

OBAMA SPINS CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

At an August campaign stop, President Obama addressed the HHS mandate saying, “We worked with the Catholic hospitals and universities to find a solution that protects both religious liberty and a woman’s health.” The president also said that Mitt Romney “joined the far right of his party to support a bill that would allow any employer to deny contraceptive coverage to their employees.”

Regarding the first remark, Obama was singularly dishonest. On February 8, Archbishop William Lori, who chairs the bishops’ Committee for Religious Liberty, said point blank that “no one from this administration has approached the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops for discussions on this matter of a possible ‘compromise.’” Was Obama suggesting that Archbishop Lori was lying? Furthermore, on February 13, Lori made it clear that only after the original HHS mandate of January 20 was revised and ready to be announced on February 10 did the White House contact Archbishop Timothy Dolan, head of the bishops’ conference.

Regarding the other remark, Obama was referencing the Blunt Amendment; it secured conscience exemptions for health care providers. Not only was it not a product of the “far right,” it lost by only three votes in the U.S. Senate, with three Democrats joining with the Republicans; one Democrat was Senator Bob Casey, hardly a “far right” zealot. More important, a March *New York Times* poll showed that 57 percent of Americans believe that religiously affiliated employers should be able to opt out of the HHS mandate. Are most Americans part of the “far right,” Mr. President?

Demagoguery will not make Obama’s “war on religion” vanish. Only respecting the conscience rights of Catholics will do that.