

8-1-1986

## [Book Review of] *For Every Idle Silence*, by Henry J. Hyde

Eugene F. Diamond

Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq>

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Diamond, Eugene F. (1986) "[Book Review of] *For Every Idle Silence*, by Henry J. Hyde," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 53 : No. 3 , Article 8.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol53/iss3/8>

## Conclusion

Father McCormick puts forth the "guidelines" contained in the book as a suggested replacement for the current *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Facilities*, formulated by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops for promulgation by each bishop in his diocese. We find at least two major problems with his effort.

First as indicated above, fundamental issues regarding teaching authority in the Church are seriously mishandled in the book, and as presented there could not, in our opinion, be incorporated into any revision of the current *Directives*. Moreover, specific Church positions, both doctrinal and disciplinary regarding contraception, abortion, and a number of other issues are seriously misrepresented or mishandled.

Second, there is a distinct danger that, on the basis of this book, some Catholic institutions may proceed — or have already done so — to ignore *even now* the *Directives* where they seem to be in conflict with the "guidelines" presented in the book. Such a move would be a disaster, for it would promote positive disinformation about the nature of the Catholic Church and the locus of final teaching authority with the Church, and the moral commitments of the Church. Despite much acceptable content, then, *Health and Medicine in the Catholic Tradition*, threatens real damage to the Church's mission, to her people, and to contemporary society which desperately needs moral guidance and challenge from her teaching and the way of life of her people and institutions.

---

## *For Every Idle Silence*

by Henry J. Hyde

*Servant Books, Ann Arbor, MI., 135 pp.*

This book is the watershed publication on the issue of the role of conscience for the Catholic in politics. It documents, first of all, the extent to which the secularist power brokers will go to insure that religion-based values play no role in the political process. During the litigation surrounding the Hyde Amendment, Mr. Hyde was followed to Mass and duly noted to have taken communion and to have read the epistle. All of his mail was read by ACLU and Planned Parenthood lawyers and each instance in which the correspondent had used an expression such as "God bless you", became part of a brief which was submitted as evidence of a religious conspiracy to deny federal funding for abortion. This was "evidence" that Congressman Hyde could not separate his religious beliefs from his political activity. If this seems like an outlandishly bigoted legal tactic, we should remember that the Hyde Amendment was barely sustained by a 5-4 majority in the Supreme Court.

Abortion is the focus of such attacks by the broader issue which is whether religious beliefs should play any role at all in the political process. The ultimate goal, as identified in a critique by Federal Judge Bork, is "the privatization of religious beliefs. The individuals are entitled to moral beliefs but may not gather as a community to express these moral beliefs in law."

Congressman Hyde dissents from this view of a power elite and points out that the framers of the Constitution did likewise. He quotes Jefferson as declaring, "The only firm basis of liberty is a conviction in the minds of people that these liberties are a gift of God" and cites a quotation from Hamilton, affirming that "The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written as with a sunbeam in the whole volume of human nature by the hand of the divinity itself and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power." In view of the long tradition of religiously based political values going back to John Winthrop and the Pilgrims and continuing through Abraham Lincoln, the abolitionists and 15 generations of the black churches, why is it that we suddenly find Henry Hyde standing somewhat alone as a beacon on a broad sea of gelatinous "personally opposed but" Catholic politicians?

As the author points out, no one opposed the involvement of the clergy in the political movements surrounding civil rights, antiwar, the environment or ERA. It was only when there appeared to be an unprecedented coalition gathering between the 60 million Protestant Evangelicals and the almost 50 million Catholics on the pro-life and pro-family values, that religion was identified as a threat to "the American way."

Each of the chapters in this book contains a unique and carefully articulated position on issues such as abortion, religious freedom, handicapped newborns and the like, but the truly seminal chapters are *Keeping God in the Closet* and *Spiritual Leadership and the Abortion Crisis*.

