

Connecticut moving to regulate the Catholic Church?

posted at 8:11 am on March 9, 2009 by Ed Morrissey

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According to the First Amendment and the Establishment Clause, the government has no business dictating to religious organizations how they should structure themselves. In Connecticut, though, some lawmakers seem to have skipped over the Constitution. A new bill will require Catholic parishes and dioceses — and *only* Catholics — to [organize their parish leadership](#) in a way that pleases the Connecticut legislature (via [The Corner](#)):

The Lawlor-and-McDonald-controlled Judiciary Committee has introduced Raised Bill 1098, a bill aimed specifically at the Catholic Church, which would remove the authority of the bishop and pastor over individual parishes and put a board of laymen in their place. You can read Rep. Lawlor's defense of this bill, Bridgeport Bishop William Lori's response and more here.

We need as big a turnout as possible for the public hearing on Wednesday, especially from non-Catholics. As Ben Franklin told the Founders while they were signing the Declaration of Independence, "either we hang together or we will all hang separately." Legislators need to understand that this bill is an attack on everyone's religious liberty.

Lest you think this is a joke, [American Papist](#) has Lawlor's response to criticism. He admits that the state legislature wants to dictate the structure of this *volunteer* organization, but says he's got his reasons:

... the current state statutes governing Roman Catholic corporations ... were enacted in 1955. SB 1098 is a proposal to make changes in that law, which was suggested by parishioners who were the victims of theft of their funds in several parishes, and these parishioners feel that the state's existing Roman Catholic Corporate laws prevented them from dealing with the misuse and theft of funds.

I agree with you that the whole notion of having a statute governing the church seems like an intrusion on the separation of church and state, but the current law does that already. Perhaps we should repeal the whole thing, but if we are going to have a corporate law of this type, it probably should make sure there cannot be deception of parishioners.

It more than *seems* like an intrusion on separation of church and state, Mr. Lawlor. It's the real deal. The church's defenders note that the state legislature in Connecticut currently runs on a \$1.5 billion deficit and hardly has any room to talk about how private organizations handle their money. But even apart from the hypocrisy, fraud and theft laws *already apply to religious organizations*. If theft or fraud occurred, then parishioners already have recourse in the law. "Misuse", though, is an awfully broad lever for government intervention in a religious organization's hierarchy. No one collects donations to a parish at the barrel of a gun, *unlike the state legislature*. If parishioners don't like the way a parish spends its money, they can find another parish or simply stop donating money to the one they attend.

The [bill itself](#) is a piece of work:

(a) A corporation may be organized in connection with any Roman Catholic Church or congregation in this state, by filing in the office of the Secretary of the State a certificate signed by the archbishop or bishop and the vicar-general of the archdiocese or of the diocese in which such congregation is located and the pastor and two laymen belonging to such congregation, stating that they have so organized for the purposes hereinafter mentioned. [Such archbishop or bishop, vicar-general and pastor of such congregation and, in case of the death or other disability of the archbishop or bishop, the administrator of the archdiocese or diocese for the time being, the chancellor of the archdiocese or diocese and the pastor of such congregation shall be members, ex officio, of such corporation, and, upon their death, resignation, removal or preferment, their successors in office shall become such members in their stead. The two lay members shall be appointed annually, in writing, during the month of January from the lay members of the congregation by a majority of the ex-officio members of the corporation; and three members of the corporation, of whom one shall be a layman, shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.]

(b) The corporation shall have a board of directors consisting of not less than seven nor more than thirteen lay members. The archbishop or bishop of the diocese or his designee shall serve as an ex-officio member of the board of directors **without the right to vote**.

In other words, bishops would no longer have power over the actions of the parishes. That's the Connecticut legislature's vision of Roman Catholicism, but in America, government doesn't get to structure religious organizations to suit itself. That, in fact, is a form of fascism that we routinely decry in other countries. The State Department objects to China's insistence on picking Catholic bishops itself to suit their political oppression of religion, and Lawlor's motion would find a welcome in Beijing as another means to the same end: state control of Catholicism.

And why *only* the Catholic Church? If Lawlor wanted to improve the lives of Connecticut residents, why not impose this structure on every religious organization? I thought we'd fought the Know-Nothing anti-Catholic bigotry battles a long time ago, but apparently Lawlor is a nostalgic bigot as well as a fascist.

