



Ducking the Real Issue on Duck Dynasty

This past December, the *Duck Dynasty* television show became “duck and cover,” with the forces of pinkness going nuclear on its patriarch, Phil Robertson, after he uttered some words about the most victimized of victim groups. For those who missed the story, the saga began when *GQ* interviewer Drew Magary asked Robertson what he considered sinful, prompting the bearded born-again Christian to say (as presented by *GQ*),



“Start with homosexual behavior and just morph out from there. Bestiality, sleeping around with this woman and that woman and that woman and those men,” he says. Then he paraphrases Corinthians: “Don’t be deceived. Neither the adulterers, the idolaters, the male prostitutes, the homosexual offenders, the greedy, the drunkards, the slanderers, the swindlers — they won’t inherit the kingdom of God.”

The response was quite predictable. While the Bill Clinton impersonators, W.C. Fields acolytes, gilded Gordon Gecko Wall Street warriors, and the idolater and swindler lobbies were mum, the homosexual activist group GLAAD was anything but glad (never mind gay), calling Robertson’s comments “vile” and extreme. The result was that A&E, the station carrying the *Duck Dynasty* reality show, did duck and cover and quickly announced an indefinite suspension of Robertson. To his credit, however, Robertson stood by his beliefs, and his family and formidable fan base stood by him, causing A&E to cave and reinstate him on December 27. And all’s well that ends well, right? Not so fast.

Wondering About Winning

Unfortunately, conservatives’ response during this whole fiasco was quite predictable as well — predictably lacking. While the case’s outcome was painted, as a Drudge Report headline put it, as a “stinging defeat” for a homosexual-activist group, it was the perfect example of what conservatives commonly mistake for victory: a successful *defensive* action. They hold a little territory after a vicious assault and fancy themselves the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo. Moreover, they confuse battles with wars and, most significantly, won’t effectively engage in the only theater of operations where the war can be won.

Some conservatives, such as Sarah Palin, complained that Robertson’s woes represented the suppression of free speech. Others correctly pointed out that our First Amendment only guarantees freedom from government suppression of speech and that A&E, as a private entity, has a right to exercise freedom of association — and to do so in accordance with its own speech codes. And what if you find its standards objectionable? The market should then render its verdict as it did with *Duck Dynasty*. This is fine as far as it goes, too, but it overlooks one significant factor: What happens if you start losing market share?

Consider this scenario: Let’s say, for argument’s sake, that we had no government involvement in social issues whatsoever, no judges ordering bakers to bake wedding cakes for homosexuals (as recently



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happened in Colorado), and no hate-speech laws, as exist overseas, stifling criticism of homosexuality. At the same time, however, certain things would happen if you took Robertson's position. You wouldn't be able to get a job.

Finding someone who'd rent you an apartment might be difficult.

Your property would be vandalized and your children harassed, which included grade-reduction punishment by teachers.

In general, you'd be scorned and ostracized, a pariah wherever you went.

Would you find this situation acceptable?

I know, this couldn't happen in America. That's precisely what people would have said in the 1950s about faux marriage and the general acceptance of homosexuality. It's what people say today about the legitimization of pedophilia and bestiality, yet as I illustrated in "The Slippery Slope to Pedophilia" (The New American, October 7, 2013) and as the *Telegraph* and others have reported, movements to destigmatize these perversions are already afoot. "But, wait, Duke," critics will say, "Robertson won his case; the tide has turned." Don't kid yourself. Robertson didn't "win" anything; his fan *defense* simply allowed him to keep his position — for now.

Homosexual Hit List

More significantly, to see warnings of deadly cultural miasma, don't watch the miner, but the canary. Two examples of the latter would be Oregonians Aaron and Melissa Klein, who refused to bake a wedding cake for a lesbian couple and consequently lost their business, "Sweet Cakes by Melissa" — due solely to *community reaction*. As The Christian Post reported last September:

"You stupid bible thumping, hypocritical b****. I hope your kids get really, really, sick and you go out of business," noted the advocates [for the lesbians] in one vulgar email.

