

Losing sight of the role of the church?

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Dear Editor,

The Nassau Guardian reported that Dr. Philip McPhee wants churches to give government "financial donations for national development programs" (Churches asked to give govt revenue, July 17, 2012), as a fallback position for those churches that do not want a referendum legalizing numbers/gambling houses.

Of course gambling is already 'legal' as numbers houses operate with business licenses and pay government taxes like National Insurance, property tax and business license, and conduct business quite openly.

Dr. McPhee seems to think that having a referendum to legalize gambling is important to raise revenue for government through taxes from the numbers houses, but all this talk about a referendum is basically a charade. Also, an important question is, does government need more revenue or to slow spending down?

But I digress, so back to the main point.

It occurs to me that the church has lost its focus which is assisting the community. To suggest that the churches can donate to government and they can come together to develop a corporate entity with "specific and agreeable goals" is pie in the sky.

Just who does Dr. McPhee think will take the organization over and do what they like with the funds using their coercive power? You guessed it, the government.

Churches like other civil society participants are to assist the less fortunate among the communities they serve. That is one of their main functions, is it not? Getting the government involved in every aspect of our lives is what has helped get us in the trouble we're in.

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There are no better words to explain the banality of offering to get government involved in charitable initiatives than Michael Tanner's, director of Health and Welfare Studies, Cato Institute, about the role of society in this regard: "There seems to me to be something wrong in this society, with the way we've now decided that government is the answer to everything, even faith-based charity. It used to be that if there was a need, if in your congregation someone was homeless, the preacher would get up and say: Pass the collection plate, dig into your pocket, give, give till it hurts. Now, the preacher gets up and says: Write your congressman. Lobby Washington. Demand that they raise taxes so that we can have more money for our program. That seems to turn charity on its head. And I think, as we debate, we do have to debate the practical implications. We have to debate the legal implications. But I think we also need to look at the fundamental question of relation of government to individuals and to civil society. And I would submit that what we need is more civil society and less government, even when it has the best of intentions.

Finally, if the church can afford to donate 10 percent to the government for charitable initiatives, why not use those funds to do more in the community the church serves?

Isn't that the role of the church anyway?

To subordinate charity to political forces is folly.

– Rick Lowe, *weblogbahamas.com*.