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Recovering Civility . . . and Refusing to Deny the Obvious

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Ann Coulter is a woman of many gifts and many right ideas. She can be an eloquent spokeswoman for conservative convictions and a prophetic critic of secular liberalism. Unfortunately, she can also be her own worst enemy.

Last week, as she addressed the American Conservative Union's Political Action Conference, she made a deplorable reference to former Sen. John Edwards. Here are her words, as spoken to the conference:

"I was going to have a few comments on the other Democratic presidential candidate, John Edwards, but it turns out you have to go into rehab if you use the word "faggot," so I – so kind of an impasse, can't really talk about Edwards."

Coulter remains unrepentant about the slur, saying, "I'm so ashamed, I can't stop laughing." She added: "C'mon, it was a joke. I would never insult gays by suggesting that they are like John Edwards. That would be mean."

Mean? Ann Coulter has turned herself into the evil queen of mean. She has lowered herself to embarrassing theatrics and crude humor. More seriously, she clearly does not mean all insults as a joke. In a recent book, she attacked some 9/11 widows as publicity hounds. She has a tawdry record of cheap shots, crude slurs, and indefensible personal attacks.

Conservative institutions cannot afford any association with this kind of language or attack. The issues are far too serious to be treated in this manner, and the very convictions Ann Coulter often defends are now sullied by association with her.

Referring to John Edwards by using a word meant to demean homosexuals? What was she thinking? Ann Coulter has never been married. She has been known for once dating Bob Guccione, Jr., son of the *Penthouse* magazine magnate. John Edwards, on the other hand, has been married for almost thirty years to his wife, Elizabeth. Together they have had four children, Wade, Cate, Emma Claire, and Jack.

Wade died in a tragic car accident at age 16, throwing the Edwards family into a grief that often tears spouses apart. Their marriage not only survived the tragedy, but went on to produce Emma Claire and Jack. John Edwards stood by his wife through her more recent fight with breast cancer, and there has never been a scandal associated with their long marriage.

I oppose John Edwards' political platform, but not John Edwards the man, husband, and father. I do not want to see him elected President of the United States, but this has everything to do with his political positions, not his personal life. I do not appreciate his crude oversimplification of the challenges that face our nation, but I must oppose any crude talk about John Edwards the man.

So . . . why would Ann Coulter use that word? And, even more troubling to me, why would any in her audience laugh? There is nothing remotely funny about that word in any context. It is meant to hurt when boys use it in the locker room, and it was meant to hurt when Ann Coulter used it when speaking to a conservative audience. It demeans homosexuals and should be banned from any acceptable discourse.

How can homosexuals think anything but the worst of a movement that would laugh at the use of this slur? How can

we think any better of ourselves if we stand by and let it happen?

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