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Limiting 'government control' a new article of Catholic faith?

Thomas C. Fox | Sep. 1, 2009 NCR Today

A pastoral statement, titled ?Principles of Catholic Social Teaching and Health Care Reform,? issued by Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of the Kansas City, Kansas, archdiocese, and Bishop Robert W. Finn of Kansas City-St. Joseph appear to wed Catholic articles of faith with current Republican Party articles of faith.

"Grounding their critique in the principle of subsidiarity, which holds that higher levels of authority should not usurp what can be done better or more efficiently at lower levels, the bishops write that a ?centralized government bureaucracy? poses three risks:

- ?A loss of personal responsibility?
- ?Reduction in personalized care for the sick?
- ?Higher costs?

Although Catholic teaching asserts a right to health care, Naumann and Finn say that this right "does not necessarily suppose an obligation on the part of the government to fund it."
In our American culture, Catholic teaching about the ?right? to healthcare is sometimes confused with structures of entitlement,? the bishops write. ?The teaching of the universal church has never been to suggest a government socialization of medical services.?

The bishops go on to issue this warning: "The writings of recent Popes have warned that the neglect of subsidiarity can lead to an excessive centralization of human services, which in turn leads to excessive costs, and loss of personal responsibility and quality of care."

Adding weight to their arguement the bishops quote Pope Benedict who wrote in Deus Caritas Est: "We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. ? In the end, the claim that just social structures would make works of charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man: the mistaken notion that man can live ?by bread alone? (Mt 4:4; cf. Dt 8:3) - a conviction that demeans man and ultimately disregards all that is specifically human.?

I wonder: If these bishops' critique of government gets raised to the level of faith, if it gets mixed into the current political debate, then are these bishops serving the church or are they hurting the church while serving the Republican Party?

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