



Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 12, 2012 B

Many appalled at President Obama's attempt to violate the conscience of good American Catholics.

Regardless of whether our political affiliation is democrat, republican or independent, or whether we are for or against contraception or sterilization, we should be, I believe, outraged at the government's attempt to force Catholic institutions and individuals to buy into a healthcare plan that violates their conscience.

I believe that we should not allow the government or the liberal media to frame this as merely a contraceptive issue (90+% of Catholics do not follow this teaching of our church). Rather, we need to fight this issue because it is another attack by the government on religious liberty and conscience. It is amazing that the government is attacking an institution that has been a champion of healthcare benefits for all, an institution whose hospitals care for one out of six Americans, an institution that does provide very good health insurance for its employees who work 30 hours or more a week. Now the government sees fit to seek to force our church to include in our healthcare benefits abortifacients often called 'the morning after pill'.

Let me be clear, I am *not* one of those priests who believes that it is a sin to vote for a pro-choice candidate (unless of course one is voting for the candidate because he *is* pro-choice. That would be a serious sin). There are many issues to consider when one goes into a voting booth and while the abortion issue is certainly a huge issue, there are many other issues as well—such as, which candidate has policies that will provide for the poorest of our people (high on Jesus list). Our concern is not just for the unborn, but also for the already born.

Having said the above, I am personally outraged at this attempt by the government to attack the moral beliefs of a church that does so much good for millions and millions of our people. I believe every person who values religious liberty and doesn't want the government attacking the beliefs of his church, should

fight this issue. It has been said "all that is needed for evil to succeed is for good people to stand by and do nothing". I hope, when it comes to this issue, we will not be guilty of standing by and doing nothing. Make no mistake: this is not a case of furthering women's health benefits, as the administration's spin would have us believe, it is a case of ordering the violation of conscience. If unchecked, what will they dictate next?

Concerning this issue, our Bishop John Noonan has written the following letter to the people of our diocese.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the Church in the United States directly, and that strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith. The federal government, which claims to be "of, by, and for the people," has just dealt a heavy blow to almost a quarter of those people – the Catholic population – and to the millions more who are served by the Catholic faithful.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced last week that almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer their employees' health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be forced to include those "services" in the health policies they write. And almost all individuals will be forced to buy that coverage as a part of their policies.

In so ruling, the Administration has cast aside the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, denying to Catholics our Nation's first and most fundamental freedom, that of religious liberty. And as a result, unless the rule is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled either to violate our consciences, or to drop health coverage for our employees (and suffer the penalties for doing so). The Administration's sole concession was to give our institutions one year to comply.

We cannot – we will not – comply with this unjust law. People of faith cannot be made second class citizens. We are already joined by our brothers and sisters of all faiths and many others of good will in this important effort to regain our religious freedom. Our parents and grandparents did not come to these shores to help build American’s cities and towns, its infrastructure and institutions, its enterprise and culture, only to have their posterity stripped of their God-given rights. In generations past, the Church has always been able to count on the faithful to stand up and protect her sacred rights and duties. I hope and trust she can count on this generation of Catholics to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

And therefore, I would ask of you two things. First, as a community of faith we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail, and religious liberty may be restored. Without God, we can do nothing: with God, nothing is impossible. Second, I would also recommend visiting:

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/conscience-protection/index.cfm> to learn more about this severe assault on religious liberty, and how to contact Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration’s decision.
(End of letter)

As regards this edict, **Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan** says: *“In effect, the president is saying ‘we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences.’”*

Franciscan Sister Jane Marie Klein, chairperson of the board of Franciscan Alliance, Inc., a system of 13 Catholic hospitals, said that *“this is nothing less than a direct attack on religion and the First Amendment rights.”*

Cardinal Mahoney of Los Angeles, seen by most as a progressive, wrote on his blog January 20: *“I cannot imagine a more direct and frontal attack on freedom of conscience than this ruling today. ...For me there is no other fundamental issue as important as this one as we enter into the presidential and congressional campaigns. Every candidate must be pressed to declare his/her position on all of the fundamental life issues, especially the role of government to determine what conscience decision must be followed: either the person’s own moral and conscience decision, or that dictated/enforced by the federal government.”*

Archbishop Dolan further states: *“Scarcely two weeks ago, in its Hosanna-Tabor decision upholding the right of churches to make ministerial hiring decisions, the Supreme Court unanimously and enthusiastically reaffirmed these longstanding and foundational principles of religious freedom. The court made clear that they include the right of religious institutions to control their internal affairs. Yet the Obama administration has veered in the opposite direction. It has refused to exempt religious institutions that serve the common good—including Catholic schools, charities and hospitals—from its sweeping new health-care mandate that requires employers to purchase contraception, including abortion-inducing drugs, and sterilization coverage for their employees.”*

If so moved, write to your representative and tell him/her that you strongly disagree with the government’s attempt to violate the conscience of institutions by demanding that they include in their healthcare plan provisions that are contrary to their moral beliefs.

Have a blessed week,

