

Agencies face discrimination

"Despotism may be able to do without faith, but freedom cannot," said Alexis de Tocqueville, an early observer of American democracy. This remains true. Yet today many are laboring aggressively to reduce faith's public influence.

In California, Catholic Charities was told by the California Supreme Court that it was not religious enough to be exempt from a state law mandating that employers pay for contraception. In New York the Salvation Army is being assailed by the New York Civil Liberties Union as being too religious to provide public social services.

The two cases illustrate how a type of "heads I win, tails you lose" argumentation now is employed to drive faith out of public life.

The California contraceptives mandate was almost diabolical in its clever design to injure Catholic Charities. On the surface, the law exempted "religious organizations" from the contraceptives mandate. In reality it was less an accommodation than a means of exclusion.

By insisting that the only religious organizations exempted from paying for contraceptive services were those that served their own adherents, the California Assembly confronted Catholic Charities with an impossible choice: Either Catholic Charities could stop offering millions of people help regardless of creed or it must



Douglas W. Kmiec

subsidize behavior contrary to the church's moral teaching. The California Supreme Court did not see this as religious discrimination.

Like Catholic Charities, the Salvation Army of New York turns no one away who needs help. So, too, it is called to this service by the witness of Christ's own ministry. The Salvation Army describes itself as "an international movement, an evangelical part of the universal Christian church, with a mission to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination."

In carrying out that mission, the Salvation Army runs homeless shelters and group homes for impoverished families, juvenile delinquents and the disabled; and adoption and foster-care programs. Indeed, it is only with the help of the Salvation Army that many state and local governments fulfill their own legal obligations.

Its reward? It is now the target of a multicount lawsuit contending that its overt Christianity constitutes a "hostile work environment"

— hostility being occasional, voluntary prayers at staff meetings, notices of religious services on its bulletin board and personnel practices inquiring whether a person is of good character and faith — any faith.

The charitable good works of these agencies should be lauded and facilitated, not litigated. Both organizations are enormously successful at what they do.

Like the Catholic Church, the Salvation Army subscribes to an understanding of human freedom that is not merely license. Authentic freedom is anchored in the Creator, reflecting a desire to build up life, not destroy it. These two noble friends in faith consistently have taught that certain behaviors do not conform to God's will for society: homosexual practice, abortion, premarital and extramarital sexual relationships, and drug use.

Would a sane society think otherwise? In praising the young America of the 1840s, de Tocqueville himself asked, "How could society escape destruction if, when political ties are relaxed, moral ties are not tightened?" Of course, it cannot, and making it more difficult for religious organizations such as Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army to be true to themselves only obscures that fact.

Douglas W. Kmiec is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

Candidates' positions disappointing

To the editor,

The Risen Lord is the affirmation by the Father of all that Jesus lived and taught. Central to Christ's life was his nonviolent love, even of one's enemy. We as followers of Christ have drifted far from this teaching. That is why as we enter the political season of our country, I cannot support President Bush. He claims to be a Christian, but his actions are anti-life as he spends large amounts of funds which could be used to help the poor on weapons and defense. His administration's policies of war have directly or indirectly cost the lives of many people in our country and throughout the world.

I also cannot support Senator John Kerry, who claims to be a Catholic. I never have heard Senator John Kerry ever explain why he is personally opposed to abortion yet never acted on this position publicly as a Senator. Does that mean he could be personally opposed to rape or torture, but not act on his belief as Senator? I would hope a highly educated man like Senator Kerry would not be opposed to abortion just because he was Catholic. He must know from science the reality of the humanity of the unborn.

He must be aware, as those of us who work in Project Rachel are, of the destructiveness to women from abortions. Has he supported a crisis pregnancy service, at least as strongly as he supported the "right" to abortion? Has he tried to convince friends or other family members in private, why he personally sees abortion as wrong? If he is personally opposed to abortion, how as a private citizen has he acted in any way on his personal belief opposing abortion? My guess is that he hasn't done a thing.

That is why both major candidates leave me very disappointed.

Father Jim Hewes
St. John/St. Patrick
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Sodus Street
Clyde

Skeptic likes issue devoted to vocations

To the editor:

I would like to comment on the new format of the *Catholic Courier*. I must admit I was skeptical at first. But after reading the second edition, I have to tell you that I am enjoying it very much. The added topics are most interesting — it's worth the wait. In fact, this (May) edition is so jam-packed, I'm not sure I'll get thru it before the next one arrives!

I particularly like the press given to the subject of priest ordination. I agree that there is a parallel between the breakdown of marriages and the breakdown in vocations. As Father Hewes said, basically, people don't want to make a permanent commitment to anything that involves sacrifice. But I do believe that our children need to hear more FROM priests and nuns about their own experiences. The children need to know that priests & nuns are people too!

This makes me think of another parallel: the shortage of nuns. They are the ones who taught us humility, obedience and tolerance.

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