

“I’M PERSONALLY OPPOSED, BUT...”

Beginning with New York Governor Mario Cuomo, literally hundreds of local, state and federal Catholic executives and lawmakers have said that they are personally opposed to abortion, but are nonetheless obliged to take a pro-abortion position. Cuomo’s attempt to carve out a middle ground on this issue, however, was no more successful in 1984 than it has proved to be today for presidential hopeful John Kerry. Indeed, it’s a minefield ready to explode.

Consider that when Cuomo was governor, he vetoed legislation that allowed for capital punishment because he said he was personally opposed to the death penalty. Now listen to what Kerry said on May 17 when asked why he is opposed to same-sex marriage: “I personally believe that marriage is between a man and a woman.”

So why is it that their personal belief was also their public position on the issues of capital punishment and gay marriage, but not abortion? Put differently, both Cuomo and Kerry do not believe that their opposition to these behaviors creates a church and state dilemma, even though their personal beliefs coincide with the beliefs of the Catholic Church. Yet when it comes to abortion, their positions collapse: now they feel compelled to go against their personal beliefs for fear of imposing the teachings of the Catholic Church.

This begs the question: Why is it acceptable for a Catholic politician to ratify the Church’s teaching on the death penalty and marriage but not abortion? Alternatively, why is it possible to avoid a church-state dilemma when voting to affirm the Church’s teaching on one public policy issue, but not another?

It’s time that Catholic pro-abortion politicians stopped with

the dishonesty. This is not a partisan issue. For example, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, as well as current New York Governor George Pataki, both Republicans, are in favor of legalizing partial-birth abortion. So are the two Massachusetts Senators, John Kerry and Ted Kennedy, both of whom are Democrats. All of these Catholics are creating a straw man, and they know it.

Here is how the Catholic League explained its position to the media: "As long as the issue is a public policy concern, and not a peculiarly sectarian interest (e.g. dietary laws), lawmakers of faith can easily reconcile their personal beliefs—grounded in an informed religious conscience—with the votes they cast. Thus, the mere invocation of a church and state dilemma does not reflexively settle the issue. What may be at play is pure politics, having nothing to do with any alleged constitutional question."

Pope John Paul II, not surprisingly, has said it best: the Catholic Church is not seeking to impose anything; rather, our goal is to propose. And that is something we are not only allowed to do, it is something we are obliged to do.