

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

AN ENTITLEMENT CULTURE

Since the New Deal, the US has been building an entitlement culture. It has grown beyond anything ever imagined by our Founders. We have created a culture where the expectation of American citizens is that the state will meet my personal challenges and meet virtually all my needs. Typically, Americans are way beyond expecting the state to help them; the norm is now demanding that the state help them. Several thoughts.

- First, consider the recent announcement by the Obama administration that it would do an end run around the COLA for Social Security recipients. COLA represents the cost of living adjustment for Social Security recipients that occurs annually to deal with inflation. Because inflation is relatively low, there was no COLA scheduled this year. But our president decided to grant one anyway—a \$250 payment for each Social Security recipient. With tongue in cheek, George Will writes that “Barack Obama has now established. . . Social Security’s COLA as the capstone to the architecture of the entitlement culture that is modern liberalism’s crowning achievement: IT is an entitlement to which you are entitled even when you are not entitled to it. Obama says that 57 million Americans—every Social Security beneficiary and some other recipients of federal entitlements—are entitled to \$250 apiece to assuage the disappointment of having not been uninjured by inflation. Because the cost of living declined 4% last year, the 57 million are not entitled to the actual COLA, but they evidently are going to be declared entitled to monetary consolation for the misfortune of not experiencing misfortune.” How will he pay for this? Our president has no intention of offsetting this new entitlement benefit in any manner except by borrowing. Will again writes: “The money will be borrowed, much of it from abroad, much of that portion from China. Fortunately, foreigners have unlimited appetites for lending to America. Don’t they?” I find it quite unbelievable that our nation is continuing to buy into this entitlement culture so voraciously. The example of the COLA is a small one compared to the health care costs or even to Medicare. But I find it staggering that there has been no protest over this; there has been no debate over this; there is no one raising the red flag—“wait a minute; we are only following the COLA law. Social Security is not to receive a COLA increase because that is the law. There was a decrease in the cost of living by \$5 and the law mandates no COLA.” The entitlement culture does not blink an eye at this because that is what entitlement means. “We are entitled to this even though we are not really entitled to this.” Such logic is the road to financial ruin—the very road America is now traveling. See George Will in the *Washington Post* (22 October 2009).

- Second, we must see the health care legislation now in its final stages as the formation of another entitlement that will ultimately be funded by the US government. Columnist Michael Gerson writes that “it is not cynical for Republicans [or anyone else for that matter] to recognize the ideological stakes that Obama has raised. The passage of a massive health entitlement would change the relationship of Americans to their government. On the evidence of nations such as England, a national health system places a conservative party at a permanent ideological disadvantage. Every proposal for tax reductions is attacked as undermining the eternally hungry public health system. Every failure of that system becomes an excuse for greater spending and government involvement. The tide of government grows, and the ebb weakens, until no one can fight the flood.” Further, the current legislation Congress is considering will expand health-care access, but it does little to address the issue of cost inflation. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that health costs under this new entitlement program will grow at about 8% a year—higher than the growth of the economy or of government revenue. For that reason, as Gerson points out, the Medicare costs assumed by the Finance Committee are dishonest. “A future Congress is required to display remarkable, politically suicidal heroism—to impose a 25% cut in Medicare reimbursements to doctors in 2011—which everyone, literally everyone, knows will not happen.” The facts are that this new program will actually cost more than \$1 trillion and add to the deficit that our current president has already tripled. This is quite frankly an unsustainable system. History tells us that Congress vows to cut Medicare costs and then regularly defers them. Furthermore, during the Bush presidency the Republican-controlled Congress passed a prescription drug entitlement that was not offset by either spending cuts or tax increases. That entitlement will cost the US more than \$1 trillion in this decade, including the interest on the necessary borrowing to fund it. The entitlement culture is now deeply entrenched in the American political culture—and it is neither a Democratic nor a Republican issue. Both parties are to blame and both parties are in effect bankrupting America. The Bible speaks often of the wise becoming fools; that is what we are now experiencing in our culture. We are being ruled by very foolish leaders. May God have mercy on us.

See George Will in the *Washington Post* (22 October and 18 October 2009) and Michael Gerson in the *Washington Post* (21 October 2009).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

ROMAN CATHOLICISM OPENS ITS DOORS TO ANGLICANS

Last week the Roman Catholic Church made it easier for Anglicans to join the Catholic Church. This was a strategic move on the part of the Vatican, for it is taking advantage of the disillusionment some Anglicans are experiencing over the election of openly gay bishops and the blessing of same-sex unions. For that reason, Pope Benedict XVI approved a new church provision that will permit Anglicans to convert while maintaining many of their distinctive spiritual and liturgical traditions. Again, this is significant because Anglicanism worldwide is on the verge of schism over the issues of women bishops, gay bishops and gay unions. Several thoughts.

