



Depth Perception™

Commentary from Design For Ministry™
Milwaukee – Philadelphia – Tampa

Deserving tax breaks, part two 30 April 2004

The court cases continue:

*Illinois recently removed the tax status of a prominent, church-affiliated hospital. The reason: it no longer demonstrated it operated with charitable intent.

* A California court ruled that Catholic Charities must pay for birth control measures for employees – even though it is a violation of Catholic doctrine to do so.

While we continue to maintain non-profits and religious charities did much to bring this pressure, and that their protests only add to the problem, we clearly stand at the beginning of a troubling trend. This trend is not limited to the U.S., but is bubbling up in many western countries. Witness the ban on Muslim headscarfs in French schools. The trend grows from a conventional wisdom that believes religion is entirely private and should not appear in the public marketplace.

The legal climate around the homosexual marriage debate may well further this trend. Advocates state that denominations and religions that forbid

it would not be pressured to perform such marriages. However, given the court rulings listed at the opening of this article, it seems wise not to accept this as fact. It is more than conceivable that conservative groups might be threatened with the loss of tax status, or civil suits if their religious convictions get in the way of societal direction.

The intent here is not to raise alarm, but to point to the horizon and ask ministering organizations to plan – regardless of their views on a matter. This trend creates opportunity to return to any organization's central mission, to distinguish between preference and truth, to identify values by which a ministering organization will operate, and to return to civil discourse.

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–mark l. vincent