

GOP: The Conservative Party At Prayer In The Cathedral

By Rod Dreher
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Andrew Bacevich is not a Neoreactionary, but [his column about the “Washington consensus”](#) is a pretty good approximation of what Neoreactionaries refer to as “The Cathedral.” Here’s [a definition of the Cathedral](#), from a Neoreactionary site:

The Cathedral — The self-organizing consensus of Progressives and Progressive ideology represented by the universities, the media, and the civil service. A term [coined](#) by blogger Mencius Moldbug. The Cathedral has no central administrator, but represents a consensus acting as a coherent group that condemns other ideologies as evil. Community writers have enumerated the [platform of Progressivism](#) as women’s suffrage, prohibition, abolition, federal income tax, democratic election of senators, labor laws, desegregation, popularization of drugs, destruction of traditional sexual norms, ethnic studies courses in colleges, decolonization, and gay marriage. A defining feature of Progressivism is that *“you believe that morality has been essentially solved, and all that’s left is to work out the details.”* Reactionaries see Republicans as Progressives, just lagging 10-20 years behind Democrats in their adoption of Progressive norms.

Bacevich writes:

Although the Cold War has long since ended, this emphasis on an expansive, militarized foreign policy persists. If there’s a fresh element in today’s neoliberal consensus, it’s found in the realm of culture. As neoliberals see it, received norms related to family, gender and sexuality ought to be optional. What Hofstadter in his time described as a “democracy in cupidity rather than a democracy of fraternity” has become in our day a democracy combining cupidity with individual autonomy at the expense of fraternity and self-restraint, all backed by the world’s most powerful, widely deployed and busily employed military establishment.

To imply that all Americans subscribe to this neoliberal consensus would be misleading, of course. A loosely-organized antiwar movement objects, however ineffectually, to Washington’s penchant for military adventurism.

Are the troops in Afghanistan fighting for our freedom? If so, the package of things they fight for includes the prerogative of dispatching US forces to wherever it pleases Washington to send them, along with no-fault divorce, abortion on demand, gay marriage, and an economic system that manifestly privileges the interests of the affluent at the expense of those hard-pressed to

make ends meet. To pretend otherwise, indulging in some sanitized or cliché-laced definition of freedom, is to engage in willful self-deception.

To imply that all Americans subscribe to this neoliberal consensus would be misleading, of course. A loosely-organized antiwar movement objects, however ineffectually, to Washington's penchant for military adventurism. Moral traditionalists protest against the casting off of social conventions, again without discernible impact on policy. Risking the charge of engaging in class warfare, groups such as the Occupy Wall Street movement raise a ruckus about the yawning gap between the rich and everyone else. Again, the effects of their efforts appear negligible.

As far as their practical impact is concerned, these dissenters might as well be locked in a soundproof booth. They shout, but are not heard. Hofstadter had anticipated their predicament. "The range of ideas ... which practical politicians can conveniently believe in," he observed, "is normally limited by the climate of opinion that sustains their culture."

Yes — and Bacevich's column made me realize how I gave in to futility on the Arizona religious liberty bill just vetoed by Gov. Jan Brewer. Some pro-SSM readers kept prodding me for an opinion on the bill, and a similar one in Kansas. I told them quite honestly that I didn't have an opinion, because I hadn't researched the details of the bills, which were being widely denounced as the second coming of Jim Crow. I had — and do have — serene faith that were these bills passed into law, the courts would overturn them, because that's what the ~~Cathedral's canon law tribunals~~ courts do these days on gay issues. Why bother learning about a bill that will not withstand court scrutiny anyway, no matter how carefully drafted and precise? It may have been a sound bill, it may have been a terrible bill, but the point is, the fix is in. None of this matters anymore.

But writing in *The Federalist*, [Brandon McGinley says](#) anybody who looked at the details of that bill would have seen that it was not the homopocalypse, but a fairly minor tweak on already existing law. He writes:

Crucially, SB 1062 does not, under any conceivable definition, affirm a "right to discriminate." All that it does is expand the circumstances under which religious liberty claims can be heard in court; it does not (unlike the recent, equally controversial Kansas law) prescribe the outcomes of those hearings.

But there's more. Despite hysterical claims that SB 1062 would have "legalized discrimination" in Arizona, you may be surprised to learn that sexual orientation and gender identity are not protected classes in Arizona. Which is to say, except in [Phoenix, Flagstaff, and Tuscon](#), which include those traits in local ordinances, *it's already legal to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in Arizona*.

That dystopian Arizona with LGBT folks sitting at different lunch counters and forced out of jobs en masse and booted from retail stores? You know, the one promised by LGBT activists, and then by Marriott and Intel and Yelp, and then, implicitly, by John McCain and Mitt Romney and Laura Ingraham? Under Arizona law, that could exist right now. And yet it

doesn't. Because Arizona isn't full of hordes of cackling Christians plotting an LGBT apartheid state.

Those dire predictions peddled by LGBT activists were guilelessly parroted by the media, by the business community, and by many Republicans. And they were nothing more than Christian-baiting fearmongering.

McGinley points to [the opinion of libertarian legal scholar Ilya Shapiro](#), who supports gay marriage rights, in which he comes out in favor of the Arizona bill, saying it does nothing more than align Arizona law with the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act — [a position defended by a coalition of law professors](#) on both sides of the SSM issue. More McGinley:

It's been clear for quite some time now that the Republican Party's commitment to social conservatives, especially on issues of marriage and sexuality, is not principled, but contingent. As public opinion shifts, the party makes no attempt to wield its massive influence to arrest that shift (no, platform planks don't count); it glides along with it, if perhaps a beat or two behind. But on religious liberty, the GOP seemed poised to stand its ground. Until now.

Because the fact of the matter is, if SB 1062 was unacceptable, then no substantive religious liberty protections will ever be acceptable. SB 1062—nothing more than a clarification and slight broadening of Arizona's RFRA *in line with federal standards*—was the bare minimum.

... *if perhaps a beat or two behind*. Recall this line: "Reactionaries see Republicans as Progressives, just lagging 10-20 years behind Democrats in their adoption of Progressive norms." I am not a Neoreactionary, but they could hardly be more correct in this judgment.

Look, I know we're going to have nationalized gay marriage in this country. I've been saying that for years. I have been saying for years that instead of focusing their energies on trying to stop the inevitable, Republicans should be working to build up religious liberty protections. Now we can't even trust them to do that. They're nothing more than the conservative party at prayer in the Cathedral.