

My Government My Boss

So, two guys are sitting around having a beer, talking during halftime. The First guy says to his pal, "I am tired of the government telling us what to do all the time." The Second guy moans, "That's right, we have to get them out of our lives." "By the way," says the first, "has your social security check arrived yet?" "Nah, the government just doesn't give enough money to run the post office efficiently." Lots of people are sitting around just like that, complaining about their social security being in jeopardy, wanting those cost of living increases, and wanting more money for the post office to deliver those checks on time.

What does all this have to do with the government demanding that Catholic health care systems provide funding for birth control? Well, it's that government interfering again! How dare the government tell hospital or health care insurers what to do with the money that the taxpayers provide? Outrageous! The argument of many in the church is simply that they should be able to do whatever they want with taxpayer money regardless of government wishes. What is wrong with this picture?

There is nothing to stop a truly independent charitable institution from taking no money from the government, other than the already generous tax exempt status afforded to many businesses associated with religious organizations. Take the Herbert Rieders Foundation – Hatzilu, of which I am President. Now, this Foundation has no salaries, since all of us work for the organization for free. Donations are tax exempt, and the money goes for direct cash assistance to the most needy. We get no government money, and therefore, if we wish, we can decide to provide only kosher food to families who keep a kosher home. If we took government money, we would have to supply the government ration to all comers. The big religious institutions can do the same thing, but they want their cake and they want to eat it too.

An old friend of mine, who I have not seen for many years, managed literally hundreds of millions of dollars of the Catholic Arch Diocese in New York. She was one of the top municipal bond portfolio managers on Wall Street. There is nothing wrong with religious organizations being rich, since many of them do phenomenal work. Once upon a time, I did *pro bono* legal work for a legal organization that was largely funded by the Campaign for Human Development, a Catholic Charity.

What really is at stake is whether religious organizations, that take taxpayer money, are going to dictate through the government that birth control is bad policy.

Intertwined and tangled up with all of this is the thorny question of abortion. Somehow the anti-birth control folks have aligned themselves with the pro-life movement. Is it true that pro-lifers are really against birth control? It has never been my understanding the two went hand-in-hand, but there seems to be an alliance developing in order to fight off big bad government.

Overpopulation is, without question, one of the world's most disastrous problems. Those of us who are uncomfortable with abortion, see intelligent family planning without the need for the taking of human tissue capable of developing into life as an alternative to abortion. Removing the option of safe family planning will actually increase dependent families and will drive more desperate young women into the arms of abortionists. How counterproductive can that strategy be? If a woman or a couple want or need birth control in order to live the life they choose in this great nation, why should they be denied that opportunity by organizations who hire non-Catholics all the time? How about all of those nice Jewish and Muslim doctors and nurses at Holy Redeemer Hospital in Philadelphia? They have only been hired thanks to the largess of the taxpayer which helps to support Medicare, Medicaid, and countless other government programs from which Holy Redeemer benefits. Those non-Catholics will now be denied the same health care benefit to family planning that employees at other non-Catholic facilities enjoy.

I certainly am not picking on the Catholic Church. In fact, the HRF recently completed, in cooperation with the Vatican, a documentary on the treasure trove contained within the Vatican library. That documentary is being shown nationwide at academic institutions. The next showing will be in conjunction with Towson State University in Baltimore March 1st. Without the frank and honest answers of the church, a documentary in-depth about the Vatican Jewish collection would not have been possible.

The taxpayer, however, needs to consider the family planning issue without the political implications. This is not a First Amendment issue. The First Amendment guarantees that there will be no establishment of religion, and it further guarantees that there shall be no religious entanglement with the government. When a religious institution takes taxpayer dollars and refuses to abide by government rules and regulations, who is it that is entangling religion with the government? Perhaps it is the religious institution that is demanding that its views be imposed upon the rest of the taxpayers and the government which so generally doles out the money to keep worthy charities in business.

Does anybody remember George Bush's 1,000 points of light? Bush was talking about efforts of the nonprofit sector to improve the condition of downtrodden Americans. The Bush doctrine, encouraged by other Presidents,

including the present one, thought that it was important to give money to nonprofits in order to uplift poor Americans through the comingling of dollars with a spiritual path. Numerous addiction programs are supported by religious institutions that receive government money. George Bush's 1,000 points of light could not function without taxpayer dollars. Most religious organizations would struggle, if they could survive at all, absent tax-exempt status. We subsidize nonprofits in America by not taxing what often amounts to impressive amounts of property that they own. The Muslim organization which is building its fabulous facility blocks from the site of the 911 catastrophe will never pay property taxes on their investment.

Most Americans do not think family planning is a bad thing, even if they do question *Roe v. Wade*, permitting abortion during the first two trimesters of a woman's pregnancy. To link family planning with abortions is an iconic irony that cannot be ignored. Abortions will be reduced by family planning, not increased. Nonprofits that seek generous government handouts and use them to promote good works as well as their own ideals, need to abide by the same rules by which we are all governed.

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