

Mozilla, World Vision & The Culture Wars

Michael Sean Winters | Apr. 8, 2014 Distinctly Catholic

The CEO of Mozilla was recently forced out when it was disclosed that he donated to the campaign for Proposition 8 in California, which banned gay marriage. And, World Vision recently reversed a decision to hire people who have contracted a same-sex marriage after donors to the charity objected. Both [Robert George](#) [1] and [Mark Silk](#) [2] have commented on the situation and Silk makes the more salient observations.

It should not surprise that Professor George only considers the Mozilla case. That focus permits him to launch into his full-blown prophet of doom mode. He writes:

Catholics, Evangelicals, Orthodox Christians, Mormons, observant Jews, Muslims, and others had better stand together and face down the bullies, and they had better do it now, or else they will be resigning themselves and their families to a very unhappy status in this society. A very unhappy status indeed. When tactics of intimidation succeed, their success ensures that they will be used more and more often in more and more contexts to serve more and more causes. And standing up to intimidation will become more and more difficult. And more and more costly. And more and more dangerous.

George frets about a slippery slope: If a CEO can be hounded from office for standing against gay marriage, what is to prevent a different CEO from being hounded from office because she opposes legal abortion? I am resistant to slippery slope arguments in the first place, and it is telling that George does not recognize the way some gay rights advocates also worry about a slippery slope, and their worries, like the worries of all minorities, have greater historical currency: If you can deny a person one right, what is to keep you from denying her other rights?

The slippery slope that George invokes for abortion, however, unwittingly illustrates the danger of the neo-con approach to the issue. As I have noted before, our pro-life opposition to abortion should not be based not on the depth of our religious convictions, but on the violence of the act. Every time we in the pro-life movement address the issue of abortion, we need to keep the focus on what abortion is and does, not on some abstract moral law, not on our strongly held convictions, not on what legal abortion does or does not say about societal permissiveness or legal reasoning. The brutality of the act itself is the thing that will, God willing, some day bring an end to the scourge.

I agree with Professor George that the sacking of the CEO of Mozilla was wrong. He has every right to support whatever causes he wishes. And, we should all be alarmed at the prospect of some who supports traditional marriage, a position that Barack Obama held until yesterday, is somehow now *persona non grata*. But, to be clear, the government did not force the CEO out. The 'culture' did not force the CEO out. The company, concerned about an impact on profitability, forced the CEO out. In our culture, money trumps all, and I look forward to reading Professor George's searing critique of the free market.

Those of us who support traditional marriage have been painted as bigots, but the pro-traditional marriage advocates handed their opponents the paint brushes and the paint-by-number kit. The issue of same-sex marriage has been spoken of, better to say ranted about, in histrionic terms, as a civilizational threat, with no

effort to consider the good faith of those on the other side. A very complicated issue has been turned into a mortar in the culture wars which, in turn, justifies more ranting, more slippery slope arguments, more prophecies of doom, more agitated people and, therefore, more contributions to the groups fighting for the cause. It is unseemly at best. It is unchristian at worst.

I simply do not understand why advocates for traditional marriage believe that once they know this one discrete thing about a person, that the person is gay, then all hell breaks loose. I am not going to give *them* employment benefits! I am not going to bake *them* a wedding cake! *Their* kids better not try and come to *our* Catholic schools. Is this how Christians should act and speak? I thought we were supposed to be known by our love. The Mandatum rite may be optional in the Diocese of Madison, but the Great Commandment to love one another is not optional in terms of our Christian witness. Where has the love been in the campaigns to defend traditional marriage? Why must that defense be predicated on a perceived "assault" on traditional marriage from gay people who wish to solemnize and legally regularize their relationships?

Toleration is an ambivalent thing. Our neo-con friends pine for the days when civil religion, a mostly anodyne mainstream Protestantism, set the tone for American culture. The head of the Napa Institute claims that fifty years ago, the culture was receptive to the Christian faith, ignoring Jim Crow, rampant commercialism and materialism, and the ever more powerful military-industrial complex. It was Ike who warned us about this last item, and it is Ike whom the neo-con advocates of civil religion claim as one of their own. He famously said that "our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply-held religious faith, and I don't care what it is." There is civic religion in all its ecumenical glory. But, people forget that Ike added, "With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept, but it must be a religion with all men are created equal." So, even Ike set a limit on the kind of religion that was acceptable, it "must be" a religion that proclaimed the equality of all people. This is an old story. Since the Reformation, hell, since the Garden, the dictates of God have been made subservient to the dictates of man. Yet, for the neo-cons, it all happened in the past fifty years and the Obama presidency is like a secular armored brigade for aggressive secularism. I am not buying it.

World Vision was also concerned about money in making its decision. Not in a bad way. No charity can long continue to do its good work, and World Vision does very good work, if that charity angers its donors. The organization is within its rights to determine its basic character and, as an arm of the church, it should be given wide latitude by the government, and the culture, to pursue its goals as it sees fit. I do not see why any charitable organization would decide it doesn't want to hire gay men or women, but a religious organization should have the right to set its terms of employment in ways other non-religious organizations do not. Still, I do not see how hostility to gay men and women has become a hallmark of orthodoxy in our day and I do not believe that hostility furthers the mission of the Church.

Our culture is ever in tension between the City of God and the City of Man. The path advocated by the moral scolds is quite rightly rejected but not, primarily, because of any harm it inflicts on gay men and women. The real problem for the leaders of the Christian churches is the harm that the moral scolds self-inflict on the Church. We follow the Lord Jesus who famously said, "Judge not, lest ye be judged," and the neo-cons have a fondness for judgment. Pope Francis has pointed us towards a better way, a way of dialogue, of solidarity, of walking with people and acquiring their smell, no matter who they are and no matter what they do. Judgment divorced from such solidarity and love is unworthy of the Christian Church.

At the end of his essay, Mark Silk asks:

Had Mozilla and World Vision not been faced with these boycotts, they presumably would have stuck to their guns. Had they stuck to their guns regardless, I would have admired them. But the power of the purse proved more powerful than all other considerations.

For those who don't like the cause for which that power is wielded, it's called bullying. For those who do, it's called principled behavior. Is there anything I'm missing?

No, Professor Silk, you are not missing anything. You are simply witnessing the predictable outcome of those whose culture war mentality distorts Christian witness.

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[1] <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2014/04/what-mozilla-means>

[2] <http://marksilk.religionnews.com/2014/04/07/mozilla-world-vision-and-the-power-of-the-purse/>