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Yahoo Watch: Jennifer Hartline at Catholic Online

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

I have never noticed Ms. Hartline's byline until today. She has joined the hysteria against the full body screening being employed by the TSA to protect Americans on planes.

How bad is that hysteria? Mr. Hartline prefers profiling - she does not say racial profiling, but that is what she means evidently.

Otherwise, why pen this:

3 year-old girls are not the enemy. 7 year-old boys are not the enemy. Elderly nuns in full habit are not the enemy. The overwhelming majority of people in the United States are not the enemy. The enemy, by and large, is Muslim men. But since the current administration won't even name the enemy, let alone employ security measures that actually target the enemy, now every American citizen is treated as the enemy.

The enemy is Muslim men. Oh, that simplifies everything. Except of course that Timothy McVeigh was not a Muslim man, was he.

She contends that the new TSA procedures are violations of the 4th Amendment guarantee against unreasonable searches and seizures. Guess she is not a strict originalist in the manner of Justice Scalia. There were no planes back when the 4th Amendment was drafted so determining what is, and is not, "unreasonable" requires a discussion not a citation. And, of course, her preferred remedy of racial profiling runs up against the 14th Amendment.

Ms. Hartline then recommends that we do what the Israelis do. I admire Israeli security procedures to be sure. How can one not? But, El Al is a small airline. Does she seriously contemplate hiring and training

enough agents to do what El Al does? That might help the unemployment rate, but it would cost a fortune. Will the rightwingers screaming about the invasive TSA procedures vote the necessary funds? El Al does not racially profile - they interview everyone. Their agents are trained to ask smart questions. I remember that one potential hijacker was discovered when the Israeli agent asked him what he did for a living. He said he was an architect. The agent asked who was his favorite twentieth century architect. When he could not name one, he was sent for interrogation and arrested. So, not only would TSA have to hire a lot of people, it would have to hire a lot of really smart people.

We can debate the effectiveness of the TSA procedures, but labeling them reactive is not an argument. The 9/11 Commission Report was entirely reactive, but that did not keep people from failing to even admit its shortcomings. Counter-terrorism is necessarily reactive because we don't want to get burned the same way twice. Hopefully, in ways that are opaque to us, and therefore to the terrorists, the TSA people are also proactive, but the mere fact of being proactive is no guarantee of success. After all, the war in Iraq was a proactive measure.

Keep an eye on Ms. Hartline. I suspect her hysteria, so abundantly overwhelming whatever good sense she possesses, will demonstrate itself on other topics at other times as well. I invite her to fly without screening if that will make her feel better. I invite her to fly with some of McVeigh's rightwing militia buddies and see if she feels secure in her 4th Amendment protections. I invite her to recognize that in dismissing our country's proud tradition of racial tolerance, so dearly bought, and spreading fear and anxiety, she is helping the terrorists in their objective of scaring us in to abandoning the hallmarks of our civilized life. Shame.

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