

FAITH & VALUES

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VOICES OF FAITH

Politics, religion and sex

By *Tim O'Toole*

They say there are three things you should never discuss with strangers: sex, politics and religion.

The tabloids deal with the first subject, while the news media overwhelm us with abundant coverage of the second.

That leaves religion and, where it overlaps with politics, theocracy.

Look around the globe, and wherever there is strife, it is likely rooted in strident positions on religion, morality, conformity with tradition, and subjugation of individuals — especially women.

Rape victims are vilified by their neighbors, or stoned by their own families. Gays and lesbians face life imprisonment in Uganda. Infidels and adulterers can be beheaded in some countries. India's Hindus and Pakistan's Muslims face off with nuclear weapons.

America should not act superior to these overseas examples. Battle lines being drawn in our own land threaten to impose a theocracy that turns its back on our history of pluralism, equal rights and women's liberation.

False prophets try to undo centuries of progress, castigating immigrants, demonizing religious minorities and restricting legal services and medical care for women.

A lot of this throwback activity occurs below the Mason-Dixon Line, but even here in Albany we see hypocrisy in a pseudo-ecumenical approach to undoing New York's mandate on access to birth control.

Even as Pope Francis suggests the Zika virus makes birth control morally acceptable, while mulling over the possibility of ordaining women as deacons, Catholic bishops joined by Episcopalians, Baptists and Lutherans seek to restrict women's access to birth control. Even hospital employees would be affected.

An unusual alliance of churches often at loggerheads over doctrinal issues has come together by the need to keep women in their place.

They send in their lawyers to punish those who do not subscribe to their narrow interpretation of ancient scriptures, condemn the poor to unwanted pregnancies, punish victims of rape and incest by giving a fetus unequal protection of the law, and then expect taxpayers to pick up the tab for unwanted or impoverished children.

Look around most churches on a Sunday morning. The majority of attendees are women. How ironic that the very denominations that depend on them for their very existence turn their back on them every Monday morning.

Is your denomination in such company?

Freedom of religion must also include freedom from religion. Without free choice, there can be no morality.

Tim O'Toole is a Presbyterian deacon and author of "The American Pope," a thriller about a secret society of liberal Catholics who plot to rig the next papal election.

