

CATHOLIC MESSAGE ON WORLD AIDS DAY

On December 1, World AIDS Day, we issued a statement noting that it is important to remember these few relevant facts:

- No private institution on earth provides more HIV/AIDS services than the Catholic Church. Indeed, it accounts for more than a quarter of all the services worldwide.
- In the United States, Catholic diocesan agencies play a major role tending to those with AIDS. In 1989, for example, the Archdiocese of New York established the first AIDS nursing home in New York City (this was the same year that homosexual activists stormed St. Patrick's Cathedral during Mass).
- In Africa, where AIDS has taken a heavy toll, the efforts of the Catholic Church counseling sexual restraint has yielded impressive results.

During his trip last year to Benin, Africa, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to this issue with his customary authority. He said that AIDS "clearly calls for a medical and pharmaceutical response." However, the Holy Father hastened to add that "Above all, it is an ethical problem. The change of behaviour that it requires—for example, sexual abstinence, rejection of sexual promiscuity, fidelity within marriage—ultimately involves the question of integral development, which demands a global approach and a global response from the Church."

In other words, AIDS will not be resolved by science, technology and morally neutral sex education programs.

For the most part, AIDS is caused by behaviors that violate the natural law. Its resolution, therefore, lay in observing the cardinal virtue of temperance, not in the promiscuous distribution of condoms.

SEXUAL RIGHTS vs. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Nowhere in the U.S. Constitution does it mention sexual rights, but it does cite religious liberty. To be sure, the courts have granted a generalized right to privacy (also not mentioned in the Constitution) that covers sexual rights. Still, such newly crafted rights cannot legitimately trump the two religious-liberty protections explicitly stated in the First Amendment. Yet the Obama administration seems to think otherwise.

Archbishop Timothy Dolan, the president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), spoke eloquently recently about the need to safeguard religious liberty. Another sign that the bishops are taking new threats to religious rights seriously is the formation of a new Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, chaired by Bridgeport Bishop William Lori. Driving these concerns are such sexual issues as abortion and homosexuality.

The USCCB has filed a Freedom of Information Act request seeking to uncover why the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) dismissed the findings of an independent review board that deemed acceptable a USCCB program to combat human trafficking. Moreover, 27 U.S. senators have asked the Obama administration to explain its unprecedented denial of this grant. We know the conclusion—HHS denied the grant because the Church opposes abortion as a way to “help” women in need—but we would like to know more about its reasoning. Furthermore, HHS is trying to force Catholic hospitals to cover sterilization and contraceptive services, allowing an “exemption” that is nothing more than a Hobson’s choice.

This attack on religious liberty is not limited to the federal government. In Massachusetts and Illinois, Catholic social service agencies have been forced to drop their adoptive and foster care programs because they refuse, on religious liberty grounds, to include homosexual parents.

This is the most determined onslaught on religious liberty we've seen in decades, and all of it is driven by a debased understanding of sexual freedom

CATHOLIC CHURCH vs. OBAMA SHOWDOWN

On December 1, the House Committee on Oversight & Government Reform held a hearing titled, "HHS and the Catholic Church: Examining the Politicization of Grants." At issue was the decision by the Obama administration to deny a grant that the Catholic Church routinely receives providing for relief to the victims of human trafficking; the ruling was made despite an independent review board's finding that gave high scores to the Church's program.

The Church was denied the grant because it refuses to offer abortion referrals. Many Catholics, including the Catholic League, argued that the politicized nature of the decision to defund the program demanded the hearing. Since 2006, the Church has helped more than 2,700 trafficking victims, most of whom are women and children.

Although the issue of abortion referral was on the table, the real issue was something more sinister: the pro-abortion community, which is supporting the Obama administration's push to mandate that private healthcare plans provide coverage for

sterilization and contraceptive services, has its real sights set on mandated abortion coverage. Everyone knows that even minimum-wage earners can afford contraceptives, so this issue hardly explains the heated rhetoric. What mandated contraceptive services accomplishes is that it greases the slide towards abortion coverage.

The USCCB grant proposal was awarded a score of 89, yet it was denied the grant. Two other organizations, with scores of 74 and 69, were given a grant. The hearing sought to determine whether the USCCB's opposition to abortion referral killed its chances.

In his opening statement at the hearing, George Sheldon, Acting Assistant HHS secretary for the Administration for Children and Families, said that "HHS did not establish a preference for grantees that would require each individual subgrantees to provide referrals for family planning and the full range of legally permissible gynecological and obstetric care."

The following exchange between Sheldon and Rep. Trey Gowdy calls into question Sheldon's veracity:

Rep. Trey Gowdy: "The truth be told, if the Catholic bishops had scored a 100, you still wouldn't have picked them."

George Sheldon: "That's not necessarily accurate."

Gowdy: "Well, would you have—if they scored a 100? Is an 89 not enough?"

Sheldon: "Well, I'm dealing with the facts in front of me."

Gowdy: "Assume this fact then: If they scored a 95, would that have been high enough?"

Sheldon: "I cannot without looking at the facts, the other applicants—I cannot respond to...."

Those who do not ascribe to the vision of sexuality entertained by “progressives,” but are nonetheless not terribly bothered by the push for contraceptive services in healthcare plans, need to wake up before the “progressives” start racing for home. This is the top of the home stretch, which is why this hearing was critical.

When asked about this, Bill Donohue said, “Anyone who can’t figure out what is going on with the Obama administration is either hopelessly partisan or in sheer denial.”