

Using Caesar's Sword to Promote Christian Marriage

There has been a discussion at TitusOneNine about the movement among Christians and other groups in California – including Hindus and Muslims – to organization in opposition to same-sex marriage. At least one individual who claims to be an orthodox Christian is opposed to this because it means Christians are "manipulating Caesar to force Christian sacraments on the empire. . . . Conservative christianity cannot be salt and light by means of Caesar's sword."

This is my response.

In the history of Christian social thought, there have been at least the following models of the relation between church and state:

1) Separatist—the model of radical Anabaptism. The most vivid contemporary example might be the Amish, who, as much as possible, live separately from the rest of the culture, do not participate in politics, do not bear arms, live in their own communities.

2) Government as corrective of sin—Augustinian/Lutheran. In a fallen world, the primary responsibility of government is to punish evildoers and provide a safe space for the Church to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. Luther's "two swords" analogy illustrates the distinction. There are some things the state does that the church does not do, and vice versa. The state enforces law and executes punishment on criminals; the church does not.

3) Promotion of the Common Good—Thomist/Aristotelian/Hooker's Anglicanism. "It is not good for the man to be alone." God created human beings to be social animals. For humans to live together, there needs to be government to enable cooperation

to promote human flourishing. The state not only punishes wrong-doers, but also takes positive steps to enhance human community and preserve the orders of creation. For example, anyone who uses the internet or drives an automobile on public streets is benefiting from a state that takes positive measures to promote the common good.

4) Transformationist-Calvinist. Inasmuch as possible, the state should work to transform society to promote Christian values, and anticipate the Kingdom of God. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech is a prime example. As I was watching the speeches at the Democratic convention last night, and I heard Ted Kennedy preach "Health care is a right, not a privilege!," I was aware of just how much this Calvinist vision is alive in American culture.

5) Catholic subsidiarity/Reformed sphere sovereignty. (David Koyzis discusses this in his *Political Visions and Illusions* (InterVarsity, 2003)). There are numerous groups and cultures within a given society—churches, government, businesses, voluntary organizations, clubs, guilds, schools, etc. Each has its own realm of integrity and problems happen when groups trespass their bounds. The realms of the family or the schools, for example, are not the realms of either the state or the church; they have a genuine integrity of their own that both state and church need to respect.

6) Secularist separatism. Religion is a private matter of individuals and voluntary organizations. The realm of government is the realm of the public. The government should respect the right of religions to keep their own rules within their private environs, but the churches have no right to impose their private morality on the state or culture as a whole, and, if necessary, the state can pass laws that affect public matters that private voluntary organizations like churches must respect. So, for example, a Christian wedding photographer can be fined for refusing to photograph same-sex

blessings. Catholic adoption agencies cannot discriminate against unmarried or gay couples.

There are, of course, other models.

Of the above six models, only 1) and 6) would suggest that the church has no business pushing against same-sex marriage. In any society of which Christians are citizens, Christians have the same privilege and duty to act in the public square as do other citizens. My own leanings are toward models 3) and 5). I would argue that heterosexual marriage is neither a creation of the state nor of the church, but is an ordinance of creation that pre-existed both. From a theological view, Genesis 1 and 2 is decisive. From an anthropological and historical view, it is clear that the heterosexual family predates not only government, but also cities and cultures. It was the heterosexual family that enabled cities, cultures, and eventually governments to be formed.

If the purpose of the government is to promote the common good, then the government has a moral obligation to promote the prospering of the heterosexual family, and to discourage cultural movements that would harm it. At the same time, because the family is a separate sphere, the government has to respect its freedom in that sphere. The government, for example, has no right to create a new definition of family by blessing same-sex unions. That is a violation of the family's sphere of sovereignty. Because there needs to be some kind of coordination for human cooperation to take place, and there needs to both positive and negative enforcement of activities that benefit or harm the family, the government (by default) can establish laws to regulate such things as legal age of marriage, regulations of divorce, whether or not polygamy is permitted, compulsory childhood education, specific penalties for such specific violations of marital good as incest, domestic abuse, sexual predation, etc.

Similarly, the church also has the right to decide within its own sphere what are the requirements of Christian marriage, but the church neither creates marriage, nor has the right to change it. The church can forbid divorce to its members, specify who can or cannot be married within a church, but cannot bless things that would violate the very definition of marriage, e.g., same-sex unions.

Insofar as Christians are citizens, they certainly have not only the right, but the obligation to promote legislation that helps the family to flourish, and to resist legislation that harms it.

To complain that such legislation is coercive is to miss the point that all legislation is coercive. If the government passes a law that says I must drive on the right side of the street, I am interfering with the freedom of those of British ancestry who might prefer to drive on the left side of the street, but I am also preventing the deaths that would inevitably result if everyone was allowed the freedom to simply drive on whatever side of the street they preferred. Those who cannot have their sexual relationships blessed by the church or the state certainly have restrictions on their freedom to do what they wish, but this is true not only of same-sex couples, but of all whose sexual activity falls outside the norms of what it properly means to be family—certain consanguinous relationships, underage relationships, polygamy, etc.