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The Kerry Doctrine: The Separation of Church and Morality

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This past July, the Vatican released a bold statement calling on Catholic legislators and politicians to oppose homosexual marriage as a matter of Catholic duty [see Web Log August 4, 2003, below] The statement bears papal authority and is official church teaching. It not only instructs Catholic politicians to oppose homosexual marriage, but also provides a moral argument as foundation: "Given the values at stake in this question, the State could not grant legal standing to such unions without failing in its duty to promote and defend marriage as an institution essential to the common good." [see Vatican statement]

Sen. John Kerry, the Massachusetts Democrat running for his party's 2004 presidential nomination, rushed to distance himself from the Vatican statement. Kerry is Catholic, a matter of no little consequence in Massachusetts politics. But the Kerry campaign quickly insisted that the candidate's Catholicism would have nothing to do with his political decisions.

"John Kerry believes deeply in separation of church and state and does not accept edicts from any religious leaders," retorted Kelly Benander, a spokeswoman for the senator. [see Boston Herald article] Obviously not. Kerry supports abortion, homosexual rights legislation, and the legal recognition of homosexual unions.

"I believe in the Church and I care about it enormously," Kerry later claimed. "But I think that it's important to not have the Church instructing politicians. That is an inappropriate line in America." That line was drawn by President Kennedy, Kerry argued, "and I believe we need to stand up for that line today."

John Kennedy did draw that line as a presidential candidate when on September 12, 1960, he addressed a group of Southern Baptist pastors in Houston, TX. Anti-Catholic prejudice led many evangelicals [especially in the South] to oppose Kennedy. The candidate, also then a Democratic senator from Massachusetts, insisted that his Catholicism would have nothing to do with his governance. Like Kerry, Kennedy invoked the doctrine of the separation of church and state:

"Whatever issue may come before me as President, if I should be elected — on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling, or any other subject — I will make my decision in accordance with these views, in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be in the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressure or dictate. And no power or threat of punishment could cause me to decide otherwise." [see text of Kennedy speech]

Of course, what Kennedy and Kerry really mean is not just the separation of church and state, but the separation of church and morality. Following their logic, the church should simply shut up about moral issues when it comes to legislation. Leave the political process alone, and go back to the confessional, they charge.

We now know that President Kennedy not only did not let his Catholicism get in the way of his politics, he didn't let Christian morality stand in the way of his sexual liaisons. The Pope had no influence over President Kennedy in the Oval Office or the bedroom.

How can anyone expect the likes of Kennedy and Kerry to support the institution of marriage when Kennedy was a serial adulterer and Kerry divorced his first wife? [see MSNBC article] As the feminists constantly remind us, the personal is the political.

Liberal politicians such as Sen. Edward Kennedy and Sen. Kerry claim their Catholic identity when it helps, but run from the Church's teaching on a host of moral issues.

All nine of the major Democratic presidential candidates have thrown their support to the homosexual agenda, with Sen. Kerry bragging before the Human Rights Campaign that "Before Ellen Degeneres, before Will and Grace, before anyone knew who Melissa Etheridge was, before there had been a march on Washington when it was radioactive, I was the only United States senator . . . to vote against the Defense of Marriage Act." [see Crosswalk.com coverage]

Clearly, we are not dealing here with a tortured conscience. These candidates are brazen in their disobedience to Church and Scripture. And they are getting away with it.

This is not just a Catholic problem. Rep. Dick Gephardt [D-MO] is a member of a Baptist church. Politicians of every denomination reject the moral authority of their faith on a regular basis. The Southern Baptists who cheered Kennedy's pledge not to take his Catholicism into the Oval Office reaped the whirlwind when President Bill Clinton [a member of a Southern Baptist church] followed his example.

The Kerry Doctrine is not really about the separation of church and state, but the separation of church and public morality. Even when it comes to an institution as basic as marriage, the church is told to back off, keep silent, and mind its own business.

The Pope demonstrated great courage in staring down Catholic politicians and reminding them that Catholics bear a moral responsibility to be Catholic. How many evangelical pastors have the courage to read their own members the riot act? How many churches will summon the courage to discipline their own members when they deny the faith?

The victory of the Kerry Doctrine will mean a fully secularized America. Is this what Americans really want?

