

Reflections

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The Continuing Ebb of Christianity

(Third of a series of four articles)

Ever since the social forces unleashed in the 1960s overran the Christian mores of the country, America has continued to move toward becoming a more irreligious nation. In the last 40 years, there has been a progressive assault on the public display and acknowledgement of religion, accompanied by life style practices and social abuses which are antithetical to Christian beliefs. Marriage, the family, and even life itself have been degraded. Today, a great deal of social practice and political action in the nation is incompatible with Christian principles.

In 1970, California passed a law that legalized no-fault divorce. By 1985, every state allowed it. A rationale for this change was that when there were irreconcilable differences, the partners would not have to lie about the other's infidelity to develop grounds for divorce. The result, however, transformed the marriage bond from a life-long covenant into a cancelable contract.

Movement now is to remove the procreative rationale for marriage and make it a contract for material security. With this reasoning, marriage can be viewed as a civil agreement between any two people, regardless of gender. In 2004, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts declared that limiting marriage to a man and a woman was discriminatory against same-sex couples, and legalized homosexual marriages in that State. Although other States have not followed their exact lead, Hawaii, California, Maine, Vermont, Connecticut, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia allow civil unions, an arrangement which confers a status equivalent to marriage.



With the emphasis in marriage on individual satisfaction, there was no reason why pregnancy should hinder personal desires. In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that women had a constitutional right to privacy under the 14th Amendment, and based on that they could choose to abort any child they were carrying. The period of legality for abortion has been extended from conception to the partial birth of a full-term child. Since the ruling, some 1.3 million babies, which is the equivalent of the population of New Hampshire, have been aborted annually.

These changes have occurred with minimal resistance from the Christian community, even though Christians form the majority of the United States population. Too many Christians, including Catholics, have accepted the notion that religion is a matter that should be restricted to one's private life. They limit religious expression to a Sunday worship service, and pursue their material ends the rest of the week. Their religious beliefs are carefully compartmentalized and therefore do not impinge on their behavior in the secular world. Increasingly, religious beliefs are becoming diluted and the nation is becoming de-Christianized as people accommodate themselves to a society which is militantly secular and highly materialistic. Media which glorify

sex, easy access to pornography, rap music that extols killing, the acceptance of all life styles as valid in the name of tolerance, schools that teach children about sexuality and provide them the means to practice it, and a myriad of similar influences which operate steadily, but silently, undermine traditional family values and mitigate against the transmission of Christian beliefs and traditions from generation to generation.

Pope John Paul II drew a distinction between secularity and secularism. The former is advantageous in a pluralistic society as it separates the political realm from the religious. Secularity implies that the state is non-clerical and is concerned solely with the temporal concerns of its people, leaving the religious sphere to operate as it sees fit. A state founded on secularity ensures the free exercise of worship and of the spiritual, cultural and charitable activities of the communities of believers.

Secularism, in contrast, is an ideology that promotes indifference to religion and disallows any public expression of faith or religious considerations. It relegates faith to the private sphere and leads, over time, to restrictions on religious liberty, promoting contempt or ignorance of religion. A government based on secularism is intolerant of religion and attempts to impose its own values on the consciences of the people and exerts pressures to have religiously-based organizations operate according to totally secular norms, even when those norms violate the tenets of the religion.

Today, America is moving from the principles of secularity, upon which it was founded, to those of secularism. It is not a frontal assault on all religious expression, but is occurring on a consistent basis in innumerable ways. It is seen in the rejection of a display of the Ten Commandments in courthouses, in forbidding the saying of non-sectarian prayers in public schools, in forcing pharmacists to dispense birth control and abortifacient medications even if it goes against their consciences, in attempting to require Catholic hospitals to perform abortions, in trying to force the Boy Scouts to allow homosexual men to serve as scout leaders, in repeated actions to take the words “under God” out of the Pledge of Allegiance, in trying to mandate that Catholic social service agencies allow same-sex couples to adopt children, and the list goes on.

The movement toward secularism must be reversed or America as we know it will cease to exist. As then-Cardinal Ratzinger stated: “A culture and a nation that cuts itself off from the great ethical and religious forces of its own history commits suicide.”

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