

Bp Cupich on Same Sex Marriage

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 6, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

How should bishops conduct themselves in the public square? The question is as relevant as ever, as the Church finds herself at odds with strong cultural attitudes on a range of issues from the right-to-life, to traditional marriage, to the defense of union rights, to religious liberty. Given our media culture, the loudest and most obnoxious voices are the only ones that get heard. And, so, when a bishop compares President Obama to Hitler and Stalin, that makes news. But, does it persuade anyone?

Culture wars, as the phrase implies, can get especially ugly because the issues run more deeply than mere policy differences, engaging fundamental culture notions, ideas about the nature and extent of human rights, the role of law in society, the relationship between religious values and public policy in a pluralistic country. But, must these issues always be understood in war-like metaphors?

I think the answer to both questions above ? must we Catholics behave as warriors and does a warrior approach persuade ? is No. And, by way of evidence, I would like to call readers? attention to [a pastoral letter read at all Masses](#) [1]this past weekend in the Diocese of Spokane from Bishop Blase Cupich. Washington State will have a referendum on same sex marriage this November, even though Washington State already has civil unions that confer all the rights that attend to marriage on same-sex partners. The debate has generated a lot of strong feelings and, in his letter, Bishop Cupich addresses those feelings:

Admittedly, the conflicting positions of this issue are deeply held and passionately argued. Proponents of the redefinition of marriage are often motivated by compassion for those who have shown courage in refusing to live in the fear of being rejected for their sexual orientation. It is a compassion that is very personal, for those who have suffered and continue to suffer are close and beloved friends and family members. It is also a compassion forged in reaction to tragic national stories of violence against homosexuals, of verbal attacks that demean their human dignity, and of suicides by teens who have struggled with their sexual identity or have been bullied because of it. As a result, supporters of the referendum often speak passionately of the need to rebalance the scales of justice. This tends to frame the issue as a matter of equality in the minds of many people, a value that is deeply etched in our nation?s psyche.

Likewise, many opponents of the law redefining marriage have close friends and family members who are gay or lesbian. They too recognize the importance of creating a supporting environment in society for everyone to live a full, happy and secure life. Yet, they also have sincere concerns about what a redefinition of marriage will mean for the good of society and the family, both of which face new strains in our modern world. They are asking the public to take a serious and dispassionate look at what a radical break with centuries of marriage law and practice will mean.

What is remarkable about these paragraphs is that Bishop Cupich does not demean those whose views are different from his own. He does not distort or mischaracterize those views. Indeed, he recognizes that, seen from a certain point of view, these attitudes are entirely understandable. I dare say that any proponent of same sex marriage would have to allow that the bishop?s words are not only not incendiary, they are the fruit of a desire

to understand, evidence of a stance of primordial respect for all people. And, in stating the views of those with whom he does agree, he is careful to insist that the Church's commitment to marriage is not the stuff of mere bigotry but comes from a genuine concern about the state of traditional marriage and a recognition of the profound importance of traditional family life in the health of any society. Indeed, Cupich goes on to write:

But, I also want to be very clear that in stating our position the Catholic Church has no tolerance for the misuse of this moment to incite hostility towards homosexual persons or promote an agenda that is hateful and disrespectful of their human dignity.

He then goes on to cite a document issued by the bishops, Ministry to Persons With a Homosexual Inclination, which in turn cites both the Catechism of the Catholic Church and a document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This last is especially bracing given the usual media narrative that the Catholic Church hates gays.

It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs.

Sadly, too many Catholics, on the blogosphere, in the pulpit, and at the water cooler, do not echo these words from the CDF, still less that kind of language found in Bishop Cupich's truly remarkable letter. I am not a fan of the culture warrior model, but admit there are times when I wonder if the culture is not moving in certain ways that are so hostile to the Church, that such a model will become unavoidable. But, now, when I despair that such may be the case, I can re-read this letter to the Catholics of Spokane and take heart. We can be faithful and reasonable, faithful and respectful, faithful and persuasive. We must, as Catholics and as Americans, care about our culture, but we don't have to dress up as warriors to express our concern, and Bishop Cupich has shown the way.

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[1] http://www.dioceseofspokane.org/news_detail.php?id=212