

# **CATHOLIC RIGHTS UNDER FIRE; OBAMA PLOY REJECTED**

For the first time in American history, the federal government has waged war on the First Amendment rights of Roman Catholics. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were harsh attacks on the rights of Catholics, but they always emanated from the states and municipalities. In other words, never before has the executive branch in Washington attacked Catholics the way the Obama administration is doing right now.

In many respects, what the Obama administration is trying to accomplish is nothing new. In 2007, presidential candidate Barack Obama promised Planned Parenthood that on his first day in office he would sign the Freedom of Choice Act; it would have mandated that Catholic hospitals perform abortions. But the bill never got to his desk. That's because of the protest it engendered from groups like the Catholic League.

When the healthcare bill was being considered, the Obama administration said it would respect conscience rights and would not mandate abortion coverage. The bishops were encouraged, but very quickly it became apparent that Obama's pledge was empty: the bishops refused to support any legislation that might jeopardize conscience rights or mandate abortion coverage.

The bill passed, over the objection of the bishops, and then came the directive of the Secretary of Health and Human Services ordering religious institutions like hospitals and universities to provide coverage for contraception, abortifacients and sterilization.

On Friday, January 20, Obama said that only churches would qualify for an exemption from paying for these services (even

then they had to apply for an exemption); all other religious institutions, like hospitals and universities, would have to comply. The latter would be punished because they do not discriminate—they hire and serve non-Catholics!

This led to an uproar, and exactly three weeks later, on February 10, Obama announced his “accommodation”: employers did not have to pay for these services, just their insurance companies. But everyone knew this was a shell game—the insurance premium is paid by Catholic workers and employers. Hence, the call on the part of the bishops, the Catholic League, and others, to stand fast and call for legislation that would secure our First Amendment right to religious liberty.

On a positive note, we could fill this entire issue of *Catalyst* with all the “In the News” media hits we have garnered. So we are getting the word out.