

# NEW HHS RULES WELCOMED



Bill Donohue comments on the revised rules, announced today, regarding the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate:

The rules proposed today by HHS appear to go a long way toward rectifying the most problematic provisions of the mandate. Essentially, the rules provide insularity for Catholic institutions: they will not be directly involved in providing health insurance coverage for contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs.

Perhaps the most welcome aspect of the new strictures is the elimination of the criteria that define what constitutes a religious institution. Gone altogether is the highly objectionable definition that excludes an exemption for those religious entities that hire and serve mostly people of other religions. As has been pointed out many times, this definition punishes Catholic institutions for *not discriminating* against Jews, Protestants, Muslims, Mormons, agnostics, and atheists.

The new rules now simply revert to the established understanding of a religious employer as defined by the IRS. This makes eminently good sense.

Still unresolved is the issue of private employers who invoke a religious objection to providing insurance coverage for services they deem morally objectionable. Because the new rules have not been finalized, and there is an opportunity for further public discussion, more progress may yet be made.

While many aspects of the new proposal need to be examined before a final conclusion can be rendered, the decision to expand religious exemptions, and to adopt the IRS definition

of a religious institution, is a sign of goodwill by the Obama administration toward the Catholic community.