

5th Sunday B 4 & 5th Feb 2012

Some of you are already aware of the storm that is brewing—and that has in fact begun to strike at us. It is the storm gathering between the National Health Care initiative and the Catholic Church. It has gotten exceptionally little media coverage. Today, I'm going to read a letter from the Archbishop on this, but I want to give some background on it first.

When the National Health Care Act was passed, immediately the question was asked of how this was going to affect Catholic hospitals and especially Catholic institutions and workplaces. We know that the law requires everyone to receive health insurance, and it must be provided by their employer. The question was raised as to whether Catholic employers would be expected to provide things under insurance, that a Catholic conscience should consider immoral—things like: direct abortion, pharmaceuticals that are abortifacient (meaning they cause an abortion, like “Plan B” and “the morning after pill”), and all forms of contraception and sterilization. Would these have to be covered by Catholics' insurance?

Last August, the Department of Health and Human Services announced that all these would be expected to be covered by the insurance companies and paid for by the employers. What's more, it declared that for these services they were not allowed to ask a co-pay. Meaning: no patient would ever spend a single cent on any of these elective services that treat fertility—a normal, proper function of the human body—as a disease: something to be turned off, removed, or destroyed. Ironically—and this is the giveaway of their agenda—women suffering from infertility, which is a true medical disorder, get no special coverage. It is not paid for by the new insurance plan. In other words: if you've got a real medical problem, it's: “Honey, you're on your own.” But if you want to shut down a properly-functioning

system, if you want to mutilate tissues and organs and disrupt their proper ends, it's: "Oh yeah, that's paid in full." And this can only be paid for—since there's no co-pay—by raising the premiums on the employer, so the employer ends up paying all of the cost of these moral evils. As Archbishop Timothy Dolan says: "Never before has the federal government forced individuals and organizations to go out into the marketplace and buy a product that violates their conscience."

So back in August when this was announced, the Church asked for an exemption. And the HHS said they would consider it. Last week, Friday, January 20th, President Obama personally called to tell Archbishop Dolan, the archbishop of New York and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, that there would be no exemption for the Catholic Church and all its institutions. That same day, Secretary for Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, announced that the Church would be given one year to comply—supposedly a generous gift to give us time to figure out how to shift things internally. As Archbishop Dolan remarked: "In effect, the President is saying we have one year to figure out how to violate our consciences." Now, note the date: August 20, 2013.

Basically, it all comes down to the concept of freedom of conscience—the right to respect and follow one's own conscience, and the freedom that flows from that. No exception was made for the Catholic conscience, though exceptions were and are made for other religious groups. Just not us. To quote Archbishop Dolan again: "The Amish do not carry health insurance. The government respects their principles. Christian Scientists want to heal by prayer alone, and the new health-care reform law respects that. Quakers and others object to killing even in wartime, and the government respects that principle for conscientious objectors." We, as Catholics, aren't even asking for that. We're asking for the right to not have to kill innocent and non-

aggressive defenseless human beings, and yet we get no help, no protection for our consciences. In other words: All consciences are protected except those that happen to think that human life has value from the moment its DNA begins.

Now, some would point out that many people—many Catholics even—see no problem with things like contraception. Some sources report that possibly even up to 95% of Catholics think that contraception is ok at least in some cases and about 85% of them practice it. Many approve at least the occasional use of chemical, hormonal contraceptives like “The Pill”, Depo-Provera, Nuva-Ring, etc.

Agreed. Many Catholics don’t see a problem in it. Some Catholic insurance groups have already agreed to pay. Maybe many of you sitting here today think the same thing. Even if that’s the case, it’s at least the Church’s universal teaching that these things are morally wrong, even for those not of our Faith. And if contraception and sterilization may be hotly debated even among Catholics, we have even stronger things to say about abortion and abortifacients. Abortifacients are chemicals—like “the morning after pill”, like “Plan B”—that will keep the tiny, fertilized egg, which is now growing and dividing and developing—we would say, a living human which has its own unique 46 chromosomes—keep it from being able to implant in the uterine wall and so it passes out and is indirectly aborted. We say: that’s the loss of a human life by a human choice—that’s what humanity refers to as “murder”.

This is the world—the battle—in which we now sit. I’m now going to read the Bishop’s letter and then finish with the reasons I still have great hope in spite of this situation.

More importantly, I think this could be a great moment of grace for our country. This is going to open up a discussion of things that have lain dormant for the last 50 years. Beyond the questions of abortion and even abortifacients, the question of contraception has been basically ignored.

Next, I'm not worried because we're going to do the right thing. The Catholic Church is going to stand by its moral obligations no matter what; we're not going to bend. If, in the past, we've been too sluggish to act, we've wanted to play nice, we've tried to go along—I think the gloves are off now. I think we see our generation's battle and we see we're quite truly going to have to fight for our own religious freedom.

Along with that: we're not alone. Many other religious groups are joining us, even those that directly disagree with our teaching on some of these things. But they recognize this is about contraception or even abortion, it's about freedom. And they see that what is given to the Quakers and the Amish and the Christian Scientists should be given to us as well.

Beyond these points, I think the more they attack us, the more obvious to onlookers their malice will become. Frankly, I'm amazed this is happening in an election year. It seems poor political prudence to pick this fight at the very moment that people are paying attention on a heightened level.

We're going to be fine if we do our part. Let us call our congressman. Get involved. Pay attention. The simple thing we must do, the fight have before us, is to avoid Indifference to Truth and Unwillingness to Act.

This is our time. This is our battle. This is our challenge. We must respond.