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In Defense of Cardinal George

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 31, 2013 Distinctly Catholic

My colleague Robert McClory?s report yesterday [1] caught my eye. It was about an ad in the Chicago papers calling on Cardinal Francis George to ?retract his threat to withdraw funds from Catholic organizations that are members of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.? I was vaguely familiar with the situation, but the charges in the ad did not ring true.

I called a progressive friend from Chicago about this. He asked not to be identified because he continues to be involved in the discussions, but said he was familiar with the situation.

The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights included fourteen Catholic organizations, including eight or nine parishes. The Coalition also includes an Inter-faith group that is led by a priest. When the same-sex marriage bill was being debated in the Illinois legislature, and it was clear that it was going to be a close vote, advocates for same-sex marriage were beating the bushes to drum up support. They asked the Board of the Coalition to issue a statement supporting the legislation. ?Catholic groups felt ambushed by the Board,? my source said. ?They never consulted the members of the Coalition about this issue.? Asked if the legislation has anything to do with immigration, I was told, ?Absolutely not. You might have understood their taking this stand if they had been talking about the Leahy Amendment [which would have allowed same-sex couples to enjoy the same status as opposite-sex couples in federal immigration law]. This had nothing to do with immigration.?

Which is kind of funny. The ad attacking Cardinal George stated, ?In essence, Church leaders have decided to use immigrants and those who seek to help them as pawns in a political battle about an issue that is entirely unrelated to the care and welfare of those who seek refuge in our country.? Someone, get a mirror.

The ad also stated, ?We write to you as loyal and proud Catholics to urge in the strongest possible terms that you rescind this threat.? But, there was no threat to cut off funding for Catholic organizations that work with immigrants. Cardinal George asked only that they leave the Coalition. ?Church funding for these immigrant organizations was never at issue,? my source said.

In a statement issued via the archdiocesan Facebook page, Cardinal George said that donors to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which gave the grants to the immigrant organizations, do so ?with the understanding that their money will be passed on to organizations that respect the teachings of the Catholic faith. Organizations that apply for funds do so agreeing to this condition. It is intellectually and morally dishonest to use the witness of the Church?s concern for the poor as an excuse to attack the Church?s teaching on the nature of marriage.? Normally, Catholic progressives would consider such fiduciary concerns a part of the episcopal accountability we claim to seek, but I suppose that when you wave the LGBT flag these days, normal estimations of responsibility and accountability go out the window.

I do not always agree with Cardinal George, but he is not the bad guy here. He is certainly not the one who has ?decided to use immigrants and those who seek to help them as pawns in a political battle about an issue that is entirely unrelated to the care and welfare of those who seek refuge in our country.? It was the gay marriage advocates who used the Coalition, and a bunch of cowardly politicians, desperate not to offend affluent gay

fundraisers, who jumped on board.

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Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/cardinal-george-accused-using-immigrants-gay-marriage-battle