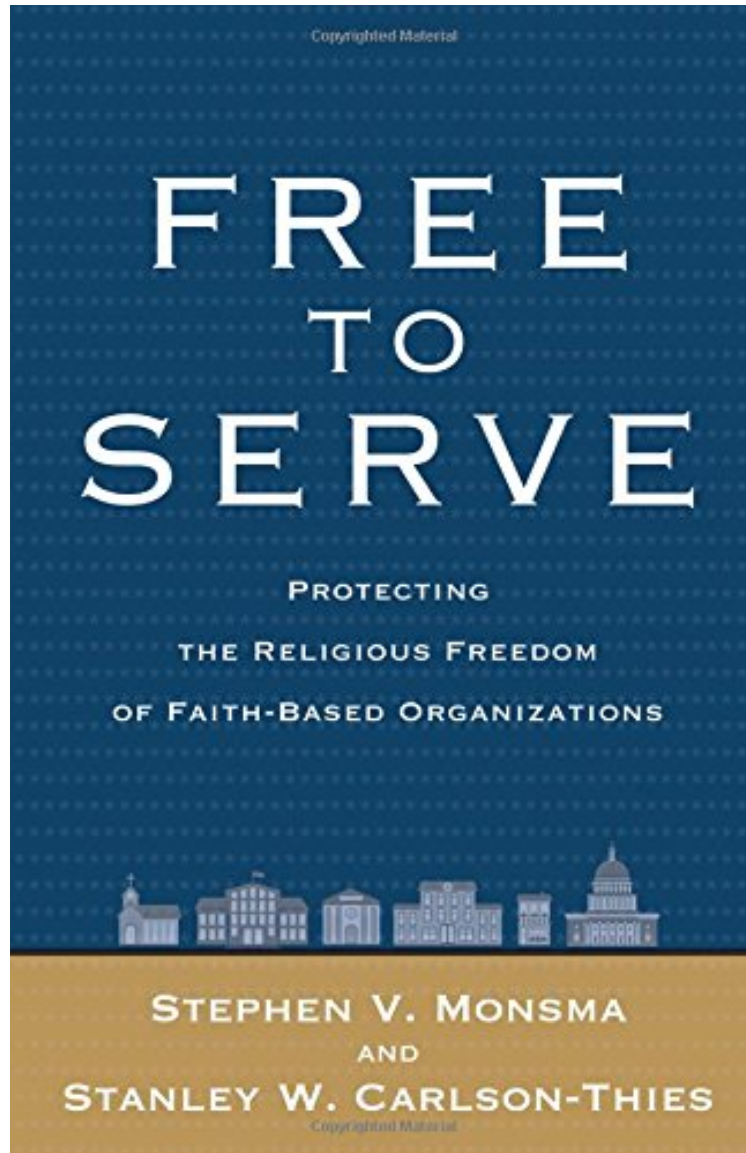


(Download free pdf) Free to Serve: Protecting the Religious Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations

# Free to Serve: Protecting the Religious Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations

*Stephen V. Monsma, Stanley W. Carlson-Thies*  
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**Stephen V. Monsma, Stanley W. Carlson-Thies : Free to Serve: Protecting the Religious Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Free to Serve: Protecting the Religious Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A thought-provoking book about the religious freedom of faith-

based organizations

By George P. Wood

James 1:27 offers this memorable definition: Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. For James, then, religion consists of a humanitarian and an integrity mandate. Do good, we might say, and be good!

