

OBAMACARE vs. CATHOLIC CHURCH

Leading up to the Supreme Court's decision on ObamaCare, two developments offered new evidence that the confrontation between the Catholic Church and the Obama administration was nearing a collision course.

In May, attorneys for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) made plain their objections to the alleged "accommodations" offered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); a day later the Franciscan University of Steubenville announced that as a result of the HHS mandate it would drop student health care insurance programs starting in the next academic year.

Writing for the bishops, Anthony R. Picarello, Jr. and Michael F. Moses said, "We believe that this mandate is unjust and unlawful—it is bad health policy, and because it entails an element of government coercion against conscience, it creates a religious freedom problem." The two men listed six objections to the HHS mandate that would force Catholic non-profits to pay for morally objectionable services in their insurance plans.

One central objection was the "unprecedented" attempt to redefine religious employers as entities that hire and serve mostly people of their own religion. The so-called HHS religious exemption—what they called "improperly narrow and unlawful"—would effectively nullify the religious exemption traditionally afforded such institutions as Catholic social service agencies, hospitals and colleges.

Another major point, one which spoke directly to the concerns of Franciscan University, is that it mandates such organizations to "either drop out of the health insurance marketplace, potentially triggering crippling penalties, or to provide coverage that violates their deeply-held convictions."

Fr. Terence Henry, the courageous president of Franciscan University, would not be bullied.

Both the crabbed redefinition of a religious institution, and the either/or conditions it offers Catholic non-profits, are classic Catch-22 politics. The goal, which is to punish Catholic organizations if they don't bow to the secular edicts of the Obama administration, couldn't be more transparent.

The war on religion continues. Anyone who thought it was fading away needs a reality check. We stand firmly with the USCCB.