

Language held captive is propaganda

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Here's why I stand with Planned Parenthood in combating divisive SB 8



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Guest columnist

It's assumed that Texas Senate Bill 8, the new law that restricts abortion by putting enforcement in the hands of individuals, not our government, is supported by Christian principles.

It's an assumption that is possible because of the pile-up of Christian language within political life. Christian language and doctrine have been on a centuries-long journey, too often leveraged as rationale for political posturing.

The reality is that this law exacerbates a civic climate of distrust and even fear that threatens to return us to frontier justice and mob rule.

Our shared work, the work of any civilized culture, is to find a balance between trust and critical reflection. SB 8 is a distraction from real civility and civic work because of its intent to erode trust between neighbors and its intent to disable critical reflection through fear-based politics. The law threatens. It means to make us afraid of

saying too much to one another when the stakes are high in our personal landscapes. The law seduces the public with inappropriate power. In it, we are encouraged to rat one another out toward a punitive end even though the welfare of individuals and families hang in the balance.

The recent journey of SB 8, from legislation to law, has been possible in part because people like me have not spoken more plainly about Christian propaganda at work in our civic life. I have a choice. SB 8 does not have to be my fate or our fate.

When Christian language is held captive toward a preference it becomes propaganda. Propaganda, at its worst, intends to erode trust and critical thinking.

Propaganda, at its worst, disables societies from moving forward. Civic life and Christian life are hallmarked not by fear but appropriate freedom within the scope of the common good. In days such as these, it is important for Christian communities to dismantle the propaganda that keeps the Christian message relegated to a foothold for political exploit.

Christian propaganda at work in politics depends on the idea that the Bible is a rulebook of right and wrong. The Bible as a rulebook quickly reveals a collection of inconsistencies. Many scholars and Sunday

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school teachers recognize that the Bible is less a rulebook and more a conversation partner that begs the seeker to ask important questions. When reading a biblical story or maxim we wonder, "How would I, with my authority and power, respond in a similar situation?"

Christian propaganda at work in politics depends on the idea that God is unchanging and rigid with expectation. Ironically, for Christianity, what is consistently unchanging about God is that the divine nature is observant, discerning and lovingly responsive to the human condition. Check it out.

Again, and again, the Bible reveals a God adapting and responding to the changing circumstances at work in people's lives. As God is, so we are called to be. Nothing dismantles propaganda like a God who is perceptive and fearless for humanity despite our limitations and flaws.

SB 8 does not have to be our fate. The better essentials of my Christian faith encourage me to ask myself the hard questions

about my own decision making. The better essentials of my faith help me to understand that the best authorities in my life are interested and responsive to my needs. The better essentials of my faith lead me to stand, despite propaganda, with Planned Parenthood. I stand with them because they provide health care and space for important conversations. In these conversations, individuals and their loving communities can talk, learn and decide.

There is no pretense that a perfect path exists. There is no taking the Lord's name in vain by invoking it in larger phrases of propaganda. Planned Parenthood is full of Christian people who trust the capacity of women and their loving communities to assess what is needed so that the greater good might be served. The only reason that Planned Parenthood seems contrary to Christian religious life is because of ill-used propaganda that seeks to coerce others toward a political preference.

I stand, because my faith demands it, with Planned Parenthood. I'll not be distracted from hard work by fear-based suggestions that I should not think critically nor trust in my neighbor's competence as they face their hour of crisis and claim important choice.

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