For Christians across the ages, the humanitarian mandate has produced charitable organizations of an enormous variety, from orphanages and schools to hospitals and relief agencies. These organizations express the heart of God the Father for those in crisis, those in need. The integrity mandate has governed how Christians carried out the humanitarian mandate. Christian theology and Christian ethics provided guidelines for what good should be done, to whom, and how. These two mandates need never come into conflict with one another. In an era characterized by the increased government licensing, regulation, and funding of all manner of activities, they can and do, however. This conflict is the subject of *Free to Serve* by evangelical Christian activists Stephen V. Monsma and Stanley W. Carlson-Thies. The authors cite, for example, laws in Arizona and Alabama that prohibited people and organizations within those states including religious organizations from transporting or housing illegal immigrants. Many churches and religious organizations had been doing precisely that, so they challenged the law in court. For another example, pursuant to a mandate in the Affordable Care Act (aka, ObamaCare), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a rule requiring employee health plans to cover 20 forms of contraception, four of which could have abortifacient effects. Catholic organizations have objections to contraceptives generally, and evangelical Protestant organizations have objections to abortifacients specifically, so they challenged this rule in court. A final example: Many campus religious organizations require members and leaders to affirm the doctrinal and ethical standards of their specific faith. One cannot be an atheist and leader of a Christian student organization. Unfortunately, in an attempt to promote nondiscrimination, some public colleges and university systems have ruled that, actually, you can be. Every campus organization must be open to all except fraternities, sororities, and sports team, of course. Campus religious organizations have challenged these rules in court. The United States has a variety of legal protections for religious individuals and organizations. The First Amendment to the Constitution states: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act holds that a generally applicable law can infringe on a sincerely held religious belief only if doing so accomplishes a compelling governmental interest through the least restrictive means. There are other statutory protections as well, both at the federal and state levels. Despite these, state and federal courts have not always protected the religious freedom of individuals and organizations. Federal Courts have upheld the constitutionality of so-called all comers policies on college and university campuses, policies that prohibit campus religious organizations from requiring affirmation of a religion's doctrine and ethics. State courts have ruled that the government can require faith-based adoption and foster care agencies to place children in the homes of married homosexuals and cohabiting heterosexuals, despite those organizations' longstanding, sincere, doctrinal commitment to marriage as a monogamous heterosexual institution. On the bright side, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that *Hobby Lobby*, a closely held, for-profit business owned by religious persons is exempt from the so-called contraceptive mandate issued by HHS. On the other hand, the same right of religious colleges and universities (Notre Dame, Wheaton, etc.) is still being litigated. Monsma and Carlson-Thies argue that these conflicts have grown and become heated because of four interlocking assumptions on the part of government bureaucrats and secular ideologues:

1. The equation of religious freedom with freedom to worship
2. The unthinking application of nondiscrimination standards to faith-based organizations
3. The belief that acceptance of government funds makes faith-based organizations government actors
4. The assumption of Christianity's dominant position in society

To this list, I would add the increasing governmental involvement in aspects of life it had left alone previously. In my opinion, the larger government grows, the larger its ability to interfere with the rights of the people including their religious rights grows. The authors do not delve into this topic, however. Instead, they make a case for what they call principled pluralism or civic pluralism. This pluralism, which they argue should not be confused with relativism, begins with the undisputed fact that our society is characterized by a diversity or plurality of religious and non-religious points of view. In light of this fact, it advocates four tenets:

1. All human beings are morally responsible, free individuals who possess human dignity and certain fundamental rights, the most basic of which is freedom of religion.
2. Although human beings are individuals, with individual rights and responsibilities, human beings are also social beings.
3. For a society to be truly free its government must not prevent its members from being able to create and sustain nongovernmental organizations that are based on and reflect their members' deeply held beliefs.
4. Just as government should not attempt to dominate or control society's organizations and their members, neither should one organization seek to dominate or control other organizations or individuals.

Under principled pluralism, the government could partner with religious organizations to accomplish humanitarian ends without requiring those organizations to sacrifice their doctrinal or ethical integrity. Religious organizations would be able to tailor health-care plans to conform to longstanding doctrine. Campus religious organizations would be able to require doctrinal and ethical affirmations of its leaders. Principled pluralism thus differs from Christian nationalism, which privileges the Christian faith socially and legally, and secularism, which seeks a public square devoid of religious language and ideas. Indeed, it challenges both. The challenge to secularism is obvious. A public college or university, for example, must provide public resources to

campus religious organizations despite their allegedly sectarian character, as long as it does so on equal footing with other religious and nonreligious organizations. That second proviso highlights the challenge principled pluralism poses to Christian nationalism. But Monsma and Carlson-Thies argue that such an application of principled pluralism is a straightforward application of the Golden Rule to our civic relationships: to do to others as we would have them do to us (Luke 6:31). That is what makes principled pluralism such an attractive option for some. America is a diverse country, and principled pluralism offers a way for diverse religious and nonreligious groups to access public resources on an equal footing. Still, I have my doubts. Pluralism must give way to principle on some issues. Monsma and Carlson-Thies cite abortion as one of those exceptions. It is a long-settled principle of American jurisprudence that race is another. No wonder, then, that LGBT groups analogize sexual orientation to race, and Christians resist the analogy. Some principles admit of no exceptions. In those cases, one can be principled or pluralist, but not both. Even with this criticism of the book, *Free to Serve* is an interesting, thought-provoking book about an important topic. You will learn from its diagnosis even if you disagree with its prescription in the end. I myself am not wholly convinced, though I wholly support the book's ultimate goal of supporting an integral Christian humanitarianism.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars  
By Earl Pomeroy  
Excellent writing and very helpful for those of us who are involved in running Christian non-profits. Required reading.  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars  
By LaDon Dawson  
Good buy

