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Crisis Responds to Academics Who Criticized Boehner

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

The newly reborn Crsis Magazine has an article up by Stephen Krason who responds to the letter sent to Speaker John Boehner by more than 80 prominent Catholic academics in advance of his commencement address at Catholic University.

The central theme of Krason's article is that there are many different ways to help the poor, and Boehner and Ryan et al., are simply trying new means to that shared objective. The problem with this is that Boehner and Ryan have not been claiming their policies will help the poor - at least not until Cong. Ryan decided to write a letter to Archbishop Dolan, a letter that was filled with assertions but no facts. Ryan has been having his staff read Ayn Rand who was not known for her commitment to the poor. No, the argument put forth by Boehner and Ryan has been that we face a massive mudget crisis, not so massive that we need to raise taxes on the super-rich, mind you, but big enough to end programs upon which people have come to rely.

Krason argues that the academics are wedded to Great Society ideas about helping the poor and that these programs have failed. The point is arguable. But, what is not arguable is that the Great Society programs have changed the way we, as a society, attempt to help the poor, and they cannot merely be ended without some attempt to replace them with a new, improved attempt to help the poor. That, alas, has not been a central theme of the GOP in recent years.

The final canard in Krason's argument is that while there can be wide differences of opinion about economic policy among serious Catholics, there can be now such differences about abortion, which is why Obama can't give a commencement address and Boehner can. But, this is an apples and oranges problem. The difference among most Catholics - excluding outliers - is that some think a legal remedy will not be effective, that it will result in a return to back alley abortions, and that cultural and social and economic remedies to the scourge of abortion must be applied. Others want the strong arm of the law to do the work, although they always get a bit shy when asked what such a law would look like. Would women who procure abortions go to jail? How would that play out politically in America today? If there

is no penalty, why would anyone fear breaking an anti-abortion law?

The difference is not between negotiable issues and non-negotiable issues. The difference is between principles to which we all must adhere as Catholics - do not take innocent human life and help the poor - and policies that try to implement those principles.

So, I agree with Krason that there may be better ways to help the poor than the Great Society programs we now have. I am just waiting for Mr. Ryan's new found acquaintance with Catholic social teaching to lead him to a better career than the one he is on now: Let him devise ways to help the poor that are new and innovative. So long as his budget proposals are only a wrecking ball directed at the current social fabric, frayed though that fabric may be, I am suspicious.

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