

CONSCIENCE

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Catholics for Choice shapes and advances sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being and respect and affirm the capacity of women and men to make moral decisions about their lives.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

NO MATTER WHAT YOU CALL IT, SECULARISM, THE LAY STATE, the separation of church and state, the role that religion plays in shaping public policy generates incessant and seemingly irreconcilable debate.

Some argue, with cause, that it is simply an issue for atheists who want to end religious influence on public policy. But many religious people also see the benefit of keeping religion and public policy separate. They recognize that religion plays an important role in many people's lives, but do not think that religious beliefs should have an unelected place at the table when public policy is being decided.

There are two important rights involved in religious freedom: the right to practice one's religion as one sees fit and as long as it does not harm others and the right to be free from religion. This latter right is often pushed aside in discussions about religion in public policy, but both are equally important for those seeking to ensure a healthy separation.

As an organization, Catholics for Choice is committed to the development and protection of real religious freedom, and this issue of *Conscience* brings together some of the leading voices on religious freedom.

Rob Boston from Americans United for Separation of Church and State provides us with an excellent introduction to the role this concept played in the foundation of the United States of America. Noted scholar Roberto Blancarte reveals what really happened when the Mexican constitution was amended earlier this year and its implications for the lay state. cfc's Kim Puchir examines the unique role of the Holy See at the United Nations and the impact that has on international policies, including those that affect women's lives.

Journalist and author Frederick Clarkson shines a light on the real motivations of those who want to insert religion into every public policy debate and reflects on the lack of concern that too many people have for religious pluralism. And finally, Sara Hutchinson explains why the current situation has reached such a dire state that it warranted setting up a new coalition to defend church-state separation in the US. There's much more to be said on this topic, and it is one that we will surely return to in future issues. In the meantime, please use our letters page to tell us what you think.



DAVID J. NOLAN
Editor

Conscience is a unique magazine, and one we would like to get as wide an audience as possible. So, I have a favor to ask. Think for a moment. Ask yourself, do I know other people who I want to be as well-informed as I am? I'm sure you do, because inquisitive people always know other inquisitive people.

So, please consider buying them a subscription as well. To purchase, please visit our website, www.CatholicsForChoice.org, or call us at (202) 986 6093.