

Weigel's Tendentiousness

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 30, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

[Over at First Things](#) [1] and in his weekly column distributed to various Catholic papers, George Weigel asks "What Kind of Country Do You Want?" The short answer, of course, is a country with a higher standard of intellectual life such that it would recognize agitprop like Weigel's essay for the partisan hackery it is. For the long answer, let's take Weigel's options one by one.

Weigel writes: "Do you want to live in an America with a robust array of legally-protected civil society institutions, supported by volunteerism and charitable giving? Or do you want to live in an America in which the government occupies more and more of the public square, squeezing to the margins of our common life the voluntary associations that have long enriched our democracy?" Ah, the problem with binary choices. I want which the government does more, not less, to support civil society. With the Republicans, I want better legal protections for the autonomy and integrity of the institutions of civil society. With the Democrats, I want government funding to help make those civil society institutions viable, which they would not be if they were reliant solely on charitable giving. Also, do you notice how Mr. Weigel neglects to mention that President Obama not only retained the Faith-Based Initiative Office George Bush set up, he actually gave it more money, much of which has gone to institutions of civil society like Catholic Charities? One of the problems with the HHS mandate is that it runs counter to the whole logic of Obama's Faith-Based Office. And, unlike Weigel, I want the government to step up to the plate when volunteerism and charitable giving and the market are not enough to meet basic human needs like universal access to health care.

Weigel writes: "Do you want to live in an America in which the national government recognizes that certain moral truths about the human person stand in judgment on law and public policy? Or do you want to live in an America in which utility, not dignity, is the governmental measure of the human person?" Neither party has a monopoly on human dignity, as Cardinal Dolan pointed out in his remarks at the Al Smith dinner—in fact, the Dems do a better job protecting most of the "un's" than the Republicans, although I will grant that the Democrats' failure to extend their concern to the unborn is not only an anomaly, it is a moral outrage and a sin against social justice. As for utility, well, I almost laughed out loud. Can you think of a Catholic who has been more prominent in the effort to baptize the American founding even though the founders almost to a number considered religion important primarily because it would make the citizenry more moral and a moral citizenry was necessary for the health of a democracy. In short, utilitarianism. Me? I believe the Church's teachings not because I think they will make America great, nor that they will make me more prosperous, nor that they will make me happier or a better person. I believe them because I think they are true and you will search in vain among the writings of the most prominent founders—Washington, Jefferson, Adams, Madison or Franklin—to find anyone who embraces Christian ethics as true because revealed as opposed to true because consonant with their own moral intuitions.

Weigel writes: "Do you want to live in an America that is recovering a sense of the decencies, a country in which moral conviction born of biblical faith is welcomed in public life and neither the culture nor the government deplore biblical morality as irrational bigotry? Or do you want to live in an America in which both culture and the government think of human beings as bundles of desires that public policy and the public purse

are supposed to satisfy?an America of Sandra Flukes?? I will stipulate that Ms. Fluke is well past her fifteen minutes of fame and that her comments against the Church?s right to religious freedom are outrageous in every way. But, I also think it was indecent of an entire audience full of GOP debate watchers to cheer the prospect of a man dying in the hospital because he lacked health insurance. I think it is indecent for Mr. Romney to refer to undocumented immigrants as ?illegals,? turning an adjective into a noun, demeaning fellow human beings whom, as the Holy Father reminded us yesterday, have a fundamental right to migrate in search of a better life.

Weigel writes: ?Do you want to live in an America that respects the inalienable right to life declared in the Declaration of Independence?an America that gladly affords legal protection to the unborn, the radically handicapped, and the elderly because it has rejected what Blessed John Paul II called the ?culture of death? and has rebuilt a robust and compassionate culture of life? Or do you want to live in an America in which an unborn child has less legal protection than a protected species of wolf in a national park?an America in which the mildest criticism of Planned Parenthood results in your being denounced by both public officials and the media?? I will make no defense of President Obama?s position on abortion. It is indefensible in my eyes. I will point out that when Bl. John Paul II used the phrase ?culture of death? he had more in mind than America?s legal framework.