What happens when a Catholic Church defies this order? Does the legislature send the police to the parish to shut them down? Toss the pastor in prison?

The people of Connecticut should instead act to remove the lunatics who reported this bill out of committee. In the meantime, follow the links to see how you can get your voice heard on this un-American piece of legislation.

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Sloppy reasoning. You appear to assume ONLY Catholics oppose baby murder.

oldleprechaun on March 9, 2009 at 10:02 AM

[Lutherans for Life-pan-Lutheran pro-life group/Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and other Lutherans](#)

[Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod's pro-life arm](#)

OmahaConservative on March 9, 2009 at [10:12 AM](#)

The notion that the Bill of Rights applies to the states is a bit of liberal judicial activism that we've all bought into. But for many years of our country's history, the Bill of Rights was understood by everyone — including the courts — to apply only to the federal government.

paul006 on March 9, 2009 at 10:10 AM

It worked that way for over a hundred years, but most of the Bill of Rights has been incorporated by SCOTUS and applied to the states. Cantwell v. Connecticut was the first case to apply the free exercise clause to the states. Maybe this Connecticut law will get similar treatment.

dedalus on March 9, 2009 at [10:20 AM](#)

The notion that the Bill of Rights applies to the states is a bit of liberal judicial activism that we've all bought into. But for many years of our country's history, the Bill of Rights was understood by everyone — including the courts — to apply only to the federal government.

IIRC, most state constitutions have articles very similar to the Bill of Rights, which is why they were added as the first 10 Amendments (remember, they weren't part of the original Constitution). These rights were already guaranteed at the State level, so by adding them as amendments that insured that the rights you had as a citizen of state A not only wouldn't be taken away by the Federal government, but would actually be *reaffirmed* by it.

crazy_legs on March 9, 2009 at [10:22 AM](#)

First, the fig leaf which is supposed to cover this blatantly unconstitutional rag is an embezzlement case in a Darien parish where the priest stole, 1.4 (really) million dollars to spend on the high life for himself, his gay lover and his mother. Limousines, a jaguar, jewelry, a condo in Florida, trips, the works. If anyone thinks no one in that parish was aware of this priest and his lifestyle then I got a Bridge I can sell you cheap.

Second, I will give you the Bridge for half price if you think this law has anything to do with that and not liberal parishes attempts to buck the hierarchy and take direct control over their parishes so they can be "progressive".

The Catholic Church is not a democracy, never has been and never will be. If you can't live with that become an Episcopalian or join a congregation structured church.

If by some insanity this was to pass and actually be found by SCOTUS to be okay the hierarchy would close every church that tried to form a board and sell or move every scrap of property.

To repeat.....**The Catholic Church is not a democracy**, get it through your thick progressive head already.

Rocks on March 9, 2009 at [10:24 AM](#)

Welcome to the United Socialist States of Amerika.

[ex-Democrat](#) on March 9, 2009 at [10:24 AM](#)

paul006 on March 9, 2009 at 10:10 AM

Yerah, its funny how much bad information and history people "know" now.

One state at the time even had a STATE RELIGION! So the Founders apparently had no problem with States making rules ABOUT religion.

Its like the silly Democracy meme... folks believe the Founders made a Democracy when its clear from their writings, and the Consitution itself, that they did not... and in fact thought Democracys were doomed to fail... it would just be a matter of time...

Kinda like the USSR were SOCIALISTS, not Communists....

Romeo13 on March 9, 2009 at [10:26 AM](#)

The proposed law is obviously stupid and dangerous. However, I'm with LevStrauss. If you don't like the public to tell you how to run your Church, stop demanding that it subsidizes it with tax breaks. My chess club membership is not tax deductible.

radiofreevillage on March 9, 2009 at [10:27 AM](#)

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radiofreevillage on March 9, 2009 at 10:27 AM

We have come a long way when tax breaks are "Government Subsidies". That being said, I agree with the broader concept that you cannot expect government money not to come with strings attached.

neuquenguy on March 9, 2009 at [10:33 AM](#)

No Connecticut Chimps in Catholic Church...but Baptist is fine.

Mr. Joe on March 9, 2009 at [10:36 AM](#)

We have come a long way when tax breaks are "Government Subsidies".

