

Intensive Snare

The ACLU tries to force pro-life hospitals to perform abortions.

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Hospitals are a Christian invention. Following Christ's concern for the sick—in stark contrast to the pagan practice of avoiding all contact with diseased people—the early church ministered to the sick and, as soon as Rome legalized Christianity, opened hospices in every city that had a cathedral.

As Alvin Schmidt documents in his invaluable book *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization*, St. Basil in Caesarea built the first real hospital in A.D. 369. In the Middle Ages, whole religious orders were established to care for the sick, and Protestants too opened hospitals, both in mission fields and at home.

This also held true in America. When Thomas Jefferson was inaugurated, Mr. Schmidt points out, only two hospitals existed in the whole nation. By the end of the Civil War, hospitals were everywhere, and churches had started nearly all of them.

To this day, those hospitals occupy a prominent place in the health care scene in most major cities: Baptist Hospital, Presbyterian Hospital, Lutheran Hospital, and the even more numerous Catholic hospitals (providing 16 percent of the nation's hospital beds), St. Mary, St. Francis, St. Jude.

Although the religious identity of these institutions is no longer readily evident—except for the crucifix on the walls in Catholic hospital rooms—one important distinction remains: Many of the Protestant hospitals and all of the Catholic hospitals are resolutely pro-life.

Someone who checks into a Catholic hospital can have a reasonable assurance that no secularist, utilitarian ethics panel will vote to rip out his feeding tube. He can pay his hospital bill with the assurance that none of the money will go to support the abortion industry. Catholic hospitals simply will not perform abortions.

This principled, theologically grounded stand is making them a target of the American Civil Liberties Union. In a report issued on the anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade decision, the ACLU demanded that hospitals that receive federal money must be willing to provide abortions. “If you're operating in the public sphere, receiving public money, you must play by public rules,” said Catherine Weiss, director of the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project.

Catholic hospitals, which provide health care to the poor, receive up to half of their revenue from federal programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. In this initiative, which is supported by other pro-abortionist groups, the agenda is either to coerce pro-life hospitals into giving abortions or to shut them down.

Ironically, the ACLU makes its case on the grounds of religious freedom! Catholics may not believe in abortion, the report argues, but these hospitals serve people who have different religious beliefs. It is unfair—more than that, it is unconstitutional—for hospital officials to impose their pro-life religion on anyone else.

The ACLU acknowledges that individual doctors and nurses who object to abortion should be allowed to opt out of performing the procedure, but in those cases, hospitals would have to provide other medical professionals to give the women the abortions they want.

The ACLU is attempting to squelch religious freedom in the name of religious freedom. In this mindset, religion is nothing more than a private conviction or an inner experience, which the public can tolerate as long as it has nothing to do with external reality.

If a religion presumes to teach something that has content, that makes a claim about objective truth that applies to everyone, then that religion is out of bounds. It infringes on other people's subjective beliefs and is thus not “inclusive” or “tolerant.” And if someone acts on a religious principle, that too removes religion out of the permissible inward sphere into the public world, which is too divisive to be allowed.

This line of legal reasoning ascribes religious liberty only to individuals, while limiting the liberty of religious institutions. What is new, though, is the desire to use this privatized religion to sanctify what is, in effect, religious persecution, either coercing Catholics into giving up their beliefs or punishing them for acting upon those beliefs.

Moreover, a privatized religion is used to sanctify abortion. The ACLU report defines the desire for abortion as a religious choice, one that must be protected by the constitution against other religions.

Thus, some feminist theologians go so far as to call abortion a “sacrament.” The National Organization of Women celebrated the anniversary of Roe vs. Wade by holding a “prayer vigil” outside the Supreme Court. By co-opting religion—and silencing religions that oppose them—the pro-abortionists, like Moloch worshippers, are garbing the sacrifice of unborn children in the robes of piety.