

Testani and Djuric Guide Audience to ‘Wrestle with Justice’ at CTK BELIEVES

Does it matter that we are Catholic or Christian when it comes to our professional life? Can anyone tell ... should they be able to?

These are the questions Rocco Testani and Nick Djuric, Partners at Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP, challenged the audience to wrestle with and discuss during Tuesday’s CTK’s BELIEVES discussion on “Faith and Law: Wrestling with Justice” an intriguing topic that’s ever present in our society.

“Senator John F. Kennedy’s address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in September 1960 when he was running for president was very defining for our society at the time in how to balance faith and professional life,” Testani and Djuric said. “He advocated a true separation of church and state.”

One of Kennedy’s seminal remarks during the speech stated, “Whatever issue may come before me as president ... I will make my decision ... in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be in the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressures or dictates.”

Kennedy did however go on to say, “if the time should ever come – and I do not concede any conflict to be even remotely possible – when my office would require me to either violate my conscience or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office; and I hope any conscientious public servant would do the same.”

“JFK’s speech has answered the question of how to compartmentalize and separate faith from public and professional life for many people,” Testani and Djuric stated, “but is that a good thing?”

The United States Catholic bishops has recently stated in ***The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*** that “as people of both faith and reason, Catholics are called to bring truth to political life and to practice Christ’s commandment to ‘love one another’ (John 13:34).”

The bishops further state “our nation’s tradition of pluralism is enhanced, not threatened, when religious groups and people of faith bring their convictions into public life. The Catholic community brings to the political dialogue a consistent moral framework and broad experience serving those in need.”

Does JFK’s view still stand today 53 years later? Many in the audience seemed surprised to hear that 7 of 9 US Supreme Court justices are Catholic.

“Would we know it?” asked Testani.

“Integrating faith spans all lines of work,” said Djuric. “Romans 14:22 says, ‘Use the faith you have as your rule of life in the sight of God. Happy the man whose conscience does not condemn what he has chosen to do!’”

So, what are our priorities and how do we balance our duties to clients, shareholders/owners/investors, public, family, and God and faith?

For Testani, this question was central when he was being considered several years ago to be selected for Georgia’s Supreme Court. He said when he was asked if he would support a death penalty sentence if it was brought before him as a Supreme Court Justice, he reflexively said “yes” and followed the JFK approach to being able to keep faith separate from his public office. In hindsight, he said his response wasn’t as thoughtful as it should have been because the issue is more complicated.

Djuric drew from his personal experience and shared that in the legal profession, client duty has been raised to an ethical level, and where that runs into moral beliefs, there will be conflict.

"I often help people prepare and execute estate plans and advanced directives," Djuric said. "Georgia's form allows a person to choose not to want any medical procedures, nutrition, or hydration to continue life. The church teaches that you can reject extraordinary treatment, but not ordinary treatment such as hydration. Do I help them end their life ... do I do more than explain the medical choice ... do I do something unique for Catholics ... do I just be a secular lawyer in a secular society? These are the questions I wrestle with all the time in this situation."

At the close of Djuric and Testani's remarks, they invited those in attendance to spend some time talking with one another about whether their faith matters when it comes to their professional life. Then they brought the discussion back together – and dialogue was lively.

"It's in our actions," said Dick White, a CTK parishioner. "It's in what we do, and perhaps what we don't do."

Others found consensus that as professionals, we can always execute the tasks we're supposed to do, but as people of faith we're called to show compassion to those we interact with, and that often comes out in the counsel we provide to others so they can pause and wrestle with what they want to do before we are asked to execute tasks as professionals.

Mark Zyla, a CTK parishioner and Managing Director of Acuitas added a few comments from the client perspective.

"Clients that are most successful are those that say 'let's do the right thing' rather than try to navigate all the rules as black and white," he said.

Clearly a challenging topic and lively debate.

CTK BELIEVES will continue its monthly series in January when David Salyers, VP of Marketing for Chick-Fil-A, leads a discussion on Tuesday, January 14, 2014, on "What did Jesus say about business that you may not BELIEVE ... and is simply REMARKABLE?" an intriguing topic that may provide a whole new perspective on how to view business.

To reserve your spot, register today at www.cathedralofchristtheking.org/BELIEVES.