

The Dressmaker vs. the Baker

Sophie Theallet is one of the top dressmakers in the world. Her designs have been worn by celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, Jessica Alba, Gabrielle Union and Michelle Obama.

She has famously begun a campaign to recruit every major fashion designer in the world to join her in refusing to provide a stitch of clothing to the new first lady, Melania Trump. Other luminaries in the fashion world such as Tom Ford and Marc Jacobs have joined the boycott.

So why is Ms. Theallet adamantly, vigorously and publicly refusing to dress the incoming first lady? It's a matter of values, you see. Her designs are not just dresses. "We consider our voice an expression of our artistic and philosophical ideas." Our brand, she says, "stands against all discrimination and prejudice" and has "always been a celebration of diversity and a reflection of the world we live in."

In other words, her designs represent her values on display, and she refuses to allow her artistic ability to be used on behalf of ideals she finds abhorrent. She is perfectly willing to give up income for the sake of something higher. "Our bottom line is not just about money."

She concludes, "I will not participate in dressing or associating in any way with the next first lady. The rhetoric of racism, sexism and xenophobia unleashed by her husband's presidential campaign are incompatible with the shared values we live by."

And for the highbrow elites in the fashion industry, this is perfectly normal, praiseworthy and worthy of imitation. Abby Schreiber, the managing editor at *Paper Magazine*, said, "Fashion has always been about expression, provocation and, not infrequently, politics and, to that end, these designers'

refusal to dress Melania Trump is not, in and of itself, unusual for this industry.”

And she adds, if the person who would like to do business with you is linked to a message that is at odds with the brand you are seeking to cultivate, then it makes perfectly good sense to refuse to do business with them.

“Fashion designers have long attempted to tell a story about their brand and vision and to articulate a feeling, emotion or sense of who their customer or ‘muse’ is. And for those designers who are troubled by the hateful, bigoted rhetoric that surrounded Trump’s campaign, it may make sense for them to want to distance their brand and their vision from it.”

Let’s summarize the worldview of the left. If you are an artist, your work product is a vehicle for expressing your most deeply held values. And you have a right to decline to produce a work product that would violate your own conscience and compromise your values.

This is exactly what Aaron and Melissa Klein did. Cakes they crafted for weddings represented their artistic talent and communicated a message about their own values. Because they believe, as civilization has for 6,000 years, that marriage is exclusively between a man and a woman, they politely declined to produce an artistic design that communicated a message that went against their conscience and convictions.

Their wedding cakes were an expression of their artistic and philosophical ideas, and represented the shared values they live by. They told a story about their brand and vision, and they turned down a job and the money that went with it because their bottom line was about something other than money.

Well, Sophie Theallet has been lionized for her principled stand. She has been called “one of the few truly outspoken voices” in the fashion world, a woman “who (makes) the world go round,” a woman who is “not just admirable but brave,” and

“an exceptionally strong woman (who) has integrity in spades.”

In contrast, what happened to the Kleins for taking exactly the same kind of principled stand Sophie Theallet has? They have been castigated as horrible specimens of bigotry, fined \$135,000 by the government of Oregon, and put out of business.

I don't begrudge Sophie Theallet's right to make the choice she did. I disagree with her choice, and am unapologetically critical of it (freedom of speech and of the press), but I would never seek to use the coercive power of government to force her to make a dress for Melania Trump or anyone else. The First Amendment says she can “peaceably assemble” with anyone she wants to, and she shouldn't be forced to do business with anyone she doesn't want to. But neither should the Kleins.

The Kleins have exactly the same constitutional right Sophie Theallet does, the right of association, and on top of that, they also have an even more sacred right, the right to the “free exercise” of religion, which is a right they possess not just one hour a week on Sunday mornings but 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including the hours they spend in a bakery they own.

As lesbian writer Tammy Bruce has pointed out, it's a form of tyranny to require the Kleins to do work in violation of their conscience and a form of slavery to require them to do work against their own will. Only a bigot of the worst sort would attempt to deprive the Kleins of not just one but two explicit constitutionally guaranteed rights and violate the 13th Amendment in the process.

I will believe liberals and their demonizing screeches about the Kleins just as soon as they try to fine Sophie Theallet \$135,000 and put her completely out of business. Until then,

they will continue to be, in my judgment, not only Christophobic bigots but hypocrites of the darkest dye. {eoa}

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