Yes, they are, and they have always been. Taxing my way to spend Sundays (well, ok, Tue evenings) and not taxing yours is a direct subsidy of your Church.

radiofreevillage on March 9, 2009 at [10:36 AM](#)

Laura Ingraham is talking about this topic with Raymond Arroyo now.

OmahaConservative on March 9, 2009 at [10:42 AM](#)

Yes, they are, and they have always been.

radiofreevillage on March 9, 2009 at 10:36 AM

I guess they are, but I don't think they have always been. I somehow doubt the founding fathers thought of the government not taking you money as a government subsidy.

neuquenguy on March 9, 2009 at [10:50 AM](#)

I suspect this is really about the USCCB threat to close Catholic hospitals rather than be forced to do abortions, should FOCA pass, and that is why this is specifically aimed at the RC church. If this bill passes, the church will no longer control the hospitals.

And all you Catholic-hating evangelists had better sit up and take notice (if I have to explain why, you're too stupid to breathe).

[rightwingprof](#) on March 9, 2009 at [10:57 AM](#)

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radiofreevillage on March 9, 2009 at 10:27 AM

We have come a long way when tax breaks are "Government Subsidies". That being said, I agree with the broader concept that you cannot expect government money not to come with strings attached.

Actually, your chess club membership could be tax deductible if your group applied for a 501c3. My neighborhood association did it. Then what? You will be required to be an instrument of government in exchange for your tax break? This is the most idiotic argument I hear against organized religion. For one thing, it's your money. The exempt status is something you get in exchange for performing services to society, whether they be educational, social or charitable. Religious groups whether you like the beliefs or not are an important part of a healthy democracy. Read Tocqueville. Having nothing between the individual and the state (no or weak civil society) is bad. Every time it's been tried.

[MargaretMN](#) on March 9, 2009 at [10:58 AM](#)

in America, government doesn't get to structure religious organizations to suit itself.

True...but Libs don't live in America. They live in a *fictional version* of America...one that looks more like the Europe they wish they lived in.

Now shut up and drink your Perrier and turn up the PBS.

bluelightbrigade on March 9, 2009 at [11:15 AM](#)

Yes, they are, and they have always been. Taxing my way to spend Sundays (well, ok, Tue evenings) and not taxing yours is a direct subsidy of your Church.

radiofreevillage on March 9, 2009 at 10:36 AM

You have it turned around...not taxing someone is not a subsidy. Taxing someone or something is punishment and control. The govt. can't control religion, if it could tax them, then they could control them. And there is a separation of church and state I hear. The problem with most people is they think of non-taxes as a subsidy...and it is an incentive, only in comparison to others who are "over taxed". Giving you something you didn't earn, that's a subsidy, not taking something from you is not a subsidy, but a "relief", an incentive...if you don't "perform" the service needed, then the privilege is taken away and you are then punished (taxed). If you have two cars, and the govt. took one car...that's a tax. If they allow you to keep the two cars, that's not a subsidy, you earned them, they are yours. If you make profit, and build another plant...if they take part of that plant, that's a tax...if they allow you to keep the plant and hire more employees, that's an incentive. You earned that plant...the govt. can only take away...they only give to those who don't earn.

right2bright on March 9, 2009 at [11:24 AM](#)

LevStrauss on March 9, 2009 at 9:58 AM

Every single time there is a thread regarding the Catholic Church on Hot Air, one of you cockroaches crawl out of your hole to spew idiocies about the molestation controversy.

Then you whine about not getting answers to your questions that are always completely unrelated to the topic at hand.

You hate the Catholic Church? Super, congratulations. Have a cookie.

But you don't have to fund a penny of it with your tax dollars, there is nothing compulsory about it, so just buzz the hell off and go find a thread where you can complain about your unresolved childhood issues that made you an ex-Catholic. Or go on Oprah and cry on her lap.

NoDonkey on March 9, 2009 at [11:30 AM](#)

Taxing my way to spend Sundays (well, ok, Tue evenings) and not taxing yours is a direct subsidy of your Church.

Maybe the Church should tax the government for the billions of dollars of free health care to the poor they provide, the free education they provide (in areas where the public "schools" are abysmal) and all of the free help and aid they give to the poor.

I would wager, the Church ends up providing far more to this country, than the country provides to the Church.

NoDonkey on March 9, 2009 at [11:34 AM](#)

Amazing. We had to play guess that party again.... Democrat. So much for civil liberties.