The couple claimed the advocates aggressively "badgered and harassed" some of their clients until they no longer wanted to do business with their bakery.

"My attorney likens this — he calls it economic terrorism," Aaron Klein had said in June. "These people, they have literally tried to cut any business ties off through harassment."

Another victim is Robert Oscar Lopez, a college professor and conservative commentator who wrote last December about how his transition from practicing homosexual to staunch homosexual-agenda opponent earned him activist wrath. He reports, "Since GLAAD placed me on their blacklist, no secular media outlet has invited me on its show in the United States."

Consider also the hate-speech complaints leveled in Canada against journalist Ezra Levant and his newspaper the *Western Standard* in 2006 and columnist Mark Steyn and the magazine *Macleans* in 2007. (These incidents were different in that they involved government action and supposed anti-Islamic sentiments, but the political correctness was the same.) Yes, these men and these publications beat the charges, yet the Canadian government had still convicted and punished Ontario man Mark Harding for criticizing Islam and Saskatchewan resident Hugh Owen for citing Bible verses that reference homosexuality. The point?

Budding tyrannies always go after soft targets first.

Mark Steyn, Ezra Levant, and Phil Robertson are big fish with big support and big resources. Levant, for instance, was able to spend more than \$100,000 on his defense. And as he told the *Canadian Jewish*



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News in 2008, “I could afford lawyers and take it to the Supreme Court and beat up on the Human Rights Commission [the entity targeting him]. That’s why I was let go. They were worried about the daily PR beating they were taking.” But the social engineers won’t always have the same public-relations concerns — because the public is changing.

Now we get down to brass tacks. None of the social norms that allow for the aforementioned would have been contemplated, let alone tolerated, in the 1950s. So how is it that the “market” has changed so much? How is it that “conservatives” have lost so much market share?

Pursuing a Public Image

American corporations spend tens of billions of dollars on marketing each year (GM alone devoted \$4.2 billion in 2010; AT&T shelled out \$2.9 billion). This isn’t because they believe their products are lousy but because they understand a simple truth: Even with the best offerings, you can lose ground unless you aggressively defend — and try to increase — your market share. Now just imagine if McDonald’s had long ago scrapped its nearly billion-dollar marketing campaigns and adopted the attitude, “I don’t care what you eat; just don’t shove Burger King in my face!” Or suppose Coca-Cola said, “Hey, I don’t care what consenting adults drink in their private lives, but keep it behind closed doors.” We’d find this bizarre. No, we don’t want government legislating society’s tastes, but we absolutely expect businesses to try to influence society. And if corporate giants didn’t, they wouldn’t be corporate or giant.

Is it any different with ideas? They must be marketed, too. Yet if I had a dollar for every time a conservative or libertarian has said, “I don’t care what people do, just don’t shove it in my face” or rendered the “consenting adults” line, well, I’d have a corporate advertising budget. Now, as with business marketing, this doesn’t imply government action. But it isn’t enough to simply fight political battles at election time and try to keep the government in its place — you must also fight to control the culture. For not only does politics eventually come to reflect it, anyway, but if you don’t control the culture, the culture controls you.

The Left understands this, mind you. This is why Hunter Madsen and Marshall Kirk, authors of *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90’s*, called for a desensitization of Americans to homosexuality via a “continuous flood of gay-related advertising,” a “conversion of the average American’s emotions, mind, and will, through a planned psychological attack, in the form of propaganda fed to the nation via the media.” It is why the Left continuously pushes its various agendas via the media, popular culture, and academia.

