

# THE BYSTANDER —★—

## The Parable of “the Right to Refuse”

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*(Note from the writer: this is a fictionalized satire about a society where the law allows business owners, adoption agencies and medical personnel to refuse to provide services based on their religious convictions.)*

I reported to the Emergency Department at the start of my shift and checked my assignment at the Charge Desk. After the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the right to cite ones’ religion when refusing to provide certain medical services, I am now free to follow my conscience without fear of discriminatory action from my employer if I refuse to care for patients whose behavior conflicts with my Spiritual Values.

As I looked over the roster of patients, naturally I declined to tend to a woman who suffered a hemorrhage from a recent abortion. I also refused to medicate a man dying of AIDS, since homosexuality is against my religion. The rape victim in Room 21 was waiting for her dose of Plan B, but since “Life begins at Conception,” it could be committing murder to even place the pill in her hand, so I did not.

The next patient had complications from a liver transplant, and since substance abuse is prohibited by my religion, I withheld the immunosuppressant drugs ordered for him after reading in his chart that his liver failure was caused by alcoholic cirrhosis. The obese smoker in Room 13 was also removed from my list of assignments; his long-term gluttony and tobacco use had caused the cardiac arrest he was now in the midst of. Our bodies are created in the likeness of God and are temples to be worshipped, not intoxicated with worldly poisons while indulging in illicit proclivities.

The gynecological patient waiting “in chairs” to be medicated for a Sexually Transmitted Disease was a single woman, so she too was not acceptable to be my patient. However, I agreed to give antibiotics to the man who infected her, since at least he was married.

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I overheard a psychotic woman screaming obscenities at the staff: she would not be on my patient-care list after she took the Lords' name in vain. Another patient was an unconscious inmate from the state prison who had broken the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment, "Thou shall not kill." I refused to assist in reversing his septic shock, since that would be condoning his sin against society. "An Eye for an Eye" is the higher law I follow, and I voiced a prayer of thanks for no longer being required to violate my Christian oaths by supporting these immoral lifestyle choices.

However, I did agree to provide care for the rich man who was injured trying to pass through the Eye of a Needle while riding a Camel. And the owner of the nearby Currency Exchange was added to my list of worthy patients; his arm had been lacerated when a table was violently overturned by an angry Jewish man wearing a dirty long robe. A woman recovering from a tummy-tuck and face lift was also a deserving assignment, seeing as coveting the image of how you **wish** you could look is not technically violating the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment.

Then I learned that I had contracted Hepatitis C from a needle-stick accident involving an IV Drug abuser, long before the law allowed me to avoid taking care of such people. In my rage and distress, I collapsed onto the floor, breaking my leg from the fall. My doctor refused to set my broken bone, stating that when I neglected the sick, dying and needy, I had broken Jesus' Second Commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself."

I was forced to entrust my surgery to an atheist doctor, an agnostic nurse, an anesthesiologist wearing a Turban, and a pharmacist who is a member of the Unitarian Church. They were the only ones left who were willing to take care of me, no matter who I was, what I had done, or what I believed. As the anesthesia started to take effect, I remember one of them saying, "whatever we do for the **least of these**, we do for all of us."

And just before I went under, I heard myself whisper "Amen to that."