[Luckedout](#) on March 9, 2009 at [11:40 AM](#)

The reason that this is directed only to the Catholic Church is that most, if not all, churches already have local control through a board, board of deacons, and so forth. Very few protestant pastors have control of the check book! Remember this: "The power to tax is the power to destroy"? Oh, and btw, churches are already taxed for everything except income and worship buildings. Parking lots and so forth are taxed just like everybody else. Finally, to the guy who said evangelicals should stop hating Catholics? Get a clue, dork.

TimothyJ on March 9, 2009 at [11:41 AM](#)

I would wager, the Church ends up providing far more to this country, than the country provides to the Church.

NoDonkey on March 9, 2009 at 11:34 AM

But don't you understand NoDonkey? in the liberal mind the government not taking your money means the government is giving you....something, and you should bow in reverence or lick their boots or something.

neuquenguy on March 9, 2009 at [11:41 AM](#)

What is it about the left and overreaching? They are *such* control freaks that they can't stop themselves.

By the way most parishes already have lay finance councils. They are a great way to give of time and talent. However the idea of government mandating them as oversight boards independent of the Bishop is ridiculous. Almost every day I have to ask myself is this really happening in our country?

Ted Torgerson on March 9, 2009 at [11:44 AM](#)

The Catholic church has some real problems with their form of church government, where local people have little or no say in their parish, and where it's far too easy for higher-ups far away to cover up real problems with the local priests. The problems are complicated even more by the insistence that all priests and nuns remain unmarried. This in fact encourages homosexuality among the priesthood, even though that is supposed to be a sin under Catholic doctrine. It also contributes greatly to the problem of pedophilia among priests.

Nevertheless, these are problems that the Catholic church must address. People unsatisfied with *how* they address them **should be** encouraged to re-think their Catholicism. [Personally, I'd recommend finding a good Baptist church, but I may be biased.]

But the First Amendment is not about the so-called "separation of church and state." It specifically says that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or **prohibiting the free exercise** thereof." I would think telling the Catholic church how they had to spend their own money would be prohibiting its free exercise.

Do they really think this law would ever work? Or is it just meant to look good that they tried?

tom on March 9, 2009 at [11:47 AM](#)

This is incredibly dangerous. I'm no Catholic, but there's no way in hell this should fly regardless of how badly an individual screwed up.

[TheUnrepentantGeek](#) on March 9, 2009 at [11:48 AM](#)

Gee, what a shock! Liberals trying to run a church now. And yes, I agree this is a direct attempt to strip all the hospitals, etc. charitable stuff the Catholic church has out of their control.

What a country. Can we say the Democrats hate our freedoms yet?

Vanceone on March 9, 2009 at [11:57 AM](#)

Nevertheless, these are problems that the Catholic church must address. People unsatisfied with how they address them **should be** encouraged to re-think their Catholicism.

tom on March 9, 2009 at 11:47 AM

Odd, that. A non-sacramental Baptist trying to lecture the RCC.

As a Lutheran, I suggest the Baptists need to take Holy Baptism and Holy Communion *seriously*, as Jesus commanded.

OmahaConservative on March 9, 2009 at [11:59 AM](#)

If I read the proposed law correctly, this will essentially require all Catholic dioceses and parishes (those that are separately incorporated) to unincorporate by Jan. 2010. There is no way a bishop will allow his diocese to be run under these rules; it simply won't happen. It's not clear what happens upon unincorporation, though, or what corporate "perks" will have to be given up. This is plain and simply and travesty. In fact, it's so over the top as to suggest the proposal is less than fully above board. Something else could well be going on here below the surface.

jdp629 on March 9, 2009 at [12:00 PM](#)

Maybe the Church should tax the government for the billions of dollars of free health care to the poor they provide, the free education they provide (in areas where the public "schools" are abysmal) and all of the free help and aid they give to the poor.

No, it shouldn't. Neither health care, no education are government responsibilities. If the Church wants to do it, it's their right, but they should pay for it.

in the liberal mind the government not taking your money means the government is giving you....something, and you should bow in reverence or lick their boots or something.

Yawn. Nice try... I guess. It's not about not taking your money. It's about selectively taking only mine. I don't want Churches to be taxed per se. I want this form of weekend entertainment to be treated similarly to any other including playing chess or watching porn.

radiofreevillage on March 9, 2009 at [12:01 PM](#)

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