

AlbertMohler.com

Worldviews Matter — The Culture War in Europe

Wednesday, August 8, 2007



The cultural and ideological divisions that separate Americans — fronts in the Culture War — are increasingly evident in Europe as well. America is often described as divided into “red” and “blue” states, transforming the electoral map into code for conservative and liberal worldviews.

Writing in *The Spectator* [London], Stephen Pollard argues that Europe may soon divide along religious lines.

As he explains, the issues that may force the division include human embryonic stem cell research and other controversial biomedical technologies. Poland has inserted a statement into an article in the European Union’s reform treaty. That statement, identified as a “Unilateral Declaration by Poland,” reads:

The Charter does not affect in any way the right of Member States to legislate in the sphere of public morality, family law as well as the protection of human dignity and respect for human physical and moral integrity.

Here is how Pollard explains the statement and its meaning:

Seems a bit obscure? It isn’t. It goes to the heart of EU society and presages — within the next decade — a revived social division across the EU based on religion. Because ‘...the protection of human dignity and respect for human physical and moral integrity’ is EU-speak for bans on new medical areas such as embryonic stem cell research, gene therapy and even the latest breakthrough, RNA (ribonucleic acid). The declaration is designed to ensure that member state governments will remain free to ban such research.

The right of nations to ban such research on the grounds of human dignity and “moral integrity” is very important to Poland, a nation with a very large Roman Catholic population. But some see Poland’s unilateral insertion of this statement to be a compromise of the very idea of a united Europe.

The controversy over this statement indicates that even as America is divided between red and blue states, Europe is divided into red and blue nations. As in the United States, these labels do not explain everything, but they do point to an underlying reality. There is a great clash over worldviews in the modern world, and these clashes often come down to the influence of states and nations dominated by one worldview or the other.

Put simply, the Congressional delegations of Utah and New York are not expected to vote together on issues such as abortion and homosexuality. Similarly, don’t expect the Netherlands and Poland to stand together on those same issues.

Nevertheless, on issues such as cloning, stem cell research, and genetic manipulation, the traditional framework of liberals vs. conservatives does not always work. In Europe, liberal members of the Green parties often side with conservatives against the research.

Interestingly, Pollard points to religious conviction as the underlying explanation for the divide:

Powerful opposition, however, coincides with a strong church. It should not therefore be surprising that a country such

as Britain, with some of the most ineffectual religious leadership, has some of the most permissive research laws.

In other words, where the Christian church has a strong voice and a large following, laws governing research are likely to be more restrictive. In more secularized nations, the laws are likely to be more liberal.

In making this argument, Pollard effectively underlines the depth of the ideological divide and the role of Christian conviction in the cultural equation.

Stephen Pollard goes on to suggest that these technologies will not respect borders anyway — that the wealthy of nations restricting such technologies will simply pay their way to countries that allow them:

Individual member states can ban what they like, but such legislation will be irrelevant when the medical breakthroughs have been made elsewhere. Because whatever the moral rights and wrongs, such bans will lead to a new social divide. We know exactly what will happen when a government refuses to allow medical interventions because of ethical or religious concerns; look at Ireland when abortion was illegal. With these latest breakthroughs, those who can afford to leave their country to be treated abroad will simply buy a return plane ticket.

These same arguments regularly appear in American debates as well, of course. The issues are largely identical, even as the political and cultural contexts vary.

The importance of this article lies in the fact that it demonstrates two very important insights. First, that Europe is also divided by what might be called a Culture War. Second, that the fundamental divide is, at least in part, defined by the presence or absence of Christian conviction.

The explanation for this last point is very simple. What one believes about God determines what one believes about everything else — including human dignity, the sanctity of human life, and the ethics of biomedical technologies. That fundamental principle operates on both sides of the Atlantic — and everywhere else on Earth as well.

Image: Flag of the European Union

