

“HOW TO LOSE THE CULTURE WARS”

by Thomas Sowell

In the aftermath of the Senate’s acquittal of Bill Clinton, conservative activist Paul Weyrich—author of the term “the Moral majority”—now says “I no longer believe that there is a moral majority. . . . I do not believe that a majority of Americans actually share our values.”

Increasingly, those who believe in traditional values have times when they feel like aliens in the land of their birth. Some are saying that we have lost the culture wars – that what used to be called “the counterculture” is now the dominant influence in American society. Sexual amorality is only part of it. The nonjudgmental approach and other leftist fads have poisoned our schools, our criminal-justice system and other basic social institutions.

Certainly we have lost some big cultural battles. But you can lose a lot of big battles disastrously and still end up winning the war. Many of the tactics and strategies of those who have been trying to defend traditional values have been virtually guaranteed to lose battles. If they persist unchanged, the war will indeed be lost. But we are not there yet.

Many cultural conservatives analogize the abortion issue to the moral struggle against slavery. The analogy is apt, especially since it was religious conservatives in 18th century England who launched the crusade against slavery that ultimately destroyed this inhuman institution around the world.

What is sad is how many religious conservatives today ignore

the political strategy that brought down slavery. Worse, today's cultural conservatives are following the opposite strategy and are losing as a result.

While the 18th-century British evangelical leaders were morally opposed to slavery, they did not make their first political objective the immediate abolition of this whole entrenched system that had existed for thousands of years in all kinds of societies around the world. That was what they wanted, but they knew they were not about to get it.

It was a long and bitter uphill fight just to get the trading of slaves stopped within the British Empire. It took 20 years of parliamentary struggle to achieve that. But, although this still left existing slaves in bondage to their owners, it was the first crucial step toward destruction of slavery around the world.

The anti-abortionists are following the opposite strategy. Their strategy is to say that, if you are not with us all the way right now, you are against us. Instead of recruiting new allies, too many cultural conservatives are alienating the allies they already have by a rule-or-ruin strategy within the Republican Party. That is a way to show your political muscle, but is not a way to achieve your goals. It may turn out to be a way to lose the whole culture war.

The military genius of Gen. Douglas MacArthur was shown not only by his great victories, but also by the very low casualty rates among his troops. He did not send his men into battle against every Japanese-held island in the Pacific. He bypassed many of those islands on his way to key strategic objectives that would win the war in the shortest time and with the fewest Americans getting killed.

By contrast, cultural conservatives are attacking politically on all fronts simultaneously. They forget what MacArthur remembered –that his resources were not unlimited and that

they could not be dissipated on every possible objective.

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