

Charlie Rangel Should Go

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 23, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

After news broke that a full panel of the House Ethics Committee was going to proceed with an investigation into charges against him, Congressman Charlie Rangel of New York was interviewed by the press in a corridor of the Capitol Building. One of the reporters, Luke Russert, son of the late, beloved Tim Russert, asked Rangel if he feared losing his job. Rangel asked what news outfit the reporter represented and then waved the question away as "dumb."

The question was not dumb. Rangel could lose his job either by censure of his colleagues or, more likely and more swiftly, at the ballot box. This latter remedy for ethical wrong-doing was made more likely by Rangel's dismissive attitude towards a perfectly legitimate question. His condescending attitude towards Russert suggested he has grown too comfortable in the halls of power. And, the fact that he did not even recognize Russert does not speak well of Mr. Rangel's political antennae. This young man has virtually been adopted by the rest of the press corps, so Rangel did himself no favors in his choice of sparring partner.

There was something profoundly sad about watching the exchange. Whether you agreed with him or not over the years, Rangel has been a powerful influence on Capitol Hill. The defensive, dismissive man we saw yesterday was not the same man who has championed many just causes through the years. Politicians, like sopranos, need to know when to leave the stage lest their final performances leave an indelible and unfortunate memory that obscures their earlier, more successful work. It is time for Mr. Rangel to retire.

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