The first of these articles is taken from a speech delivered as a response to the highly publicized presentation by Governor Cuomo at the University of Notre Dame at the height of the 1984 presidential campaign. Congressman Hyde identifies the dilemma of the Catholic politician, usually a Democrat, who wants to retain his Catholic credentials but recognizes that, in today's Democratic party, to be upwardly mobile is to be very liberal. To retain liberal credentials, one must be a feminist and to be a feminist is to be pro-abortion. This gives rise to the type of politician whose "religion is so private that he will not even impose it on himself." The thrust of the campaign was to create the impression that abortion is a religious issue and that Catholics who speak out against abortion are suspect. The hope, of course, is to intimidate Catholics so that they will not speak out against abortion, a tactic which succeeded in the public positions of Mario Cuomo and Geraldine Ferraro, among others. The real question is why the issue was raised, in 1984, not against Jesse Jackson, an ordained Baptist minister who conducted his campaigns of registration and fund-raising primarily in black churches, but against Jerry Falwell.

In point of fact, of course, unless a political issue is supported by a unanimous consensus (a situation which virtually never exists in the practical order), the enactment of any law will always involve the imposition of the views of one group on another. The involvement of the Evangelicals in political activities was certainly not unprecedented since the mainline Protestant churches had long been identified as "the Democratic Party at prayer." The position of Governor Cuomo was so hackneyed and cliché-ridden that one must marvel that both Father Hesburgh and Father McBrien gushed over it as "nuanced". Teddy Kennedy had been saying the same things for two decades and he could afford better speech writers.

As Congressman Hyde points out, Catholic immigrants to this country did not create the anti-abortion consensus; they found it already in place. *Roe v. Wade* did not express a new consensus. Governor Cuomo and others suggest that we wait for a consensus. Congressman Hyde wants to work for a consensus. This is in the tradition of the Civil Rights Movement, which did not wait for a consensus, but worked to create it. As the majority of the Supreme Court stated in sustaining the Hyde Amendment, "It does not

follow that, because a statute coincides with the tenets of some or all religions, it violates the establishment clause."

Perhaps no political protest in recent memory has been so widely misunderstood and distorted as the broad pro-life protest against the "seamless garment" approach to life issues. In order to understand the protest, one must appreciate the *political consequences* of the doctrine. In his chapter on "Spiritual Leadership and the Abortion Crisis", Mr. Hyde forcefully and eloquently describes the inevitable political impact of the "Seamless Garment" approach. In his speeches at Fordham, St. Louis University and Georgetown, Cardinal Bernardin implicitly advances the "single issue politics" charge against the anti-abortion movement. Seamless garment arguments are obviously directed toward conservative and orthodox Catholics. The demand for a consistent ethic is never directed against liberals. No liberal is ever told that he could not credibly oppose war and poverty if he did not also oppose abortion. In fact one cannot recall when the "single issue" epithet was ever raised against the Vietnam war protesters or the Nuclear Disarmament Movement. As Congressman Hyde points out, there is very little said by the Bishops on war or poverty which would disturb secular liberalism. Whatever the intended message, the message *received* by the Catholic electorate was that it was all right to be correct on every issue but one. The *National Catholic Reporter* claims that only three Senators and seven members of the House are entitled to be called "pro-life" under terms of the "Seamless Garment" standard. Since almost everybody falls short, Catholics are told that they can be justified in supporting pro-abortion candidates on the grounds that the lapse is not disqualifying. In a country where no politician publicly approves poverty, nuclear attacks on civilian populations, active euthanasia or hunger, but where many espouse abortion on request, the political effects of the "Seamless Garment" rationale are devastating. Congressman Hyde and the other brave leaders of the Pro-life legislative battle, groan under its handicap.

Abortion for most politicians is a "no-win" issue. We must, as citizens, cherish and appreciate the courage of politicians like Henry Hyde who accept the risks of leadership and disdain the protection of the "personally opposed but" dishonesty. We must work to educate the electorate to appreciate the distinctions in argumentation and to cherish the self-sacrifice of those who refuse to hide behind semantics. Henry Hyde now flourishes as part of the Reagan Pro-life consensus but it may not be the same in another kind of administration. We can only pray that this eloquent advocate of the right to life continues *ad multos annos*.

— Eugene F. Diamond, M.D.  
Prof. of Pediatrics  
Stritch School of Medicine  
Loyola University

---