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September 11, 2010: What Did Rick Santorum Mean?

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Title: What Did Rick Santorum Mean?

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9/11/2010—On this ninth anniversary of the World Trade Center and related bombings, it seems appropriate to plumb the role of religion in America's public square. For some people, America is engaged with a militant strain of Islam that wants to install Sharia as the law for all societies as opposed to our secular vision of the public square in which all are free to practice any religion—or no religion—as they choose. From this point of view, Santorum represents a weird form of the very enemy we are fighting because he spoke on Thursday, September 9, in favor of a greater role of faith in promoting public policy. What is Santorum actually promoting? Clearly, he opposes abortion and gay marriage and he says that on both positions he is following God's will. I'm really not sure there is much else to his new faith in public life position. In one sense, this is not only nothing new, it is not even faith in public life. Lots of people oppose abortion and gay marriage for a variety of reasons. As I argued in *American Religious Democracy*, it cannot possibly be true that there is something wrong with promoting policies because I believe that they represent God's will. If the voters disagree with Santorum's policies, they will certainly say so. What about constitutional rights? Well, it is not as if abortion and gay rights are obvious from the text of the Constitution. The Supreme Court has not said anything about gay marriage and Santorum is not pledging to refuse to enforce *Roe v. Wade*. There is nothing here in a political sense. But there is something here in a religious sense. Who is Santorum to tell us what God's will is in such a specific way? The ancient rabbis, who presumably knew something about God's will, were not as pro-life as Santorum is. Even though I basically agree with Santorum on this issue, it is arrogance to assert that this is clearly what God wants. Opposition to gay marriage is even worse. What is the biblical basis for that? Paul was not addressing stable loving gay relationships. Leviticus is the old law overturned in favor of the law of love. God tells Peter all food is kosher. Why not all loving relationships, too? Santorum's theology is worse than his politics.