

Talk to Your Neighbor



BY GENE EDWARD VEITH

How can an informed Lutheran talk about violations of conscience? How do we speak about our religious liberties? What if our neighbor asks us to explain freedom of religion? Here are some questions you might hear and ways to respond.

“You don’t have the right to impose your religion on anyone else.” We Lutherans agree completely. Faith is a gift of God. It cannot be coerced. Power, whether exercised by an individual or the government, should never be used to impose a faith or control a person’s religion.

“So, why should the health-care law recognize religious beliefs?” Just as the government has no right to impose a religion, it also has no right to prevent people from practicing the religion of their choice or to punish them for doing so. The health-care law’s regulations require religious employers to pay for insurance coverage that provides contraceptives and early-abortion drugs free of charge. If they refuse, they will be punished with a fine of \$100 per employee per day. The Roman Catholic Church takes a clear stand against, not only using birth control devices, but also providing them. We Lutherans don’t usually go that far, but like many people of other religions, we believe that life begins at conception. Thus, providing “morning after pills” that prevent the embryo from implanting kills a baby.



“How about the employee who doesn’t believe all of that? What about her freedom of religion?” She remains free in her religion. She is even free to get an abortion. This measure makes churches and employers provide her with an abortion. See the difference?

“But some religions allow for polygamy and human sacrifice. Is religious freedom a license to do that?” Governments exist to establish social order and protect human life. (Ironically, protecting children in the womb doesn’t seem to count, but that’s another conversation.) Some religious practices might be outlawed. But it’s possible to be a Muslim without having multiple wives or a pagan without sacrificing human beings. Those religions are not prevented or punished. However, forcing Muslims to drink alcohol or Jews to eat pork or Catholics to fund birth control would infringe on their religious liberty.

“Why are you Lutherans making such a big deal about this? I thought you made a point of staying out of politics.” Two centuries ago in Germany, the king of Prussia systematically crushed religious liberty by forcing all Protestants to jettison their theology and join into one state church. He imposed his views on Lutherans, prevented the free exercise of their religion and harshly punished them for following their conscience. Many of those persecuted Lutherans left their families, property and homeland for America, where they could find religious freedom. These were the founders of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. So, yes, we Missouri Synod Lutherans keep the church out of politics, but we have a big stake in religious freedom.

*Dr. Gene Edward Veith
(GEVeith@phc.edu) is provost of
Patrick Henry College.*