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“We Try to Respect Religious Beliefs” — Mr. Kristof Rewrites the Constitution



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Columnist Nicholas Kristof of *The New York Times* has emerged as one of the most influential journalists and public intellectuals of our times. He has been the voice of conscience on many issues of human rights and foreign affairs, and he has won two Pulitzer Prizes for his reports, books, and commentaries on world affairs.



A graduate of Harvard University and a Rhodes Scholar, Mr. Kristof sees the world from an elite point of reference, and his column in *The New York Times* is mandatory reading for anyone concerned with human rights and human dignity.

His keen sensitivity to human rights concerns is what makes his column published in the February 12, 2012 edition of the paper so perplexing — and so offensive.

Nicholas Kristof writes movingly and urgently of human rights violations all over the world, but this recent column reveals his apparent willingness to deny human rights here at home, on a matter right at the center of the American understanding of human rights — religious liberty.

Kristof writes rather sarcastically about the “pelvic politics” of recent controversy. The furor over the Obama Administration’s inclusion of mandatory coverage of birth control as “preventive care” under the Affordable Care Act, stating: “I may not be as theologically sophisticated as American bishops, but I had thought that Jesus talked more about helping the poor than about banning contraceptives.”

How clever. Would Kristof say the same to theological liberals trying to argue for nuclear disarmament? Not yet, anyway. This cheap shot signals Kristof’s intention to slam those who have theological and moral concerns about the mandatory inclusion of birth control under the so-called Obama Care legislation. He cheapens his own credibility by speaking of “banning contraceptives.”

So, if contraceptives are not free they are “banned?” Nice try.

Kristof, who periodically registers his disgust at religious believers, pressed his case. In previous columns he has written, for example, of the fact that he is frightened to live in a nation in which so many citizens disbelieve in evolution. In another column he warned his fellow secular liberals that we live in a nation in which more people believe in the devil than in Darwinism.

He once advised other journalists and columnists to pay greater attention to evangelical Christians, while noting: “I tend to disagree with evangelicals on almost everything, and I see no problem with aggressively pointing out the dismal consequences of this increasing religious influence.”

Add to this the reality that he once bemoaned the fact that so many Christians believe in the virgin birth of Christ, arguing that this is evidence of “the way American Christianity is becoming less intellectual and more mystical over time.”

Like so many, including the White House, Kristof does his best to describe the controversy over the birth control mandate as a Catholic issue. In his “Beyond Pelvic Politics” column he wrote of “Catholic universities and hospitals,” “Catholic institutions,” and “a majority of Catholics.” The fact that so many evangelical Christians share this concern and outrage is never mentioned.

After asking his most pressing question, “After all, do we really want to make accommodations across the range of faith?,” he makes this amazing statement:

“The basic principle of American life is that we try to respect religious beliefs, and accommodate them where we can.”

That sentence caught the immediate attention of many. Could someone of Nicholas

Kristof's influence and stature really write and mean that?

When President Obama spoke February 10, announcing his administration's modifications to the birth control issue, he at least spoke of religious liberty as "an inalienable right that is enshrined in our Constitution." The President then made the error of speaking as if an "inalienable right" is to be accommodated to a matter of policy. That was bad enough, and very revealing of the President's worldview and constitutional perspective. Nicholas Kristof's statement is light years beyond the President in disrespect for religious liberty.

Where would we find what Kristof describes as "the basic principle of American life," when he goes on to state that principle with language as chilling as "we try to respect religious beliefs, and accommodate them where we can"?

The language of accommodation is almost as old as the Constitution itself, but it was never framed as Kristof frames it — certainly not by the founders who spoke of "inalienable rights" granted to human beings by the Creator's endowment.

Can you imagine any of the founders speaking as Kristof writes, of an intention to "try to respect religious beliefs"?

Mr. Kristof is a serious man, and he raises serious issues in this column. But with this one simplistic and condescending sentence he throws religious liberty under the bus and reveals what makes sense to so many in the secular elite.

They will try their best, they promise, to respect our religious beliefs, and to "accommodate them where we can."

That's it. Don't dare ask for anything more.

Given the caustic columns Nicholas Kristof has written in the past, it is hard not to laugh at his pledge to "try to respect religious beliefs."

A few years ago he wrote this:

"Yet despite the lack of scientific or historical evidence, and despite the doubts of Biblical scholars, America is so pious that not only do 91 percent of Christians say they believe in the Virgin Birth, but so do an astonishing 47 percent of U.S. non-Christians."

He followed that sentence with this amazing line: "I'm not denigrating anyone's beliefs." Does *The New York Times* still employ editors?

When it comes to human rights around the world, Nicholas Kristof remains rightly influential, and for good reason. But when it comes to human rights at home, Mr. Kristof reveals a horrifying blind spot. The continuing controversy over the birth control mandate reveals that he is by no means alone.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler

Nicholas Kristof, "Beyond Pelvic Politics," *The New York Times*, Sunday, February 12, 2012.

For coverage of the larger birth control mandate issue, see:

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. "What Compromise? This Policy Leaves Religious Liberty in Peril and Planned Parenthood Smiling," AlbertMohler.com, Friday, February 10, 2012.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The President, the Pill, and Religious Liberty in Peril," AlbertMohler.com, Thursday, February 2, 2012.

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