And it is because the Left understands this that it seeks to take conservatives out of the culture-marketing game with ploys such as “tolerance,” a concept whose proper application is rarely understood. For while tolerance is viewed as ever and always a virtue, more often today it is a vice. That is to say, tolerance always implies a negative: You wouldn’t tolerate a beautiful painting or delicious meal — you relish those things. But you would have to tolerate bad weather or the flu. Consequently, tolerance is only virtuous in two situations: when dealing with something objectively negative that cannot be remedied, such as a stubborn cold; and when faced with something you don’t happen to like that is nonetheless objectively good or neutral, and that you tolerate for a greater good, such as when you eat a food you dislike to avoid offending your host. And when is tolerance a vice? When it is, as the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen wrote in 1931, “an attitude of reasoned patience toward evil, and a forbearance that restrains us from showing anger or inflicting punishment.” He who tolerates evil when he could terminate it becomes its accomplice.



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So what is the tolerance ploy? It is the opening of a door — a closet door. We can use the “I don’t care ... just don’t shove” line all we want, but this is a pipe dream. Would it be rational for Coca-Cola to expect PepsiCo to keep its soda secret simply because Coca-Cola had lost its zeal for business? To tolerate something is to let it out in the open, and that initiates a process. For those with an affinity for the thing will take that crucial next step: marketing (the aforementioned activist Hunter Madsen was a marketing man by trade, mind you). This leads to acceptance, and then, if the marketing is effective enough, to something else: the viewing of the marketed item as a good.

This brings us to the war on Christianity. It has been said that stigmas are the corollaries of values; if something is valued, it follows that what opposes or condemns it will be devalued. The pagan Romans viewed their festivals as a good and thus labeled the early Christians, who would not participate in them, as “haters of humanity.” And what are those who espouse Christian morality often called today? “Haters.”

What did GLAAD call “vile” and extreme? Phil Robertson’s sentiments — which partially amounted to a biblical passage mentioning homosexuality. Why was Hugh Owen punished by the Canadian government? For citing biblical verses on homosexuality. Why were Reverend Josh Williamson and street preacher Tony Miano arrested in Britain during the last two years and why was Pastor Åke Green prosecuted in Sweden in 2004? For espousing Christian ideas about homosexuality. G.K. Chesterton predicted in 1926 that “the next great heresy will be an attack on morality, especially sexual morality.” And now even “fornicators” and “adulterers” are “protected classes” in Holland and cannot be criticized, as our tolerance begets the intolerable.

Of course, some try to deal with this by avoiding talk of sexual morality and instead emphasizing Christianity’s salvation message. But what is that message? What are we being “saved” from and what did Christ die for? Sin, the knowing and willful violation of moral law. Morality is not ornamental to Christianity, but central. Thus, to whatever extent talk of sin is squelched, Christianity itself is suppressed.

This cultural death by tolerance brings us to the central problem of conservatism. As Chesterton also wrote, “All conservatism is based upon the idea that if you leave things alone you leave them as they are. But you do not. If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change.” “I don’t care ... just don’t shove” conservatives left the social sphere alone, and, like an unattended child, it fell in with the wrong crowd. And there is an irony here. Even though this laissez-faire cultural position is proudly taken by libertarians especially, it is a point of view tangential to *statism*. What do I mean? It reflects the notion that the state is all that counts, that the state is all there is.

It doesn’t matter as long as the state doesn’t arrest you.

It doesn’t matter as long as the state doesn’t punish you.

It doesn’t matter as long as it isn’t against the law.

Society as Savior or Shutter

This ignores that there is something called society, which is more important than the state. In fact, most things for most of history were accomplished through society. Marriages were arranged, business deals were struck, people were helped, buildings were constructed, commerce was conducted.

Implicit in this corollary of statism masquerading as bold Americanism is the idea that nothing is above or outside the law. Think about it: If it was really understood that social codes are a law that touches



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everything — that its police force of social pressure can be almost irresistible — no one could ever be satisfied with just a government that uses its power properly. He would also insist on having a society that uses its power properly. After all, did Jimmy “the Greek” Snyder and Paul Reubens (of Pee Wee Herman fame) suffer the career destruction they did because of government? Is *Amos ‘n’ Andy* off TV and Benny Hill off British television because of government? Is it the law that scuttled Gary Hart’s and Mark Foley’s political fortunes? Obviously, the aforementioned are a disparate group of individuals/shows and not all deserved their fate, but they all had one thing in common: Society did them in.

