



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Rockford

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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 America’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 www.usccb.org/conscience, 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.

With every good wish and prayer, I remain

Cordially yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Thomas G. Doran, J.C.D., D.D.
Bishop of Rockford



Catholic New World

Newspaper for the Archdiocese of Chicago

The Cardinal's Column

Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.

January 15, 2012

Religious liberty and its discontents

If someone a year ago had told me that Catholic social service agencies in Illinois would be forbidden by law to arrange adoptions or place children in foster homes, I would have said that he or she could not be serious. If others had said that a well-established Catholic college in the archdiocese would be told by a government agency that it is no longer Catholic, I would have thought that impossible. If two years ago I had been told that Catholic hospitals and universities and other institutions that are securely part of the church's ministry would have to insure their employees for medical "services" that are immoral, I would have thought that we were still protected against a decree that would force our institutions to close or to secularize themselves. If I had imagined that the church could not go to the aid of women who have been trafficked or of refugees needing care without offering them "the full range of reproductive services" (including abortion and sterilization), I would have dismissed the thought as a mere fantasy. If the thought had occurred that the U.S. government would attack in court the right of a church to determine who are its properly recognized ministers and who are not, it would have been dismissed as pure fancy. Similarly fanciful would have been a law, actually introduced in a State legislature, revising the church's internal governance, taking it from priests and bishops and vesting it in committees dictated by State law. These developments have made me anxious. The church's work with the poor and the disadvantaged, the sick and the uneducated, the hungry and the homeless has never been threatened before. Loss of these ministries, as well as a weakening of our right to govern ourselves and to worship God in an orderly and regular fashion, will affect not only Catholics but also our whole society.

In previous generations, Catholics were protected against individual and organized prejudice by an exemplary legal system. In a society that is pluralistic in its moral standards, the law always provided religious exemptions and conscience clauses that protected both individuals and religious institutions. These traditional safeguards of liberty can no longer be taken for granted. Now it is the law itself that has become, in some instances, our adversary. This is a new development for Catholics in America: the legal system is being changed to remove protections for our faith and our religious liberty. Catholics risk being once again excluded from the American consensus. That is my fear.

Bishops swear to teach and uphold the Catholic faith and to defend the liberty of the church. There have been many reasons to oppose the Catholic faith and the church that teaches and practices it. The calendar of martyrs bears witness to this opposition from age to age. Recently, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to the diplomats accredited to the Holy See about contemporary situations where Catholics' freedom of religion is endangered: "In many countries, Christians are deprived of fundamental rights and sidelined from public life; in other countries they endure violent attacks against their churches and their homes. In other parts of the world, we see policies aimed at marginalizing the role of religion in the life of society, as if it were a cause of intolerance rather than a valued contribution to education in respect for human dignity, justice and peace."

In our age and in our country, opposition to Catholicism stems mainly from the rejection by many of our moral teaching and of the anthropology that underlies our understanding of the gift of human sexuality. The church's moral teaching is based on the preservation and encouragement of moral goods; in our society, morality is addressed through the legal defense of individual rights. Catholics, in both private and public life, have generally worked to keep the two visions compatible with each other. Religious liberty is both a moral good and a legally protected right. Strengthening religious liberty and refraining from playing rights off against each other will help keep everyone in the American consensus. That is my hope. God bless you.