Weigel writes: ?Do you want to live in a country that cherishes and protects religious freedom in full? Or do you want to live in a country where religious freedom has been dumbed-down to a ?privacy? right to certain weekend leisure activities?? Mr. Romney has pledged to protect religious freedom. He has also pledged to support Arizona?s anti-immigrant law. If Mr. Weigel were honest, and he apparently is something less than honest as the election nears, he would point out to his readers that the USCCB has filed an amicus brief against the Arizona law. That brief argues, in part, that the Arizona violates the Church?s religious freedom. The bishops of Alabama have done the same in opposition to that state?s anti-immigrant law. So, neither party is exactly clean when it comes to religious liberty.

Weigel writes: ?Do you want to live in an economically robust America in which earning a living is not only possible, but is celebrated as a dignified expression of responsibility and self-respect? Or do you want to live in an America in which the national government is the primary economic actor?? Hmmm. Economically robust like the last time we had a Republican in the White House? I would also point out that Mr. Romney did more than earn a living and I do not celebrate venture/vulture capitalists nor respect men or women who made their fortunes in that line of work. Better to be a prostitute who actually works for his or her money as the French theologians ruled in the Middle Ages, allowing prostitutes to keep their wages but forcing bankers to return their ill-gotten gains! And, if Mr. Romney intends to keep his promise to increase defense spending, I suppose that will keep the federal government as the ?primary economic actor? no?

Weigel writes: ?Do you want to live in a responsible society or an entitlement society?? Easy one. Both. I want people to be responsible and I want them to be entitled to the necessities of life ? shelter, food, health care, and retirement security.

Weigel writes, "Do you want to live in an America that is pioneering new ways of combining economic growth, the empowerment of the poor, compassion for the underprivileged, and fiscal responsibility, thereby setting a new path for the democracies of the 21st century? Or do you want to live in a country that spends profligately and burdens future generations with both unpayable debt and the economic stagnation that sky-high debt-service causes?" How many false choices can he fit into one paragraph? Of course, the Ryan budget is not exactly a deficit reduction plan, is it? Have to get those uber-rich folk their tax cuts first. And, while I have heard lip service about empowering the poor and compassion for the underprivileged, I have not seen much in the way of policy, unless you count cleaning already cleaned pots and pans a conferral of privilege. Bonus question for Mr. Weigel: Who was the last president to balance the federal budget and has he endorsed one of the two candidates in this race? Hint: He has a southern accent and you hated him too.

Weigel writes: "Do you want to live in an America that is respected throughout the world for being just as well as strong, an America that supports others' quest for freedom? Or are you resigned to living in a world where jihadists murder American diplomats, tear down the U.S. flag, and raise the flag of radical Islam over U.S. embassies with impunity?" Actually, I am not particularly worried about flag-flying, but I am worried about how to confront jihadism. I think having Libyans confront the jihadists is better than having American troops confront them. I also think America is more respected today than it was when Mr. Bush was in office and that given Mr. Romney's, ehem, malleability on foreign policy, the fact that he is surrounded by Bushies does not bode well.

Weigel writes: "Do you want to live in an America that combines its traditional hospitality to the stranger with respect for the rule of law? Or do you want to live in a country in which demagoguery makes it virtually impossible to create sane immigration policies?" Demagoguery? Which party kept Tom Tancredo in its bosom? What is Weigel's definition of "sane"?

Weigel writes: "Do you want to live in a country that has rebuilt a public culture of civility? Or do you want to live in an America in which the politically incorrect are decried as Nazis?" I must say, Republicans calling for civility after all the abuse hurled at President Obama, from the lunatic questions about his place of birth to a congressman shouting "You Lie!" to House Republicans and Fox News' bizarre conspiracy theories about the attack on the embassy in Benghazi (I can think of several reasons why the administration might not want to have advertised the fact that they knew a terrorist cell was behind the attack, starting with their desire to apprehend the attackers!), well, this is rich. I do not think it is appropriate to call opponents Nazis, and hate it when Democrats do it or Republicans. But, I do seem to remember plenty of Tea Party rallies with pictures of the President defaced to make him look like Hitler.

In all Christian charity, George Weigel is so openly uncritical and biased, it is worse than a shame that this drivel is published in any Catholic newspaper in America. He is entitled to be a political hack if he wants, but it is obscene for him to think he can dress up in Catholic drag and pretend that these biased, tendentious rants have anything to do with forming a faithful conscience.

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