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# Christian Faith and Public Policy -Questions Revisited

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Recent comments by Senator John Kerry provide an illustration of how not to apply Christian truth to the great moral questions of our age. The senator provided an illuminating insight into his confused and convoluted understanding of faith and politics when, in the course of Wednesday night's presidential campaign debate, he responded to a question about abortion. Bob Schieffer of CBS News, moderator of the debate, posed the following question to Senator Kerry: "The New York Times reports that some Catholic archbishops are telling their church members that it would be a sin to vote for a candidate like you because you support a woman's right to choose an abortion and unlimited stem cell research. What is your reaction to that?"

Mr. Kerry responded by arguing that he respectfully disagrees with these archbishops of his church. "I am a Catholic. And I grew up learning how to respect those views, but I disagree with them, as do many. I believe that I can't legislate or transfer to another American citizen my article of faith. What is an article of faith for me is not something that I can legislate on somebody who doesn't share that article of faith." In other words, Senator Kerry claims to be a Catholic who is perfectly free from any responsibility to apply Catholic moral teaching to public policy, insofar as he has the opportunity to form, influence, and vote upon legislation.

In an extended commentary, Senator Kerry tried to relate his Catholic background to his public record. "Now with respect to religion, you know, as I said I grew up Catholic. I was an altar boy. I know that throughout my life this has made a difference for me. And as President Kennedy said when he ran for president, he said, I'm not running to be a Catholic president. I'm running to be a president who happens to be Catholic. Now my faith affects everything that I do and choose. . . and I think that everything you do in public life has to be guided by your faith, affected by your faith, but without transferring it in any official way to other people." In framing his argument this way, Senator Kerry effectively argues that there can be no "transference" of his Catholic conviction to his political life. With this argument, the senator intends to absolve himself of responsibility to contend for Catholic moral teaching in his political life.

That argument, antithetical to the Christian moral tradition, would at least have the virtue of consistency. It would, that is, be considered consistent if Senator Kerry would hold consistently to it.

But Senator Kerry immediately departed from his own argument. After stating that his Catholic conviction should not be transferred "in any official way to other people," he went on to argue that his Catholic faith is the animating motivation behind his work for justice, environmentalism, and the alleviation of poverty. "That's why I fight against poverty," Kerry explained. "That's why I fight to clean up the environment and protect the earth. That's why I fight for equality and justice. All of these things come out of that fundamental teaching and belief of faith."

Which way is it, Senator Kerry? It would appear that Kerry is quite willing to transfer his moral convictions concerning poverty and the environment to public policy. But the transference of his self-proclaimed Catholic identity and

motivations stops when the contested territory becomes sexuality or abortion. Given Senator Kerry's characteristic confusion on this issue, those watching Wednesday night's debate could hardly be surprised.

Yet, while Senator Kerry was arguing that his Catholic faith was a personal matter that should not be transferred to public policy, an Italian official was being booted out of his official responsibilities with the European Union simply for being a Catholic who believed in Catholic moral teaching.

Over the past weekend, the Civil Liberties Committee of the European Parliament rejected Rocco Buttiglione, Italy's commissioner, just weeks before he was to take office. By a vote of 27 to 26, the Committee voted against Mr. Buttiglione after the Italian commissioner stated his Christian conviction that homosexuality is a sin.

Speaking to the European Parliament just days before, Mr. Buttiglione had said: "I may think that homosexuality is a sin, and this has no effect on politics, unless I say that homosexuality is a crime." He went on to say, "The rights of homosexuals should be defended on the same basis as the rights of all European citizens. I would not accept the idea that homosexuals are a category apart."

Mr. Buttiglione is not a devotee of political correctness. In the midst of other comments, he argued that women with children would be best served by having "a husband nearby that can support her morally and economically." Offended?

The statements made by Mr. Buttiglione should be neither shocking nor controversial. According to press reports, Mr. Buttiglione, appointed to his post by Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, is a conservative Roman Catholic with close ties to the Vatican and Pope John Paul II. Furthermore, these are convictions that are part and parcel of official Catholic teaching. Is anyone surprised that a conservative Roman Catholic would believe that homosexuality is a sin and that men and women should marry in order to have children?

