

# **“IT’S THE FIRST AMENDMENT, STUPID”**

The central issue in the fight between the Obama administration and the Catholic Church is the right of the federal government to redefine religious institutions as entities that hire and serve mostly people of their own faith. Secondly, the fight is over forcing Catholics to pay for abortion-inducing drugs. But one looks in vain for the Church’s critics to even acknowledge this reality. It’s not contraception that is in play—“It’s the First Amendment, Stupid.”

In a recent editorial, the *New York Times* said the Obama mandate “specifically exempts houses of worship.” Try telling that to Donald Cardinal Wuerl who runs the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.; it is a self-insured entity and thus must be forced to pay for morally objectionable services. The Times said most American Catholic women do not agree with the Church’s contraception stand, but failed to mention that *because of the Obama administration’s disrespect for religious liberty*, support for Obama has dropped precipitously among Catholic women.

The same day that the Times ran its editorial, a column by Lisa Miller of the *Washington Post* argued that a “small group of very conservative bishops have hijacked the church,” and cited Stockton Bishop Stephen Blaire as taking the other side. She was wrong. Three days before Miller’s piece ran, Blaire issued a statement saying, “I stand solidly with my brother bishops in our common resolve to overturn the unacceptable intrusion of government into the life of the Church by the HHS Mandate.”

But here is what was really driving the story. The secular critics of the Catholic Church, beginning with HHS Secretary

Kathleen Sebelius, are so out of touch with Catholic sentiment today that they seriously misread the reaction to this issue. Moreover, they thoroughly underestimated the resolve of today's crop of bishops. Now they are trying to deflect what is really happening, but it's too late.