

More on Professor George & Ground Zero

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 17, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Professor Rick Garnett, who teaches law at the University of Notre Dame and runs the blog *Mirror of Justice*, [has taken issue](#) [1] with my article yesterday about the Ground Zero mosque, specifically where I called out Professor Robert George for failing to defend, not the Muslims who wish to build the mosque, but the principle of religious freedom at stake. He objects specifically to my calling Professor George and Mr. Charles Colson frauds and says that the charge is "unworthy" of me.

Professor Garnett is correct when he writes, "We do this too much in our public conversations, I think (I am guilty of this sometimes too, I am sure): "You say you are on the side of the angels, but you have failed to condemn publicly [insert outrageous act or current controversy] and so . . . gotcha! You are a fraud!?" In normal circumstances, this is undoubtedly the case, but this is not what I did. Given the fact that it is summertime and people are on vacation, I did not write about Professor George's silence until I realized how prolix he had been regarding the deficiencies of Judge Vaughn Walker's ruling overturning Proposition 8 in California. I searched through ten pages of Google searches to see if Professor George had weighed in somewhere other than on his website. And, when his fellow Manhattan Declaration draftee, Charles Colson, showed himself to be a simple bigot on the issue, well, it became time to write about it.

I wish to be very clear here. The issue of whether or not a group of Muslims can build a mosque two blocks from Ground Zero is not a small question. It certainly has not been immune to press coverage. (Don't you like the way conservatives have begun criticizing President Obama for politicizing the issue, as if Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich and Eric Cantor and John Boehner and Lord knows who else had not already politicized it!) This is not about finding out more on the funding of the mosque, or the ridiculous things their Imam may have said, unless anyone can show me an instance of a similar investigation of funding and foolishness for the building of a church. (And if, as some suggest, the imam who wishes to build the mosque has some actual ties to terrorism, then let the FBI get involved.) The issue of whether or not this group and this imam have the right to build a mosque undoubtedly fits the concerns raised by Professor George and Mr. Colson in their little manifesto. *I* did not say they can never be silent on the issue of religious liberty. *They* said they can never be silent on the issue of religious liberty. Well, if this is not the moment to stand up and be counted, when is?

Professor Garnett had posted [an earlier comment](#) [2] about the ground zero mosque controversy. It is brilliant, on-point, all the things we have come to expect from his fine mind and his skillful pen. Had Professor George used his website to link to Professor Garnett's post, I should have been wrong and "unworthy" in writing what I did. That same website did manage to link to [Ross Douthat's confused ramblings](#) [3] in yesterday New York Times in which he compares the "two Americas," only one of which is religiously inflected. Douthat includes this priceless gem, in establishing his suspicions about the imam behind the mosque project: "For Muslim Americans to integrate fully into our national life, they'll need leaders who don't describe America as "an accessory to the crime" of 9/11?" But, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, who hail from Douthat's second America which "looks back to a particular religious heritage: Protestantism originally, and then a Judeo-Christian consensus that accommodated Jews and Catholics as well," were the first people to place the blame for 9/11 upon Americans. "The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be

mocked,? Falwell said on *The 700 Club*: ?And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way -- all of them who have tried to secularize America -- I point the finger in their face and say ?You helped this happen.?? So, perhaps the imam is a card-carrying member of the Moral Majority? Would that make Douthat and Colson think better of him? Could he build his mosque then?

Whenever I disagree with Professor Garnett, such disagreement always makes me think again on any topic. But, it is painful to disagree with someone I respect when there is a personal aspect to the disagreement. I understand his loyalty to his friend, Professor George. He, like others, assures me that Professor George is an upstanding person, a fine scholar, a great teacher. He may be all those things in spades for all I know. Another mutual friend of Professor George?s and me wrote a note observing: ?Even if you conclude that someone advocates a policy that contradicts one of his own principles, that only makes him inconsistent or foolish, not fraudulent.? I recognize the distinction although, for someone who claims to be a philosopher, the charge of inconsistency is a grave one, and I have watched Professor George in action and he is no fool.

Fraudulence is when a person presents themselves in one way but connives to achieve other, opposed objectives. Unless Professor George has the gumption to stand up to some of his fellow political conservatives, to stand up for religious freedom and for the Constitution at a time when some of his fellow conservatives are using the issue to whip up the basest of passions, unless he is willing to recognize that, throughout history, it is not merely ?the government? but the mob which is prone to threaten religious liberties, then, yes, I am afraid he is a fraud. I need scarcely add that George will be more believable when voicing his concern for the religious freedom of Catholics if he stands up for the religious freedom of Muslims! And, if he does so stand up, I shall be the first to applaud him. But, the time is now and the issue is squarely before the American people. This mosque is our Dreyfus. It is time to stand up and be counted. If any one of us is expected to take the Manhattan Declaration seriously, it is time to apply its words to lower Manhattan where the cause of religious liberty is at stake.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/23/2017 - 18:21): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/more-professor-george-ground-zero>

Links:

[1] <http://mirrorofjustice.blogs.com/mirrorofjustice/2010/08/religiousliberty-hypocrisy.html>

[2] <http://mirrorofjustice.blogs.com/mirrorofjustice/2010/08/more-on-the-mosque.html>

[3] http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/16/opinion/16douthat.html?_r=1&src=me&ref=opinion