

Theocracy tarnishes democracy

By Tim O'Toole

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Once upon a time, we had it all figured out. After two centuries as a nation, we understood our Constitution. All men and women black and white were created equal. The vote, once the exclusive privilege of landed gentry, was extended to all citizens 18 and over. The sexual revolution removed government from our bedrooms, permitting people to choose their partners, while the Supreme Court upheld the right of women to choose, period.

Freedom of religion also meant freedom from religion. The Bill of Rights protected all Americans from the tyranny of the majority. Despite fears of papal rule, we elected a Catholic president in 1960, and survived the experience.

Now we face a new tyranny, empowered by modern media. Three out of four GOP candidates openly admit they would foist their religious beliefs on our pluralistic society. Wearing their religion on their sleeves, they would turn the clock back on contraception and abortion. Three white males seek to recreate a 19th-century patriarchy that would return women to second-class status in America.

Where logic does not support their position, they rely on dogma and selective interpretation of the Bible, with emphasis on the Old Testament, not the New. Public funding for Planned Parenthood clinics? Forget it. Gay marriage? Ditto.

What we are witnessing in 2012 is a tyranny of the minority. While our President prays in private, his opponents beat their breasts in public, with great fanfare, demonizing their opponents.

Alms for the poor? A bloated entitlement program. Social Security? Tolerated for the elderly, but young workers should gamble on 401(k)s.

Health insurance for all? Pure socialism. God forbid your private plan should pay for contraception, though Viagra is OK. At least that was the case until the President provided a compromise for Catholic hospitals and universities. Under the new federal mandate, insurers, not employers, will offer contraceptive care free of charge.

Religion can be a powerful force for good — a conscience affecting domestic and foreign policy. But when politicians embrace and impose sectarian dogma — ignoring science, history and social reality in the process — they undermine our Constitution and marginalize those with differing views. **Their theocracy tarnishes our democracy.**

At least the GOP offers alternative versions of theocracy:

One candidate claims his 2009 conversion to Catholicism has wiped his slate clean. "I've made mistakes in the past," he says — implying he won't make mistakes in the future. In his world, doctors can refuse to treat patients while pharmacists refuse to fill prescriptions if it offends their religious beliefs.

A second candidate would impose Catholic dogma on birth control, eliminating funding for Planned Parenthood, while opposing gay marriage.

The third, a libertarian obstetrician, proclaims his acceptance of Jesus Christ as his personal savior (on his website), yet protests that his faith is a private issue.

Rather than fix their sights on America's economy, as we encourage democracy and religious tolerance in the Middle East, these three self-proclaimed Christians have their eyes focused on America's groin. Human sexuality is their enemy.

The fourth candidate, a Mormon, thinks the poor are already taken care of. His policy paper reads like a business plan for America, devoid of the social gospel.

While right-wing fanatics insist the President is a Muslim, some evangelicals insist Mormons are not Christians. Allied with the Catholic church, they contend that a four-celled embryo is a person — just like a corporation.

There are glimmers of hope, as America's silent majority wakes up and smells the coffee. When the Susan Komen foundation suspended its grant to Planned Parenthood for breast cancer screening, there was a backlash from big and small donors. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg weighed in with big bucks, while thousands of individuals weighed in with tweets and blogs, forcing a reversal of Komen's politically tainted decision.

I have no trouble with people's expressions of faith, if they are not repressions of my own. I believe in the dignity of all human beings, including the right to love, the right to work, the right to plan a family —whatever its composition. And the right to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and comfort the afflicted.

Give me that old-time religion. The one a carpenter's son gave to his followers: "Love one another as I have loved you." We need not share beliefs to share values. Regardless of who wins in November, the poor will always be with us. Be concerned. America is not a gated community. Get used to it.

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