- First, the new Catholic structures, called Personal Ordinances, will be units of the faithful within local Catholic Churches, headed by former Anglican prelates, who will now provide spiritual care for Anglicans who wish to be Catholic. This new structure is in response to many requests that have come to the Vatican over the years from Anglicans who are disillusioned with the progressive bent of the Anglican Communion. The new canonical provision allows married Anglican priests and even seminarians to become ordained Catholic priests—much the same way that Eastern Orthodox who are in communion with Rome are permitted to marry. But this move also recognizes a rather sobering reality for the English church today: The number of practicing Catholics in England is greater than the number of practicing Anglicans!! In fact, as A.N. Wilson observes, “Within a generation, there will probably be more Muslims than practicing Anglicans in the British Isles. Britain will no longer be able to endure the absurdity of laws relating to the religion of the monarch, the Act of Settlement, which among other things forbids the sovereign to marry a Catholic. Or the Coronation Oath, which promises to uphold the Protestant religion.”
- Second, from the perspective of history, this development is rather astonishing. This decision by the Vatican comes nearly five centuries after Henry VIII in 1534 broke with Rome and proclaimed himself head of the Anglican church. He did so because the pope refused to grant him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon. Henry’s daughter, Elizabeth I, completed the break with Rome by establishing the Elizabethan settlement—viz., that Anglicanism would be Protestant in theology but Catholic in ritual. In the news conference called by Cardinal William Levada, head of the Vatican’s office on doctrine, Levada argued that this step is a part of the Vatican’s long-established goal of healing the rift between Catholicism and Anglicanism. This announcement appeared to catch Anglican leaders off guard. The Right Rev. Michael Scott-Joynt, co-chair of the English Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee, said that these measures “went outside the mainstream” of Vatican-Anglican dialogue. The Anglican Church of North America rejoiced at the announcement, “[It] represents another step in the growing cooperation and relationship between our churches.” This move by the Vatican fits with the ecumenical spirit of Pope Benedict, who has been aggressive in his attempt to bring more Christians into the Catholic fold. For example, he has bolstered dialogue with Lutherans and other Protestant groups. He has met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodoxy. Further, he lifted the ban of excommunication on the highly conservative Catholic splinter group called the Society of St. Pius X.
- Third, what might be the effect of this Vatican move? A rather startling result is that within the next few years we will see Catholic priests around the world celebrating Mass in a form that draws largely from the Book of Common Prayer of Anglicanism. In effect, such a move adds to the growing smorgasbord of Catholic liturgical options. For example in Latin America and in Africa, millions of Charismatic Catholics regularly attend spectacular Masses that feature Pentecostal faith-healing services and speaking in tongues. Charismatic Catholicism is now an effective competitor with Protestant Pentecostalism, which is sweeping the southern hemisphere. At bottom, the Vatican move indicates a profound shift occurring within European Christianity: Doctrine and theology no longer matter. The theological cleavage that occurred in the 16th century Reformation is no longer relevant in this Postmodern world. Postmodern tolerance and doctrinal superficiality are now the buzz

within Anglicanism. The hope for theological purity and sound doctrine now rests with the southern hemisphere. All of this is quite profound!

See A.N. Wilson in the *New York Times* (25 October 2009); Francis Rocca in the *Wall Street Journal* (23 October 2009); Stacy Meichtry and Amy Merrick in the *Wall Street Journal* (21 October 2009); and Nicole Winfield in the *Washington Post* (20 October 2009).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

THE PHONY WAR ON FOX NEWS

The Obama presidency has launched an attack on Fox News. It is phony and diminishes the office of the presidency. Fox News has exposed the radical ideology of Van Jones, a White House adviser, who eventually resigned. It has exposed school children literally singing the praises of the president. Its editorial programs, led by Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity, regularly are critical of the president and his ideology. Even the *New York Times* has admitted that its reporters have not been as aggressive in following up on key news stories developed by Fox News. The *Washington Post* has admitted the same. So, what is going on?

1. The White House has not criticized Rachel Maddow or Keith Olbermann of MSNBC or Maureen Dowd, Frank Rich and Bob Herbert of the *New York Times* who are just as ideological as Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity. The only difference is that they are decidedly liberal and Fox is conservative. The White House cannot have it both ways. If they are criticizing Fox News as not really “a news organization,” it cannot embrace MSNBC then either. It is a phony claim and the White House should be ashamed of itself.
2. As Charles Krauthammer has observed, “Fox News is no monopoly. It is a singular minority in a sea of liberal media. ABC, NBC, CBS, PBS, NPR, CNN, MSNBC vs. Fox. The lineup is so unbalanced as to be comical—and that doesn’t include the other commanding heights of the culture that are firmly, flagrantly liberal: Hollywood, the foundations, the universities, the elite newspapers.”

Personally, I do not always enjoy the variety of programs on Fox News. But I have reached this conclusion: It is healthy in our democratic-republic to have a news organization such as Fox News. Its news reporters, which largely comprise the regular Fox programming throughout the day, are top notch. Its more opinionated programs from 5 to 9 pm provide a checks and balances network that this nation needs. It will not work for the White House to attempt to delegitimize the Fox News Network. In fact, what I hope occurs is that the American people will see this for what it is—the same attempt Richard Nixon pursued. Nixon was so upset by the liberal news media that he made war on it. It did not work then! It will not work for Obama to make war on the one network that gives another voice to his liberal policies. This is a democracy and there is still freedom of the press. If nothing else, Fox News can guarantee that this freedom is preserved.

See Krauthammer’s essay in the *Washington Post* (23 October 2009) and Jim Rutenberg in the *New York Times* (23 October 2009).