

Square Pegs in Round Holes

The local comedy troupe, The Portuguese Kids, have a humorous video on YouTube portraying, what they regard as, “common Portuguese problems.” In one segment, a young woman is desperately trying to fit into her skinny blue jeans, and more and more family members enter the scene trying to assist the poor woman to get the jeans to finally button up around her waist. Ultimately, the scene ends with all participants totally exhausted and unsuccessful.

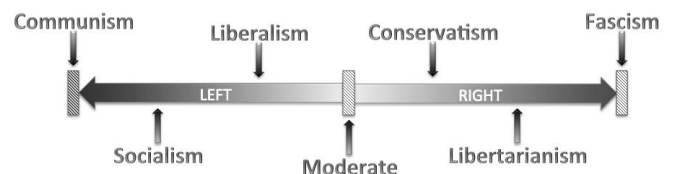
In the toxic political climate of our country, I think that there is a lot of pressure to take sides and identify with some political party or theory of economics or some ideology. Rather than there being a spirit of cooperation for the idea of “The Common Good,” we see terrible gamesmanship and factionalism. In the midst of this are opposing ideologies and schemes concerning the way the government and the economy and the health care system “ought” to work. And, of course, each ideology is a product of “special interests:” There are industries and investors and citizen’s groups vying to shape the way things go for their own **self-interests**.

Herein is a huge challenge for those of us who see our Christian Faith as “The Way:” **All of these political parties, ideologies and schemes are like ill-fitting blue jeans.** Try as we may, we cannot shoe-horn the Gospel into Republicanism or Democrat-ism, or Socialism, or what-have-you. In fact, any attempt to do so would certainly cause a distortion of the Gospel message.

Christianity is not neatly convertible with “Republican” or “Democrat” or any other political philosophy. This is just simply true. There may be more favorable aspects in one or the other, but taken as a “package deal” we run into serious problems. Pope Francis’ writings and orations, and the reactions to these in the secular world, provide a good example that there is no where for the Faith to “rest” in any of these human constructs, (“*Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head,*” (Luke 9:58).

If we cast this matter in the current political terms of “Left” and “Right,” we see the problem with

some clarity: When in the Encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* the Pope writes “*As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world’s problems or, for that matter, any problems,*” it is clear that he will not find a comfortable home with the political “Right.” In the very same document, the Pope expresses the following principle which would not make him welcome on the political “Left:” “*Frequently, as a way of ridiculing the Church’s effort to defend [the lives of the unborn], attempts are made to present her position as ideological, obscurantist and conservative. Yet this defense of unborn life is closely linked to the defense of each and every other human right.*”



The basic point I am making is that, for those in whom Faith is the priority, there is no comfortable ideological home in this world. Moreover, we have to be very careful about creating a “dualism” between our “**citizenship**” and our status as “**believers.**” The two competing conceptions concerning the relationship between these two realities are expressed by my former professor, David L. Schindler in his book, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church* wherein he writes:

“Ultimately [there are] two different conceptions of the civilization toward which Christians should be working. One is a civilization wherein citizenship is to be suffused with sanctity; the other, a civilization wherein sanctity is always something to be (privately/hidden-ly) added to citizenship.”

This is not a matter of treating our Faith like it is a third political party alongside the other two. Rather, the matter runs much deeper, as the firm belief that, at its deepest level, all nature is ordered to the Grace of God from which it gets its being and its destiny.