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March 4, 2014: Ross Douthat's Surrender Column

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Title: Ross Douthat's Surrender Column

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3/4/2014—Ross Douthat wrote a column Sunday in the New York Times ("The Terms of Our Surrender") ostensibly throwing in the towel on religious exemption for gay marriage in light of the Arizona experience. But the column was mean spirited, which Douthat usually is not, and it was not accurate in its description of the situation, which again is not like Douthat. For example, Douthat says that gay marriage is coming because of the Supreme Court. But, as he knows, the real change has been a political avalanche. Yesterday, the Quinnipiac poll reported that Pennsylvanians support gay marriage by 57% to 37%--and we have Republicans dominating all three branches of State government. Douthat's real concern is what happens to a religious culture that still clings to the heterosexual/religious/Christian view of marriage and sex. Douthat's hopes it will be live and let live, but he no longer expects that. Now he thinks that traditional institutions, like Catholic adoption agencies, will be treated like racists were earlier. But here is his key observation about a law like the proposed Arizona religious exemption: "such bills have been seen, in the past, as a way for religious conservatives to negotiate surrender — to accept same-sex marriage's inevitability while carving out protections for dissent. But now, apparently, the official line is that you bigots don't get to negotiate anymore." But, if you are wise, you don't negotiate surrender when you have nothing left to offer. Then, why exactly, should the other side give you anything? You negotiate when you still can resist. Not one traditional voice that I know of have offered to support gay marriage in return for a religious exemption when it counted. Not one. Douthat could do that now. In Pennsylvania, for example, there is no strong support for gay marriage among two Republican majority chambers. So, this is the time to negotiate. If cultural conservatives wait until gay marriage has majority support, why should they expect terms? Douthat wants a situation in which supporters of religious exemptions hold out until they lose on gay marriage and then demand a religious exemption. The flaw in Arizona was not that the bill granted a religious exemption, but that it did not legalize gay marriage. I assure the reader that no one would have objected to that fair deal. I am calling for just that deal in Pennsylvania on Monday in the Philadelphia Enquirer. If Douthat wants negotiation, let's go.