

AlbertMohler.com

Mario Cuomo's Very Bad Idea

Monday, June 20, 2005

Former New York Governor Mario M. Cuomo proposes that President Bush should appoint a "Task Force on Life and the Law" in order to solve the ethical impasse over human embryonic stem cell research.

Writing in today's edition of [The New York Times](#), Cuomo cites President Bush's concern for the human dignity of the embryo. "No doubt the president's belief that human life begins with fertilization is shared by millions of Americans, including many Christians and evangelists. But it remains a minority view and one that the president applies inconsistently. Although Mr. Bush believes that destroying an embryo is murder, he refuses to demand legislation to stop commercial interests that are busily destroying embryos in order to obtain stem cells. If their conduct amounts to murder as the president contends, it is hardly satisfactory for him to say he will do nothing to stop the evil act other than to refuse to pay for it."

I think Mr. Cuomo probably meant *evangelicals* rather than evangelists, but his point is nevertheless clear. He believes that the President's position is ultimately based on Christian theological assumptions, and is therefore invalid as public policy.

Mr. Cuomo continues: "To extricate himself from an untenable position, the president should start by following the successful pattern established in other areas of dealing with the clash of religious and political questions, including the law concerning abortion. The right of true believers to live by their own religious beliefs will be guaranteed: no one will be compelled to use stem cell research or its products, just as no one will ever be compelled to have an abortion. And the nation will respect the right of believers to advocate for changes in our civil law that correspond with their own view of morality. But our pluralistic political system adopts rights that arise out of consensus, not the dictates of religious orthodoxy; and if such rights are adopted — approving abortions or financing stem cell research on leftover embryos — they will be the law of the land, even if religious dissenters, through their tax dollars, end up helping to pay for things that they find anathema. Every day Americans who abhor the death penalty, contraceptives, abortions and war are required to pay taxes used in part for purposes they consider offensive. That is part of the price we pay for this uniquely successful democracy."

In order to plot a way through this perceived impasse, Mr. Cuomo suggests the formation of a task force much like the [Task Force on Life and the Law](#) that exists in New York State. "The best way to test that proposition would be to employ a panel of respected scientists, humanists and religious leaders to consider testimony from bioscience experts describing when consciousness first appears, when viability outside the womb usually occurs, and how other religions treat the subject. They would then provide their conclusions to lawmakers."

Mr. Cuomo never even mentions the [President's Council on Bioethics](#) chaired by [Professor Leon Kass](#) of the [University of Chicago](#), presumably because its advice isn't consistent with his own agenda. Mr. Cuomo, you should remember, is known for his 1984 [speech](#) at the [University of Notre Dame](#) in which he argued that a Catholic who holds political office is not obligated to uphold Catholic convictions on issues like abortion — at least when it comes to public policy. This is the position he now urges upon President Bush.

Missing from Gov. Cuomo's speech — and from his op-ed column in [The New York Times](#), is any reference to the statesman's responsibility to use his influence to shape and form public policy toward goals that would uphold human dignity and human life. Gov. Cuomo says we should base policies in these areas on public consensus. I am quite certain he would not apply this across the board — trusting the American people to decide issues like abortion. That's why the left talks consensus and then heads for the courts — in order to gain by judicial fiat what they cannot win by the political

process.

GOOD LINKS BY CONSENSUS: Mario M. Cuomo, [Not On Faith Alone](#), [The New York Times](#), Monday, June 20, 2005; Governor Mario M. Cuomo, [Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective](#), a speech delivered at the [University of Notre Dame](#), September 13, 1984.

Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.