Opinion



A U.S. Border Patrol agent leads a person who is being arrested during a nonviolent protest Dec. 10 at the U.S.-Mexico wall in San Diego in solidarity with the caravan of Central American migrants trying to reach the United States. More than 300 people, many from different religious faiths, held a procession to the border fence. About 30 were arrested. (CNS/David Maung)



by Michael Sean Winters

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Last week, Laura Ingraham began her prime time Fox News show with a rant against immigrants that was more despicable than usual. Later, on that same episode, EWTN's star Raymond Arroyo joined Ingraham, and he did not raise his voice in defense of the church's teaching on the rights of migrants. Indeed, on his own show the next night, Arroyo had as one of his guests lawyer and author David Limbaugh, brother of Rush, who echoed the Trump White House talking points as well.

I watch Fox News and EWTN regularly (so that you don't have to, dear reader), and so I have grown accustomed to hateful attacks on immigrants and distortions of facts about the phenomenon of migration. Both networks clearly believe one of their primary jobs is to be an echo chamber for the president's lies and scare-mongering on the topic. In the weeks leading up to the midterm election, there were regular reports on the frightening caravan, although it was never clear to me what was so scary about desperately poor people walking from Honduras.

Ingraham began her rant by focusing on soon-to-be Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Democratic Senate Leader Chuck Schumer. The two had had a stormy meeting with Donald Trump earlier that day. Ingraham quoted from the oath of office members of Congress take, emphasizing the pledge "to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic." She continued:

> At this point, are we even sure that Chuck and Nancy took the oath? I have a news flash for the dynamic duo: When migrants illegally cross our borders, whether they come to work or to collect welfare, using false documents, whether they come to deal drugs or join murderous gangs that are already here, this does constitute a foreign enemy action. That's why Trump

> was so clear at the end of that Oval Office exchange on Tuesday. He understands the threat, and he wants to answer it. He told Chuck Schumer to his face that he would be proud to shut down the government over border security. It's that important for him.
>
> But the Democrats are determined to block Trump's efforts to fortify the border. You can see them recoil at any border wall talk. Here are the facts. The Democrats are willing to sell out the country, law and order be damned, in order to deny Trump a victory over the wall.

To consider the subject of foreign threats and focus on Honduran refugees and not, say, Vladimir Putin's quite successful attempt to influence and undermine our democratic institutions shows how unreal the focus at Fox is.

The deeper problem lies in Ingraham's characterization of the migrants. She starts "when migrants illegally cross our borders." The migrants are refugees, and it is not "illegal" to come to the U.S. border and seek asylum. It is against the law to enter the country without legal documentation, but it is a misdemeanor, akin to jaywalking or not feeding a parking meter. The gratuitous suggestion that migrants come to collect welfare is absurd on its face: Undocumented immigrants can't collect welfare. All but a tiny fraction do not, in fact, come to America to "deal drugs or join murderous gangs."

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She goes on to complain about the amount of health care money spent on "illegals" — an amount she would be calling a rounding error in a federal budget of $4 trillion if she were explaining how inexpensive the border wall would be — and she performs a moral analysis that recognizes no Christian ethical influence:

> All told, Americans cross-subsidize health care for unauthorized immigrants to the tune of $18.5 billion a year. Now with that money, we could build a triple wall with all sorts of cool stuff on it along the border. Come on, $18.5 billion?

If that is not social Darwinism, what is? Migrants should not get health care because they were born somewhere else? Or because it deprives border control of some

technological gizmos? Ms. Ingraham is not a stupid woman. She is very smart. She knows what she is saying, and what she is saying is evil.

Read or watch the rest of the tirade. No self-respecting Catholic would appear on this woman's show except to confront her face-to-face for her hateful bigotry.

Alas, one very prominent Catholic has become a regular on her show, EWTN's Raymond Arroyo. In his appearance that same night and again on his own show the next night, he looked at the same Oval Office meeting. With Ingraham he offered "expert" analysis of the body language. On his own show, in his interview with Limbaugh, his guest calls Pelosi's and Schumer's intervention with the president "hypocritical and calculated." He says, "They're not honest" and repeats the charge that Democrats want open borders.

YouTube video from EWTN

What was most appalling watching Arroyo's show was the fact that neither he nor his guest offered a single word about the dignity of the immigrants. In an earlier segment, Arroyo and U.S. Rep. Chris Smith had spoken movingly about the dignity of persecuted Christians in Syria and Iraq and China. Why is Arroyo concerned about those Christians but so hateful about the Catholics from Latin America? I don't think he is a racist. I think he is a puppet, and the GOP and its propaganda arm, Fox News, is pulling the strings. And the executives at EWTN, like Republican members of Congress, dare not challenge the president's hateful immigration policies — or anything else about this morally corrupt presidency — for fear of their base, a base whose prejudices they have helped form for decades.

Tweet by Raymond Arroyo, Dec. 13, 2018

There is nothing to be done about Fox News, but EWTN pretends to be Catholic. Is there no ecclesial mechanism for insisting that it not distort Catholic teaching so egregiously? Is there to be no accountability for its star's hateful rhetoric?

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

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