What do Hobby Lobby, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Wheaton College, World Vision, the Little Sisters of the Poor, and the University of Notre Dame have in common? All are faith-based organizations that have faced pressure to act in ways contrary to their religious beliefs. In this book, two policy experts show how faith-based groups--those active in the educational, healthcare, international aid and development, and social service fields--can defend their ability to follow their religiously based beliefs without having to jettison the very faith and faith-based practices that led them to provide services to those in need. They present a pluralist vision for religious freedom for faith-based organizations of all religious traditions. The book includes case studies that document the challenges faith-based organizations face to freely follow the practices of their religious traditions and analyzes these threats as originating in a common, yet erroneous, set of assumptions and attitudes prevalent in American society. The book also includes responses by diverse voices--an Orthodox Jew, a Roman Catholic, two evangelicals, two Islamic leaders, and an unbeliever who is a religious-freedom advocate--underscoring the importance of religious freedom for faith-based organizations.

From the Back Cover  
**Protecting the Religious Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations**  
Faith-based organizations often face pressure to act in ways contrary to their religious beliefs. *Free to Serve* puts forth a vision for religious freedom for faith-based organizations of all religious traditions. The book also includes responses by diverse voices--an Orthodox Jew, a Roman Catholic, two evangelicals, two Islamic leaders, and an unbeliever who is a religious-freedom advocate--underscoring the importance of religious freedom for faith-based organizations. "This book explains how religious institutions caring for our communities risk losing their character as faith-based organizations. We have to protect the rights of everyone in our society if we are to protect the rights of anyone. An important book for our times."--Richard Stearns, president, World Vision US; author of *The Hole in Our Gospel* and *Unfinished* "The next decade may very well see more ferocious--and hugely important--battles over religious freedom than at any time in recent years. A must-read for anyone interested in preserving our country's historic stance on religious freedom."--Ronald J. Sider, Palmer Seminary, Eastern University "Monsma and Carlson-Thies present a timely and compelling case for how the United States can navigate the current changes to social norms by proposing that society value and give equal credence to the ideas of all religions and the nonreligious alike."--Shirley V. Hoogstra, JD, president, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities "Religious liberty, one of our God-given rights, stands under unprecedented assault. *Free to Serve* provides a clarion call and prophetic prescription for those committed to never sacrificing truth on the altar of expediency."--Samuel Rodriguez, president, NHCLC/CONELA, Hispanic Evangelical Association "Anyone who cares about the state of religious freedom in America should read this book."--David Nammo, executive director and CEO, Christian Legal Society

About the Author  
Stephen V. Monsma (1936-2017; PhD, Michigan State University) was a senior research fellow at the Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics at Calvin College and professor emeritus of political science at Pepperdine University. He was also a fellow at the Center for Public Justice. He served in the Michigan House of Representatives and Senate from 1974-1982, after which he worked with the Michigan Natural Resources Commission and the Michigan Department of Social Services. Monsma is the author or coauthor of numerous books including *Pluralism and Freedom: Faith-Based Organizations in a Democratic Society*. Stanley W. Carlson-Thies (PhD, University of Toronto) is director of the Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance, a division of the Center for Public Justice (CPJ), in Washington, DC. He is a senior fellow at CPJ and at the Canadian think tank Cardus. He convenes the Coalition to Preserve Religious Freedom, a multifaith alliance that advocates for the religious freedom of faith-based organizations to Congress and the federal government. Carlson-Thies served with George W. Bush's White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and served on a

task force of President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. He has appeared on NPR and in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and Christianity Today. He has coauthored several books including *The Freedom of Faith-Based Organizations to Staff on a Religious Basis*.