Is FBO Hiding Something?

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

The White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Initiatives (FBO for short) has begun implementing some new rules regarding their procedures and Mark Silk, at RNS, asks what is being hidden? He thinks the White House does not want to call too much attention to the fact that the rules still permit recipients of government money to discriminate in favor of hiring co-religionists. The issue is a tricky one, in part because candidate Obama was clear that he opposed allowing such discrimination, but as President, his Department of Justice got its hat handed to it 8-0 by the Supreme Court in the Hosanna Tabor case which, while not bearing specifically on this issue, nonetheless made the DOJ understandably shy. Tricky, indeed, but not hopeless. The President needs to make the case that the country benefits from the activities of faith-based social services, and that for those services to remain faith-based, the government needs to give them more leeway than it would, say, a private for-profit corporation. After all, you can't have a Catholic, or Methodist, or Baptist organization without Catholics, or Methodists, or Baptists. Faith-based institutions should be able to consider a person's religion in hiring, especially for jobs that might entail double duty as social service provider and some form of ministry, or at least put a thumb on the scale. If a faith-based agency consistently hires incompetent co-religionists, than the government money should be withdrawn because of the incompetence, not the religiously based hiring. A little bit of good faith all around would go a long way in such matters and, sadly, there are plenty of people around President Obama who do not think kind thoughts when they think of the Catholic Church.