

CAPITAL COMMENTARY

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Kerry and the Church

The Roman Catholic Church believes that abortion involves the intentional and violent destruction of human life. Abortion is unjust and a grave moral evil. Public justice thus demands the legal protection of the unborn. In the American context, this is called being “pro-life.” To reject the conviction that unborn life deserves legal protection is called being “pro-choice.”

It is a simple fact of American political life that, while one might occasionally find a local Democratic politician or a Democrat in Congress who is pro-life, no member of the Democratic Party can be pro-life and also aspire to any national office. Senator John Kerry is a Democrat of national stature. He aspires to the highest national office. He is also a Roman Catholic. Guess what gives.

In both word and deed, Sen. Kerry has consistently and publicly repudiated the Church’s belief that unborn life is worthy of legal protection. Quite to the contrary, he insists that legally protecting unborn life would be a massive *injustice*. His actions convey that he regards the teaching of his political party to be morally superior to the teaching of his Church.

Kerry and his followers are now very angry at the Roman Catholic Church because, in recent weeks, key Church and lay leaders have said that Catholic politicians and public officials who repudiate the Church’s pro-life teaching should be denied Holy Communion. Kerry and his spokespersons seem to believe that such an ecclesiastical sanction should not be levied against a person merely because he has differing political beliefs. That would be a violation of the separation of church and state and could lead to a “theocracy.” Kerry wants people to think that his “private” beliefs as a Catholic are radically separated from his “public” beliefs as a good American Democratic politician. He thus seems to hold the “I’m personally opposed to abortion, but don’t want to impose my personal morality on others” position made infamous by former New York Governor Mario Cuomo.

Of course, reasonable people agree that not every sin or vice should be illegal. The “personally opposed but don’t impose” position trades on that understanding. However, reasonable people also agree that certain sins and vices of great moral weight should be illegal. Sen. Kerry would not say, “I’m personally opposed to infanticide, or sex in public, or spousal abuse in the privacy of one’s bedroom, but I don’t want to impose my morality on the rest of society.” Nor would he say, “I’m personally opposed to restaurant owners who refuse to serve black people, but I don’t want to impose my morality on them.” In fact, we now praise as courageous and prophetic those Roman Catholic bishops who threatened to excommunicate Catholic politicians who publicly defended racial segregation in the 1960s.

One suspects that Sen. Kerry might not really be personally opposed to abortion at all. He can dispel all doubts by telling us why he “personally” agrees with the Church’s teaching that abortion is a violent act of homicide. Is his belief merely a “private” non-moral conviction, like preferring one hobby over another? Or is it a firm moral conviction? He can tell us if there are any other violent acts of homicide against innocents that should be legalized. And he can tell us whether the late Democratic Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan was right or wrong to call partial birth abortion an act of infanticide. Finally, he can tell us whether Roman Catholic bishops were wrong and intended to establish a theocracy when they threatened with excommunication Catholics who advocated segregation in the 1960s.

If pro-life Americans don’t get satisfactory answers to these questions, perhaps the famous quip about the other senator from Massachusetts—that his faith is so private he doesn’t even apply it to himself—can also fairly be applied to Sen. Kerry.

—Keith Pavlischek
Fellow

The Center for Public Justice

P.O. Box 48368 * Washington, DC 20002 * 410-571-6300 * Fax 410-571-6365 * www.cpjustice.org *
capcomm@cpjustice.org

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