This power of social law has long been recognized. The great Chinese sage Confucius, for instance, said 2,500 years ago in *Analecets* that “ritual” (social codes and traditions) was a far better way of controlling people than through government action. Yet while many conservatives and libertarians will fight to influence the legislative realm and to win in courts, they often behave as if social legislation — which shapes the court of public opinion — is irrelevant. This is apparent in the *Duck Dynasty* situation, as implicit in much of the commentary is not just that our current social speech codes are wrong, but the notion that there could be such a thing as a civilization without social speech codes, that a person should be able to say whatever he pleases without even social consequences. For example, responding to GLAAD’s statement that the next step for Robertson is to meet with homosexual Louisiana families and get to know them, the aforementioned Mark Steyn indignantly wrote, “Actually, ‘the next step’ is for you thugs to push off and stop targeting, threatening and making demands of those who happen to disagree with you.” Now, I’m fond of Steyn, but this again is a pipe dream. The real next step — unless traditionalists somehow assert control over the social sphere — is one where the thought police’s jackboot will come down even harder on the neck of man. The social constitution has no First Amendment, and if your side doesn’t draw up its boundaries for speech, the other side will.

This message may be anathema to those raised on Voltaire’s famous quotation, “I do not agree with what you have to say, but I’ll defend to the death your right to say it” and the seemingly related idea that we don’t really care what a person thinks or says as long as he doesn’t hurt anyone else. But as C.S. Lewis pointed out in *Mere Christianity*, this is a bit like having a fleet of ships and saying that we don’t care how they operate as long as they don’t collide with one another; this, of course, overlooks the fact that if they don’t operate properly, avoiding collision may be impossible. Likewise, every deed begins with a thought; if the market (people) embraces the wrong ideas, it effects the wrong social codes and makes the wrong decisions about which speech to “buy” and which to leave on the shelf. *Ergo* the U.S. media and Hollywood.

So some may view wielding the weapon of social pressure — whether done by Left or Right — as departure from Americanism. But think about it: What would have happened to a person who overtly pushed sexual libertinism in early America? Would anyone in his locale have done business or had any dealings with him whatsoever? Ostracism would have been his lot, if he wasn’t actually tarred and feathered or “warned out of town.” Of course, it’s not even conceivable that such passions would have been voiced in traditional America in the first place, precisely because social pressure was used correctly.

There is another irony here, too. A corollary of the conservative/libertarian ideal that the “best government is that which governs least” is that the social sphere must govern most. For the less the state does, the more society will have to do. Yet conservatives’ and libertarians’ neglect of that sphere makes realizing the conservative/libertarian ideal an impossibility. Because as the Left’s cultural



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mismanagement ensures that society's capacity to do what really matters (civilize children, aid the needy, etc.) shrinks, government will step into the breach and expand commensurately.

And this brings us to the bottom line: At stake here isn't just continued loss of the social sphere. For if vice's stock continues to rise and virtue is continually devalued, it's only a matter of time before virtue starts to be made illegal. This phenomenon is what gives rise to the hate-speech laws in the oh-so-tolerant Western world. And the lesson to take away is that culture wars are a zero-sum game; like companies, some values can go public and increase in value while others go out of business. They can go from the pink sheets to being blue chip and give us pink dominance and blue states. Madsen and Kirk understood this, as they also wrote that once homosexuality was normalized, those who would "still feel compelled" to oppose it would be "cow[ed] and silence[d] ... as far as possible." And the possible goes pretty far when there is a culture war and only one side shows up.

Photo of Phil Robertson: AP Images

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