



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY 2012 (REALLY?)

If you google the news for “religious freedom” or “religious liberty” these days, most of the hits will be related to the objections of the Catholic Church that health insurance is being required by the government to cover the cost of contraceptives. It is a curious fabric of a variety of threads.

The Catholic Church continues its peculiar doctrinal opposition to the use of any “artificial” birth control. Or, as H.L. Mencken observed, “A Catholic woman [may] avoid pregnancy by a resort to mathematics, though she is still forbidden to resort to physics and chemistry.” And yet the fact is that the majority of Catholics routinely violate this stricture as well as the Catholic prohibition on abortion.

Not only that, but since the late 19th Century medicine has grown into a science whereas formerly it had been what is now called “alternative medicine,” which is to say, mainly nonsense. Modern contraception, as well as the diagnosis and management of infertility and pregnancy has become a well-established part of medical care and goes far beyond preventing pregnancy. “Birth control pills,” for example, offer many non-contraceptive benefits including reduction of the risk of uterine and ovarian cancer. And despite the Vatican’s efforts to obscure the facts, condoms reduce the risk of transmission of STD’s including HIV.

How long will it take before the Catholic Church abandons its claim to authority in matters of medicine? It took hundreds of years for it to admit its error in claiming authority in the science of astronomy.

Employer-purchased health insurance is a part of employee compensation. Is it a violation of employers’ religious freedom when their employees purchase things that are “deeply offensive” to the employers? As long as the employers themselves are not making those decisions, religious liberty considerations run in the completely opposite direction. It doesn’t violate any employers’ religious liberties if their employees exercise their own religious liberties. The Catholic Bishops are trying to obscure this as a means of burdening others with and gaining advantage for their own religious sensibilities.

Now it is true that health insurance policies that exclude coverage of contraceptives have been the choice of Catholic employers. Doubtless Jehovah’s Witness employers would like to purchase health insurance that exclude blood transfusions. The same could be said for any number of other medical tests or treatments since anyone could dream up any kind of “deeply held religious convictions” that would exclude coverage of anything and possibly be a bit cheaper too. Don’t believe in the Germ Theory of Disease? Then wouldn’t it violate one’s conscience to have to buy medical insurance that covers antibiotics?

Admittedly, nonsensical exclusions and inconsistencies in health insurance coverage are rampant. Government regulation of health insurance has made little more sense with, for example, some policies being subject to state laws and others not. But these are things that health insurance reform was intended to address. So if government measures to promote wider and more uniform medical insurance is deemed to be good and desirable public policy, then requiring that medical insurance include contraception, whether used primarily for contraception or not, is reasonable, just as it is reasonable to require that it cover blood transfusions and all other appropriate and medically necessary services.

What would otherwise be the result of allowing health insurance policies to be tailored to specific religious doctrines? It would allow the infringement of the religious liberties of those whose health insurance is purchased for them by others. It would be the same as if someone could pay someone else in dollars that could not be used to buy something that the payer disapproved of. It would be as intolerable as allowing – as was once allowed – a restaurant or other business open to the public to practice invidious discrimination on the excuse of “deep religious convictions.”

Of course, there are some additional things going on during a year in which an incumbent President is running for re-election. Those who regularly condemn the President for not sufficiently hating gays, abortion rights, and contraception will be happily joined by those who oppose the President for other reasons. They would as enthusiastically take the side of aggrieved Muslim and Orthodox Jewish employers whose employees spend part of their compensation on pork and cheese-and-meat pizzas if this could possibly

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be blamed on their political opponents.

Notice, too, that it is a homage that vice pays to virtue – hypocrisy, in other words – that the Catholic Bishops and their supporters so readily assume the role of victims of religious oppression. The truth is that Catholic organizations, besides the usual tax exemptions and special considerations, receive a torrent of taxpayer dollars for “charitable activities” that help them promote their doctrines through the illusion of Catholic generosity. And it helps to undermine what they style as “excluding religion from the public square” but which is actually a Constitutional mandate to ensure the religious neutrality of government.

Even other religious leaders (of “believing” traditions) have recognized the real issues which, were they recognized, would demolish the stance of the Catholic leaders who claim that their religious liberty is being trampled upon. When Philadelphia Rabbi Arthur Waskow, for example, made perfectly reasonable observations about the matter, Catholic League President Bill Donohue told the Jewish leader that “you stuck your nose in where you don’t belong.” Waskow responded:

“Tens of thousands of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu women work for or study at various Catholic-sponsored universities and hospitals that involve and hire them — and that receive my/our tax money. (They are quite different from fully religious Catholic institutions, like churches, dioceses, or the NCCB, that do NOT receive tax money.) ... Those women are my business. All of them, including the Catholic women who in shaping their own religious consciences (did you know that women are capable of doing that?) have concluded that contraception is ethical and moral.” [http://www.catholicleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Donohue-Waskow-Full-Exchange.pdf]

YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED, APPRECIATED, AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!

**COMING NEXT MONTH:
“HISTORY IN HOLY BOOKS”**

**>>> Sunday, August 5th, 2012 <<<
SHERATON GRAND DFW AIRPORT
SE CORNER OF 114 AND ESTERS**

**All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar (yes, website has now been updated thanks to Sarah and Rusty Nejd!) , or through our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: - www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought -
JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Golden Corral Buffet and Grill in Grapevine, located just across from the Grapevine Mills Mall, at 2605 E. Grapevine Mills Circle, phone (972) 874-7900. To reach Golden Corral from the Sheraton, cross over the freeway and make a left onto John W. Carpenter Freeway (114) going west. Then take the first exit RIGHT onto International Parkway (121), then Grapevine Mills Parkway exit. Turn LEFT on Stars and Stripes Way, continuing on to E. Grapevine Mills Circle.

Freethought Salon: Get together to discuss today’s service topic or other conundrums of interest to Freethinkers. Most Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton Vineyard in Grapevine; see the meetup site!

Game Night: The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

Secular Singles: Freethinkers have met their life-partners with whom they have begun families through the Secular Singles group. Check the meetup site for the next date, time and location!

“State churches that use government power to support themselves and force their views on persons of other faiths undermine all our civil rights.”
- Thomas Jefferson
(1808 speech to Virginia Baptists)



DFWCOR

Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason

The North Texas Church of Freethought
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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