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Discrimination in any way, shape or form is not religious

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NCR Today

While listening to NPR this morning, I was dismayed to hear that a Catholic school teacher in the diocese of Savannah, Ga., was fired because he intends to marry his male partner in Minnesota this summer.

Flint Dollar had been teaching music at Mount de Sales Academy in Macon, Ga., and, by all accounts, his students loved him. He was open about being gay when he was hired. When he announced his forthcoming marriage on Facebook, the bishop called the principal. Apparently, getting married was one step too far. Sadly, this is simply the latest of several such firings in various parts of the United States.

Enough already. Such marriages may be contrary to official Catholic teaching, but nothing mandates firing people who go against such teachings. (I wonder if schools ever ask female teachers if they use contraception. Probably not; there would be few teachers left if they did.) The Flint Dollar case is discrimination, plain and simple.

Stories like this have gained greater significance since the Supreme Court's pernicious Hobby Lobby decision, which recognized the "religious freedom" of family-owned for-profit corporations. Now family businesses of all types are claiming "religious freedom" when it comes to eliminating contraceptive coverage from health insurance or discriminating against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

President Barack Obama is reportedly preparing an executive order banning LGBT discrimination among federal contractors. Some religious leaders lobbied for the inclusion of a religious exemption in this order. But many other religious leaders fear that such as "religious exemption" will open Pandora's box to "religious" claims all over the place. So in response, more than 100 religious leaders of many faith traditions have spoken out in a letter to Obama, urging him to eliminate any "religious exemption" in such an executive order.

Their letter said in part: "An executive order that allows for religious discrimination against LGBT people contradicts the order's fundamental purpose, as well as the belief shared by more and more Americans every day, which is that LGBT people should not be treated as second-class citizens. An exception would set a terrible precedent by denying true equality for LGBT people, while simultaneously opening a Pandora's Box inviting other forms of discrimination."

The Hobby Lobby decision has also affected support for the Employment Non-Discrimination Act pending in Congress. It contains a religious exemption that LGBT groups and others used to regard as relatively benign -- until Hobby Lobby. On Tuesday, major gay rights groups withdrew their support from ENDA until the religious exemption is removed from the bill. This includes the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and the American Civil Liberties Union. A statement by several groups said if ENDA were to pass Congress, "the most important federal law for the [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] community in American history would leave too many jobs, and too many LGBT workers, without protection."

Catholic institutions, unfortunately, have been in the forefront of shameful efforts to say that discrimination against LGBT people is somehow "religious" or "Christian."

Not too long ago, some people claimed religion as a basis for racial discrimination, too. That was shameful. And today's efforts to claim religion as a basis for LGBT discrimination are equally shameful.

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