

Repeating History?



BY MARK PFUNDSTEIN

Nearly 200 years ago, a group of Lutherans left central Europe for the frontiers of North America. Despite the guarantees of religious liberty found in the Peace of Augsburg and the General Law Code of Prussia, edicts issued by the king of Prussia had violated that freedom. These faithful Lutherans remained steadfast in their beliefs, refusing to conform to the will of the government.

In the United States, our Lutheran forebearers found a land where religious liberty was protected. Unlike in Germany, where freedom of religion was seemingly a gift from the government, the First Amendment to the Constitution prohibited the government from any interference into religious practices. Our founders realized that freedom of religion was outside of the purview of government, and matters of conscience should be free from government intrusion.

Now, however, our religious freedom is under concerted attack again, this time from the federal government. As part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), the government has promulgated regulations mandating that all health insurance policies cover contraception without any cost to the insured — and with a religious exemption and grandfather clause so narrow as to be practically worthless. The regulation covers all manner of contraception and abortifacients (drugs that induce abortion). Despite assertions that this requirement imposes a burden only on insurance companies, those companies may well pass this cost on to employers through higher premiums in the near future.

This mandate should concern all faithful Christians owing to its

unprecedented intrusion into the religious beliefs of all Americans. If the government can require the purchase of contraceptives and abortifacients despite religious-based objections, it is incumbent upon us to consider how long it will be before we face the same situation our Lutheran predecessors faced — that is, government directives on matters of the Gospel.

Our religious liberty also is under attack on the issue of marriage. The

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ancient and biblical concept of marriage as the union of one man and one woman is under siege by those who seek to redefine marriage to accommodate the desires of homosexual couples. Although referenda in 28 states have successfully amended state constitutions to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman, proponents of “same-sex marriage” continue their efforts to redefine marriage. Courts in California have delayed implementation of a ballot initiative that maintained the traditional definition of marriage.

This fall, proponents also are pushing hard to implement “same-sex marriage” via referenda in Washington and Maryland. Currently, states maintaining the traditional definition of marriage are aided by the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1996. DOMA retains the traditional definition

of marriage for all federal purposes and declares that no state is required to recognize a “same-sex marriage” from another state.

Because DOMA is only a law, its constitutionality can, and has been, challenged. The Supreme Court could overturn or uphold it at any time. If it is overturned, state laws or constitutional amendments would be nullified and the way paved for nationwide “same-sex marriage” — in much the same way as *Roe v. Wade* nullified state abortion laws, thereby paving the way for legalized abortion nationwide.

Although there is yet no organized push to require religious institutions to perform “same-sex marriages,” the regulation requiring them to cover contraception and abortifacients may be a harbinger of things to come. One day, the government may require all religious institutions that perform marriages to perform “same-sex marriages” and to recognize them as valid.

To preserve their religious freedom, our Lutheran forefathers had little choice but to flee persecution. As Americans, we have the opportunity to change the policies that threaten our freedoms. This November, it is vital that we examine ourselves and each candidate for office to determine if his or her policy positions and beliefs will preserve our religious freedom and if our government will be one that continues to violate our consciences or one that recognizes that there are limits on the government in matters of conscience.

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