

THE POST-DISPATCH PLATFORM

I KNOW THAT MY RETIREMENT WILL MAKE NO DIFFERENCE IN ITS CARDINAL PRINCIPLES, THAT IT WILL ALWAYS FIGHT FOR PROGRESS AND REFORM, NEVER TOLERATE INJUSTICE OR CORRUPTION, ALWAYS FIGHT DEMAGOGUES OF ALL PARTIES, NEVER BELONG TO ANY PARTY, ALWAYS OPPOSE PRIVILEGED CLASSES AND PUBLIC PLUNDERERS, NEVER LACK SYMPATHY WITH THE POOR, ALWAYS REMAIN DEVOTED TO THE PUBLIC WELFARE, NEVER BE SATISFIED WITH MERELY PRINTING NEWS, ALWAYS BE DRASTICALLY INDEPENDENT, NEVER BE AFRAID TO ATTACK WRONG, WHETHER BY PREDATORY PLUTOCRACY OR PREDATORY POVERTY.

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mirror of public opinion

revived concern with social issues is not merely that both are authoritarian and inherently unconstitutional, but that they are incompetent.

Forcing women to have children they wish they had aborted is a most unlikely way to make people appreciate the value of life. And, if one truly seeks to preserve the nuclear family, one must allow a couple to have the number of children they feel they can handle and afford, not a larger number that nature springs on them.

The best thing about pornography, study after study shows, is that if left to its own devices, it will self-destruct. Most people exposed to it find it so boring, they soon turn it off. The only way known to social science to keep them at it is to make porn into a forbidden fruit. That is, censorship just promotes what it seeks to suppress. While it matters to the preservation of the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, people's sex lives, and moral fortitude, are not much affected either way.

Indeed, data show "bad" (delinquent) boys and "good" ones expose themselves to the same quantity of the tasteless stuff, strongly suggesting pornography could neither be the source of their undoing nor of their virtue. The few who continue to resort to it, use it to discharge as fantasies what they might otherwise inflict on living persons. This is, by the way, why it is not inconsistent to favor people viewing whatever they wish, but to throw the book at producers of pornography who involve minors in their sordid business.

The effects of school prayers have not been studied, but it is easy to see that just as reciting an allegiance to the flag each day does not patriots make, so a daily declaration of

Imposing Virtue On America

Far Right Seeks To Legislate Its Notion Of Good Behavior

A Statement By Amitai Etzioni
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If every American schoolchild were to recite a voluntary prayer each morning; no abortion were to be performed legally or even in backrooms; pornography were not to be had, even in plain wrappers; and the death penalty were meted out twice a week — all this would do precious little for those who made these issues the hard core of their social agenda. That is, it will not strengthen the family, shore up our moral fiber, or build up patriotism.

Liberals have pointed out that these positions are morally wrongheaded; what must be added is that these social nostrums will not work for people of all persuasions. What joins the Moral Majority and President Reagan's recently

allegiance to the Almighty will not make American pupils into upright, God-fearing little Christians, Jews or whatever.

Suppressing gays might keep a few more in the closets, at tremendous human costs. It will not keep heterosexual children from experimenting, and then naturally returning to the heterosexual fold. Nor will it stop gay adults from following their inclinations. Repression is not merely inhuman, it is ineffective.

As to the death penalty, it is well known that study after study found no difference in homicide rates between states that had it and the adjacent states that did not; the rates did not change significantly when the penalty was added or removed, not even in the cities in which executions occurred and were publicized. While the studies have been subject to social science quibbles, the most anyone has proven is that criminologists need more funds for studies, not that death sustains the civil order.

Precisely for those who do care about marriage, individual character and civil order, it is essential to retire office holders who deflect the yearning for a social-moral renewal into wrongheaded and unworkable channels, so the difficult task of finding ethical and workable approaches can be advanced.

True, the contours of social-moral renewal can now be dimly discerned at best. Its essence is to build on what flows from people, rather than on what is imposed upon them. It relies on a world in which people care for one another and their community instead of either excessive reliance on government or me-ism.

Not weekend voluntarism to make up for a week of unbounded greed, but a renewed willingness to balance looking out for self with a sensitivity to fellow persons and a renewed commitment to share and serve. The shortest route to being loved is being someone else's best friend. And the best way to serve all the Numero Unos is to see to it that as we each fell a tree for ourselves, we also contribute to reseedling the forest.

This new orientation is basically not an agenda for legislation, as it ought not to be. Social-ethical issues are not suitable subjects to control by laws and regulations. But if public symbols is what our leaders are after, several come to mind. Our lawmakers could set a role model for ethical behavior, by enforcing the feeble ethical code of Congress.

Removing the penalty on Social Security recipients who marry (one loses the benefits) would have fewer of our grandparents living together when they would prefer to marry. A year of national service might help instill in Americans a measure of renewed patriotism. Introducing flex-time into government service, and encouraging industry to follow suit, will do more for our millions of latchkey children than all the pious talk about the family. So would a 30-day cooling-off period, backed up with counseling, for people seeking divorce.

These are not magic cure-alls and, to reiterate, will work only if they follow a change of heart. But they will do much more for all Americans, the Moral Majority included, than Reagan socio-illogic.

