Events Calendar

Foundations for a Catholic Ethic of War Termination

Msgr. Robert McElroy, Bay Area priest, scholar and author, will explore an ethical framework within the Catholic tradition that might inform a position on withdrawal from Iraq.

Friday, February 1, 2008
12:00 noon
Handlery Dining Room, Lone Mountain Room 100, USF


Restorative Justice and Catholic Social Thought: Challenges as Opportunities for Society, Church, and Academy

Friday, February 29, 2008
12:00 noon (11:30 am refreshments)
Xavier Hall, Fromm Institute, USF

Fr. Kurt Denk, SJ, Maryland Province Jesuit, former chaplain at San Quentin State Prison, student at Boalt School of Law at UC Berkeley.

2008 SUMMER SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

Fr. James Keenan, SJ
The Lane Center is delighted to announce that Fr. James Keenan, SJ, moral theologian at Boston College, will be the Lane Center Scholar-in-Residence during the summer of 2008 and deliver a series of public lectures on his current research in the area of HIV/AIDS. Dates and times TBA.

Fr. James Keenan, SJ, Professor of Moral Theology at Boston College, will be a Scholar-in-Residence at USF in 2008.

In 2003, Keenan testified against a bill defining marriage in Massachusetts as being between one man and one woman. See following pages.
Father James F. Keenan, S.J.
Roman Catholic priest
Testimony submitted to Joint Committee on the Judiciary in opposition to H.3190
April 28, 2003

To the Honorable Chairpersons and Members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary:

I am Father James F. Keenan, S.J., a Roman Catholic priest and Professor of Moral Theology at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge. I received my doctorate in moral theology from Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University. I will also be a visiting professor at Boston College over the next two years, holding the Gasson chair (2003-2005).

I am here today to testify against H. 3190 because it is contrary to Catholic teaching on social justice. Recently I published an essay which reviewed roughly one hundred and fifty articles and books by Catholic moral theologians from around the world who have written on the lives of gay and lesbian persons. I have made a copy for each of you. I can tell you that H.3190 is out of step with a broad consensus among the world's Catholic theologians, who insist that gay and lesbian persons should be treated with dignity, fairness and justice.

To appreciate why Catholic moral theology could not support H. 3190 we need to appreciate how theologians and bishops differentiate the church's theology of chastity from its theology of justice. In the former, the Catholic theological position on chastity prohibits all sexual activity outside of those non-contraceptive relations between a husband and wife. It thus opposes the sexual activity of all divorced heterosexual persons, all unmarried heterosexual persons, and all gay and lesbian persons as well as any contraceptive activity of sacramentally married husbands and wives.

When it comes to the social lives of all these persons--both hetero- and homosexual--whose sexual activities it opposes, Catholic theology does not by any extension endorse the unequal or discriminatory treatment of any of these people. Thus it does not argue against treating divorced heterosexual persons justly or equitably, nor against just and equitable treatment of gays and lesbians. On the contrary, it obliges society to recognize that all these persons retain their full range of human and civil rights because of their inherent dignity as human persons. This position has been articulated time and again by many, many moral theologians. (For instance, those from the United States include: Father John Coleman, Cassassa Professor of Social Values Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles; Sr. Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago; Father John Tuohey, Providence Health Systems, Portland, Oregon; Father Charles Curran, Elizabeth Scurlock Professor, Southern Methodist University; Dr. Margaret Farley, Gilbert Stark Professor of Christian Ethics, Yale University; and, Father Richard Peddicord, O.P., the Aquinas Institute, St. Louis University. see my article, notes 13, 24, 25).

This same position has been endorsed by the United States Catholic Bishops in their pastoral statement, "Always our Children," where they write, "Respect for the God-given dignity of all persons means the recognition of human rights and responsibilities. The teachings of the Church make it clear that the fundamental human rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any forms of injustice, oppression, or violence against them." Similarly in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2358) we read: "Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided."

In this light, as a priest and as a moral theologian, I cannot see how anyone could use the Roman Catholic tradition to support H. 3190. On the contrary, the Catholic theological tradition stands against the active and unjust discrimination against the basic social rights of gay and lesbian persons. For these reasons, I urge you to recommend a no vote on H. 3190.
This is the website of MassEquality.org, the Campaign for Equality, Inc. and the MassEquality Education Fund, Inc. Click here to learn more about the distinction between these two organizations.
On June 14th, the Massachusetts Legislature voted down a discriminatory, anti-gay, anti-marriage Constitutional amendment by a vote of 151 to 45.

Learn More:

- New: Message from Marc Solomon, Campaign Director, about the future of MassEquality
- How they voted: the final tally

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About Us

Who We Are
MassEquality.org is a coalition of local and national organizations defending equal marriage rights for same-sex couples in Massachusetts.

- About our coalition

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We work to protect the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's decision on marriage equality and to defeat any discriminatory amendment to the Massachusetts state constitution in the Legislature.

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MassEquality.org
11 Beacon Street, Suite 1125
Boston, MA 02108
MassEquality.org
11 Beacon Street, Suite 1125
Boston, MA 02108
Phone (617) 878-2300
Fax (617) 878-2333
Info@MassEquality.org

This is the website of MassEquality.org, the Campaign for Equality, Inc. and the MassEquality Education Fund, Inc. Learn more about the distinction between these two organizations.
Massachusetts Bill H. 3190 would, following the lead of almost two-thirds of the states of the Union, specify that marriage is a union between a man and a woman. Father James F. Keenan of Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Mass., is opposed to it and so testified at a hearing on the bill. As noted earlier, Fr. Keenan has written extensively and sympathetically on gay rights, “queer” theology, and related matters. “Besides coming before you as a priest,” he told the solons, “I am here as a moral theologian. We theologians see our task in the Church as teaching and interpreting the Church’s tradition and in this sense we are somewhat like rabbis whose authority derives from an ability to teach and apply the tradition to our ordinary lives of faith.” Really? The authority of a rabbi is indeed dependent upon his personal wisdom and holiness, while with Catholic theologians there is the Magisterium that defines what the tradition is and, when necessary, authoritatively indicates its correct application to the particulars of life. Fr. Keenan’s formulation would seem to be yet another way of advancing the claim that academic theologians constitute a “parallel magisterium.” He goes on to cite a number of moral theologians who agree with him that homosexuals “retain their full range of human and civil rights because of their inherent dignity as human persons.” He names nine theologians but he could have named thousands, for that is, quite simply, the magisterial teaching of the Church. The difference is that Fr. Keenan and a few others contend that human and civil rights include the right of homosexuals to have their unions legally defined as marriage. Not only that, but he appears to believe that that is the only authentically Catholic position. “In this light, as a priest and as a moral theologian, I cannot see in any way how any one could argue for H. 3190 on any Roman Catholic traditional grounds” (emphasis added). So much for the many bishops, theologians, and priests who, in their several states and in their support for a federal marriage amendment, take the position that marriage should be legally defined as a union between a man and a woman. But Fr. Keenan did say that, as with rabbis, his authority derives from his ability. As with rabbis, one is free to consult another who is able to see what Fr. Keenan is unable to see. Even better, one might have recourse to someone who accepts the responsibility of being a teacher of what the Church teaches.