

Election will debate freedom

Not all presidential elections are equal. It made a lot of difference to America's future that Andrew Jackson beat John Quincy Adams in 1828, that Abraham Lincoln bested Stephen A. Douglas in 1860, and that the twentieth century's two most influential presidents, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan, topped Herbert Hoover and Jimmy Carter, respectively. Conversely, it's not easy to see that the Republic was decisively affected by James Polk's victory over Henry Clay in 1844, Samuel Tilden's disputed loss to Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, or the see-saw between Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison in 1884, 1888 and 1892.

The presidential election of 2004 will be another nation-defining fork in the road.

Beneath the blizzard of rhetoric in recent months, two issues of grave importance have surfaced. The parties, the candidates and the American people seem deeply divided on them.

The first great issue in this election is the choice between the world imagined by "Sept. 10 people" and the world imagined by "Sept. 12 people."

For Sept. 10 people, what happened on Sept. 11, 2001, is best understood as a crime. On this analysis, the appropriate response to the crime of Sept. 11, and the way to prevent such criminal acts in the future, is



George Weigel

The Catholic Difference

through more vigilant and effective police work. Al-Qaeda and similar terrorist organizations should be dealt with in about the same way we deal with international criminal organizations: through enhanced intelligence, interdiction strategies and the use of international legal institutions.

For Sept. 12 people, Sept. 11 was an act of war. The appropriate response to an act of war, Sept. 12 people argue, is war: the use of proportionate and discriminate military force to defeat the aggressor and those who support aggression, to deter future predators, and to restore the necessary minimum of order to world affairs. Sept. 12 people agree with Sept. 10 people that the U.S. needs better intelligence-gathering and analysis; but Sept. 12 people are inclined to use that intelligence to take the battle, forcefully, to the enemy, whom they understand as a combatant, not a criminal.

The second great issue underlying the 2004 campaign involves the nature of freedom. Is freedom a means to satisfy personal "needs"? Or does freedom

have something to do with moral truth — with goodness? Is freedom doing things "my way"? Or is freedom doing the right thing for the right reasons in the right way, as a matter of habit (which is another name for "virtue")? Once again, the parties, the candidates and the nation seem sharply divided here.

The abortion debate, the struggle to define moral and legal boundaries for the development of biotechnology, and the question of a Federal Marriage Amendment are all expressions of this more fundamental division over the nature of freedom. If the argument for freedom as personal willfulness ("my way") prevails, it seems likely that abortion will remain unrestricted, the biotech industry virtually unregulated and "marriage" will mean, eventually, any configuration of consenting adults. If the argument prevails that freedom means freely choosing what we can know to be morally good, there may be a real chance to accelerate the building of a culture of life in America.

The two great questions before the Republic are, what is that freedom, and how shall we defend it? A lot of 21st century history will turn on how the American people answer those questions on Nov. 2.

George Weigel is a senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

LETTERS

Rejects idea that divorced means 'bad'

To the editor:

I would like to respond to the letter in which Henry Korytkowski says he is worried that the Catholic voters of the United States may vote for Sen. John Kerry because he is Catholic not realizing that he is divorced and remarried. Since when is someone a "bad" Catholic because he/she is divorced and remarried. Following this line of thinking, does that also make them a "bad" person? Does Mr. Korytkowski realize that a divorced person may not be the one who initiated the divorce, but maybe the one who the divorce was laid upon? Let's not judge, lest we be judged.

I was raised Catholic, went through 12 years of Catholic education and Mass every Sunday. I have never been in trouble with the law, have a college education and, good to my Catholic roots, do not believe in abortion or the death penalty. I was married to a Catholic man who later saw other opportunities and divorced me. By Mr. Korytkowski's line of thinking, I am a "bad" Catholic:

I am now remarried and my Lutheran husband and I have found a Catholic church that accepts both of us. I am tired of being judged because I have been

divorced. Shouldn't we accept each other for the person we are and how we treat others and not on the circumstances of our lives?

I know when I die I will be accepted into the most loving and forgiving arms imaginable, those of God.

Susan D'Arienzo
Pemberton Road,
Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: Regarding questions from other readers: According to reports in secular media, Kerry's first marriage was annulled by the church in 1995.

Suffering child is ours

To the editor:

When I pulled out your March 11 issue from my mailbox and looked at the most heart-moving picture of that beautiful young boy's grief and desperately hurt face — *and those eyes* — I cried. That was before I knew even what the article was about (human trafficking).

Then to read and know of *our children* being so abused, so deeply hurt. I cannot forget that face and those eyes. Today, to truly look at his eyes and what's in his little heart, I still cry. What if that precious small child was mine? Yours?

Though I cannot physically touch and hug that child, I pray that I and each of us will just reach out and touch another in need, in love and compassion from Jesus.

Judy Taylor
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Interlaken

New Courier 'important'

To the editor:

Thanks very much for the substantial investment that you made in redesigning the publication, and in making news from the diocese of Rochester more accessible by integrating it with our Sunday bulletin. This is an important step and provides vital news and

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