

REFORMS WEAKEN FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS



Bill Donohue comments on the Obama administration's proposed reforms governing faith-based social service programs:

It has been evident from the beginning that President Barack Obama was never serious about strengthening the faith-based initiatives established by President George W. Bush. The latest reforms prove it.

The White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships has released reform proposals that were initiated by its Advisory Council. The reforms are designed to enhance government oversight of religious social service agencies; they seek to limit religious expression, not facilitate its reach.

Historically, when social scientists and constitutional scholars spoke about religious liberty, they meant protections afforded the free exercise of religion. But in this report, religious liberty means the right of individuals to refuse religious exercises, a guarantee to be insured by the federal government. Thus has the term been stood on its head.

Similarly, the report calls for more government "monitoring" of faith-based programs. To be sure, it nominally counsels against "pervasive monitoring," but the weight of the document emphasizes the need to "monitor" these religious bodies. No wonder secularists like the reforms.

Religious agencies are also asked to report "explicitly religious activities that are *privately* funded," [my italic]

and a majority of the Council even voted to force churches to form **separate corporations** detailing their receipt of federal funds. The latter scheme would be prohibitively expensive for small churches, and its proponents know it.

On p. 120, the report brags that the Council was staffed by both critics and supporters of “charitable choice.” Yet when Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius proposed the HHS mandate, she never spoke to a single bishop and never subjected the religious liberty issues involved to legal analysis. This is a game. The faith-based programs should be defunded and reconstituted by a president who is serious about religious matters.