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A Catholic Refuses Government Funds **by Margaret Mathers**

From 1984 to 1993, I was director of Catholic Charities for San Juan County, New Mexico. A situation existed which has caused me to do some soul-searching and to reach a conclusion that was not popular.

I was criticized — with varying degrees of contempt — for my refusal to accept government funding (FEMA funds, for example) for the agency I directed. In an attempt to lay a guilt trip on me, I was told that I was depriving our clients of assistance because of this refusal, and that the money was there and I was silly to refuse it.

Financial assistance coming from government — at any level — comes from taxes or from borrowed money. Taxation, as it is presently applied in the United States, is morally repugnant to me.

Taxes are taken by force from my fellow human beings. In the case of income tax, the IRS boasts that it ensures "voluntary compliance." This is a lie. The word "voluntary" implies that a choice can be made not to pay, but if you do not pay, you go to jail, and if you resist, you can be killed. "Voluntary"?

There are no taxes levied — none — that are optional. They all represent the initiation of force against people.

When the Catholic Church preaches social justice, I wonder if they have considered the injustice of taking one individual's earnings by force to give to another. If you look at it logically, it's only a matter of semantics that keeps it from being called theft.

Many people believe that when Jesus said, "Render unto Caesar . . ." He was defending taxation as right and proper — but think about it.

Caesar was a conqueror, a despot who could claim almost everyone under his jurisdiction as a slave. Any coin with his likeness on it undoubtedly originated in his treasury and was indeed his.

On the other hand, when people needed help, Jesus told his disciples to help them. He did not tell them, "Go to Caesar and apply for a grant."

This is not Caesar's empire. Our nation was established on the principle that all are equal, that none rules. The money we earn belongs to us, and the services we get from the government should be paid for in a different way than by (to paraphrase Mr. Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence) ". . . erecting a multitude of offices and sending hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance."

The American Revolution was set off by a three-and-a-half percent tax on tea. The total of taxes now taken from the average American citizen is fifty percent and growing.

Charity is the duty of individuals. As they hope to serve God, charity must be done at a personal level and never by forcing someone else to do it (see Isaac 58:6-11, Psalm 112:9, 1 Peter 5:2).

In its effort to provide for every need, government has incurred a debt that boggles the mind. To solve the problem, they will "eat out more of our substance," impoverishing more people in the process, and bountifully coming up with more help.

And it cannot be repeated often enough: When government spends, the economy drinks its own blood and, in the end, is weakened accordingly.

As a matter of principle, I refuse to be a part of this process. And in my search for a model, I need go no further than Mother Theresa. No one would presume to call her foolish, impractical, insensitive, callous, or anything else because she does not apply for government grants for her work.

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