral case, at least not as we Catholics understand the moral calculi at issue: The right to be treated humanely crosses borders, and whether an immigrant has papers or does not have papers, their human rights, including he right to migrate, remains intact. Or, as Jehovah said more pithily to Moses, ?You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.? (Ex. 22:21)

So, if one has no moral case, you can, in good conscience, make a prudential case, trying to illustrate why the moral principles in a given situation must be recalibrated to take account of circumstances. When the Heritage Foundation released a report earlier this springtime claiming that immigration reform would cost the country $6.3 trillion over the next fifty years, they were trying to make just such a case: Whatever you think of the merits, we can?t afford this. Of course, I am doubtful the Heritage study met one of the key requirements noted above ? ?in good conscience? ? as it was revealed their lead researcher had a history of outrageous racist comments about Latinos.

That prudential argument from Heritage was always a bit like the Titanic, after hitting the iceberg, sinking and sinking fast. Now, that argument has become the Lusitania, taking a direct torpedo hit yesterday as the non-partisan and scrupulously fair Congressional Budget Office released its fiscal scoring of the bi-partisan Senate bill drafted by the Gang of 8. The results? The immigration bill will actually cut the federal deficit by almost $200 billion in its first ten years, and by as much as $700 billion in the following decade. So, instead of asking if we can afford immigration reform given the nation?s other fiscal challenges, the question is now turned round: Can we afford not to undertake immigration reform?

If you do not have a moral case, and you no longer have a prudential argument, where does one turn? To a political argument. As mentioned yesterday, Cong. Dana Rohrabacher has said Speaker John Boehner will lose his Speakership if he brings a bill to the floor that does not have the support of a majority of Republicans. As I noted yesterday, Boehner does not actually need the support of a majority of Republicans for the bill, just the support of a majority of Republicans for the proposition that they should let the bill come to the floor, even though most of them will vote against it. Nonetheless, Republicans face the choice of giving President Obama a signature victory by letting immigration reform pass, which course of action risks hurting their image as tough, just-say-no? obstructionists, an image that appeals to much of their base, versus kissing the White House good-bye for a generation by so alienating Latino voters that this fastest growing demographic within the electorate is pushed firmly, and permanently, into the embrace of the Democratic Party.

Yesterday, Boehner said that he would not, in fact, bring a bill to the floor that lacked majority GOP support, but he said something similar before the vote on federal aid to the victims of Hurricane Sandy. Meanwhile, opponents are planning amendments so onerous as to strip the bill of Democratic support. Among these ideas is that of giving state and local authorities more authority to draft their own immigration policies and increased authority to local police to enforce immigration laws. To which I have a two-word reply: Sheriff Arpaio. Does

anyone really think our nation?s immigration policy, which has ramifications for foreign policy too, should be entrusted to someone like that?

There is another political argument making the rounds of Fox News, namely, that the GOP will never win Latinos so the push for immigration reform is just an effort by the Democrats to sign up 10 million more voters. There are two groups of Latino voters that must be kept distinct in such calculations, and some of the ranters at Fox conflate them. Seeing as the immigration bill does not grant full citizenship for 13 years, I would imagine a political party might use that time profitably to find ways to reach out to voters who are very pro-family, more pro-life than others, tend to open small businesses, etc. The other group is Latinos who already are citizens and can vote now. As we all know, they broke for Barack Obama over Mitt Romney by more than 7-to-1 in last year?s election. Here the GOP might be able to make in-roads if they could keep the likes of Cong. Steve King, who is a Catholic by the way, from speaking of Latinos in disparaging, offensive ways. But, it seems there are some in the GOP who just can?t help themselves.

At some point, you have to ask why this animus? If it is not rooted in any moral concern, if it is not backed by prudential judgment, and if it is bad politics, why the ranting? Because, just as the WASPs once hated the Irish, and the Irish resented the Italians, and everybody hated the Jews, racism is alive and well in the human soul, stained as it is by sin, original and otherwise. I am hoping that my conservative Catholic friends who are politically vocal will step up to remind the Republicans in Congress that racism is an intrinsic evil too.

Source URL (retrieved on *03/10/2014 - 17:42*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/anti-immigrant-prejudice-search-rationale