The Buttiglione affair provides convincing proof that the European Union—which just months ago refused even to acknowledge that Christianity had formative influence in the creation of European culture, has lost all moral sanity and is firmly committed to creating a new post-Christian, post-tolerant, and post-modern culture of radical moral revolution. Johannes Svoboda, second in charge of the European Parliament's Socialist Group, told Deutsche Welle, the official German press service, that Mr. Buttiglione would turn Europe back from progress. "If Buttiglione wants to send women back to the kitchen, if he thinks that homosexuality is a sin—these are opinions that at this time, for someone who is responsible for the realization of measures against discrimination, for freedom and equality of women—they simply don't match," he said.

In other words, while Senator John Kerry was arguing that he was perfectly free to believe Catholic moral teaching that he was unwilling to apply to the public square, Mr. Buttiglione was booted out of his official post with the European Parliament simply for believing what his church teaches on the issue of homosexuality and marriage.

Mr. Buttiglione's fate is the natural outcome of Senator Kerry's reasoning. The Democratic presidential nominee effectively argues that his personal faith must be a matter of privatized concern disconnected from his public life—at least when it comes to controversial issues of sex and morality. From there, it requires only a small jump to reach the position argued by Mr. Buttiglione's critics, who now argue that merely believing that homosexuality is a sin disqualifies an individual from public office and public influence.

The vehemence and vitriol of the secular Left are becoming more and more evident each day. The secular outrage over Rocco Buttiglione is indicative of what will soon come to any culture that accepts this artificial and unsustainable separation of the sacred and the secular.

Anyone who doubts this assertion need look no further than Louisville, Kentucky, and the outrage expressed over an eloquent and sensitive campaign for marriage undertaken by Southeast Christian Church. One of the nation's largest congregations, Southeast Christian Church exerts a major influence in Louisville and beyond. With Kentucky voters facing a proposed constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage, the church organized a campaign intended to affirm the dignity and integrity of marriage. One phase of the project included a series of three billboards strategically placed throughout the Louisville metropolitan area. Each features a warm-hearted portrait of a married couple. Along with the portrait, the billboard communicates this message: "One man, One woman, God's plan for marriage: To honor, to cherish." That's all. The billboards are attractive, positive, and eloquent. The message they convey is nothing less than the

sum and substance of what virtually all persons throughout human history have believed marriage to be.

Nevertheless, the secular outrage has been extreme. In the October 12, 2004 edition of *The Courier-Journal*, Louisville's newspaper, a series of five letters to the editor was published, each one condemning the church's message. "Southeast Christian Church's position on marriage stresses that the Bible should be our guideline for defining marriage," one letter began. "It is this kind of overbearing fundamentalism that has produced theocracies like Iran. Fortunately we live in a country that was founded on the separation of church and state, regardless of what some Christian 'historians' want us to believe." This letter writer obviously believes that those eccentric individuals who believe marriage is a union of a man and a woman—representing, we might note, the overwhelming majority of Americans—can be driven only by some form of religious extremism and "overbearing fundamentalism."

Another letter writer expressed similar outrage: "The lovey-dovey couples hugging on billboards and buses make me so mad. These slick commercials supporting an amendment to the Kentucky Constitution limiting marriage to one man and one woman mask a black-hearted bigotry. How dare they tell my sister and her partner, who is a minister in a Protestant church, what God does or doesn't want them to do. My sincere hope is that all these couples who profess to have God on their side have a gay child."

After arguing that a marriage amendment would be discriminatory against common law relationships, as well as same-sex unions, another letter writer got right to the point: "If religious organizations like Southeast Christian Church keep meddling in civil matters, it will eventually turn around and bite them on the butt." Yet another writer argued that the state's constitution "guarantees our freedom from the religion-based judgment of others." Going further, she asserted: "Harmless religious and ethical choices are fundamental freedoms of this great country."

Evidently, this writer is willing to accept religious liberty so long as the religion is acceptably "harmless" according to her secular sensibilities.

We are now witnessing a massive closing of hearts and minds, fueled by a radical divorce of morality and law. Behind all this stands the totalitarian aspirations of a new secular elite. Senator Kerry has given voice to their argument, and Rocco Buttiglione has felt the crushing weight of their hatred.

Think it can't happen where you live? Just ask the members of Southeast Christian Church who wanted to remind their neighbors that marriage is to be a union of one man and one woman marked by honor and cherishing love. They can tell you what it is like to be on the receiving end of the secular onslaught.

