

# Laws should support the common good



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

Peter Finley Dunne, an Irish immigrant to the United States, was the author of a popular, nationally syndicated column that satirized, through the lips of his fictional Mr. Dooley, the rich and powerful and denounced, among other things, racism, the Spanish-American war and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Mr. Dooley once said, "Religion is a quare thing. Be itself it's all right. ... Alone it prepares a man f'r a better life. Combined with polly-ticks it hurries him to it."

Dunne's sentiments are probably shared by millions of Americans. Millions of others, such as evangelical Protestants and conservative Catholics, would not share Mr. Dooley's point of view or his sense of humor, of which they seem to have precious little.

They insist that people of faith have as much right to participate in the political process as any other citizens. If they think that their moral values, based solely on their own understanding of God's will, ought to be embodied in law or public policy, they have every right to try to make that case.

But they are no more correct than a Catholic bishop who might decide to run for the U.S. Senate. There would be no constitutional prohibition against such a candidacy. The question, however, is whether it would be prudent. James Madison, a Founding Father and our fourth president, warned against

factionalism as the great enemy of the public peace. He defined a faction as "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community" (Federalist Paper, No. 10).

He specifically included religious groups. The antidote to religious factionalism, he wrote, is the multiplicity of religious groups within a (lower-case) republican form of government.

Applying Madison's view to this year's election, the exercise of political muscle by evangelical Protestants would most effectively be countered, not by a political party, but by other religious groups, particularly other Christian churches.

"Faith" is not the private preserve of Christians, nor is Christianity the private preserve of evangelical, fundamentalist and Pentecostal Protestants. They are as different from Lutheranism,

Methodism, Presbyterianism and New England Congregationalism as Mel Gibson's form of Catholicism is from the mainstream Catholicism of Vatican II.

Religious groups can best support republican government by distinguishing between moral values grounded in their own confessional understanding of revelation, contained in the Bible and/or teachings of the church, and moral values whose validity can be established by reasoning and arguments unrelated to sacred texts and doctrines.

In the public forum, the only arguments that should bear on the framing of laws and governmental policies are those which are intelligible and persuasive even to citizens who have no sacred texts and doctrines. In a pluralistic society, laws and constitutional amendments that would regulate the conduct of minorities — be they religious, racial, ethnic or sexual — should only be approved if society judges them to be truly conducive to the common good.

God should have nothing explicitly to do with the process. A Christian group's convictions about the divine will can be judged by another Christian group as a form of heresy or fanaticism.

In the end, who speaks for Christian values and for Christianity itself?

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Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

## MORE LETTERS

ue of forgiveness? Yes, we have to stop those who hurt others, but do we have to kill them? Last I checked, thou shalt not kill was one of the pretty important commandments.

Although I came upon these values partly because of my Catholic roots, it seems to me that many of them are just "human values" that are shared by most people, regardless of their religion. If this administration is going to make decisions based on their Christian faith, then I hope they take a hard look at all the teachings of Jesus. In my estimation, they have missed some key ones.

Karen Crowe  
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## War in Iraq not 'pro-life'

To the editor:

UNICEF and the World Health Organization reported some time ago that more than one million Iraqi civilians died during the postwar 1990s as a result of the economic sanctions. They report that most of the Iraqi dead were children under the age of five. About 6,000 children died each month because of the sanctions. Also the bombings and strafings by the United States and Great Britain air forces added to the Iraqi disaster.

We must ask President Bush why we are bombing Baghdad neighborhoods again and again these days.

Our victims include Iraqi children, women, pregnant women and families. These bombings and the invasion of Iraq are identified as illegal by international law and the U.N. Are we acting as a Super Power Terrorist? Only the U.S. people can stop this illegal immoral war. How can we say we are pro-life when we bomb Iraqi children, pregnant women and families? If this happened to us, would we call it collateral damage, which is an illegal oxymoron?

War aborts human life outside the womb and inside the womb. Peace recognizes the sanctity of all life. Catholic Christian Faith, all Christian Faith — followers of Christ — are inspired by His teaching that we love God with all our being and love our neighbor as ourselves. These are imperatives via Jesus.

Do unto others as we would have them do unto us — another of Jesus' imperatives relevant to us today. Would we believe bombing our families and treasures are justified because of the SINS of our political leadership? What are we doing to the Iraqi people? There truly are better ways. We have Peace within each of us — let's get to work! Share Peace!

The road to a nation's sanity begins with praying for peace and then following through over and over again.

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