

# CATHOLIC RIGHTS UNDER FIRE; OBAMA PLOY REJECTED

For the first time in American history, the federal government has waged war on the First Amendment rights of Roman Catholics. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were harsh attacks on the rights of Catholics, but they always emanated from the states and municipalities. In other words, never before has the executive branch in Washington attacked Catholics the way the Obama administration is doing right now.

In many respects, what the Obama administration is trying to accomplish is nothing new. In 2007, presidential candidate Barack Obama promised Planned Parenthood that on his first day in office he would sign the Freedom of Choice Act; it would have mandated that Catholic hospitals perform abortions. But the bill never got to his desk. That's because of the protest it engendered from groups like the Catholic League.

When the healthcare bill was being considered, the Obama administration said it would respect conscience rights and would not mandate abortion coverage. The bishops were encouraged, but very quickly it became apparent that Obama's pledge was empty: the bishops refused to support any legislation that might jeopardize conscience rights or mandate abortion coverage.

The bill passed, over the objection of the bishops, and then came the directive of the Secretary of Health and Human Services ordering religious institutions like hospitals and universities to provide coverage for contraception, abortifacients and sterilization.

On Friday, January 20, Obama said that only churches would qualify for an exemption from paying for these services (even

then they had to apply for an exemption); all other religious institutions, like hospitals and universities, would have to comply. The latter would be punished because they do not discriminate—they hire and serve non-Catholics!

This led to an uproar, and exactly three weeks later, on February 10, Obama announced his “accommodation”: employers did not have to pay for these services, just their insurance companies. But everyone knew this was a shell game—the insurance premium is paid by Catholic workers and employers. Hence, the call on the part of the bishops, the Catholic League, and others, to stand fast and call for legislation that would secure our First Amendment right to religious liberty.

On a positive note, we could fill this entire issue of *Catalyst* with all the “In the News” media hits we have garnered. So we are getting the word out.

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## IS MINAJ POSSESSED?

Nicki Minaj [pronounced Min-aah-juh] fresh off looking like a fool with Madonna at the Super Bowl, showed up at the Grammys on February 12 walking on the red carpet with a guy dressed like the pope. This was just a prelude of what was to come.

Minaj’s performance began on stage with a mock confessional skit. This was followed by a taped video depicting a mock exorcism. With stained glass in the background, she appeared on stage again with choir boys and monks dancing.

The most vulgar part was the sexual statement that showed a scantily clad female stretching backwards while an altar boy knelt between her legs in prayer. Finally, “Come All Ye

Faithful” was sung while a man posing as a bishop walked on stage; Minaj was shown levitating.

None of this was by accident, and all of it was approved by The Recording Academy, which puts on the Grammys. Whether Minaj is possessed is surely an open question, but what is not in doubt is the irresponsibility of The Recording Academy. Never would they allow an artist to insult Judaism or Islam.

It’s bad enough that Catholics have to fight for their rights vis-à-vis a hostile administration in Washington without also having to fend off attacks in the entertainment industry. The net effect, however, will only embolden Catholics.

Our protest of this obscene assault was picked up by media outlets from the *New York Times* to *The Times of India*.

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## CAUGHT IN A WHIRLWIND

FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK  
William Donohue

This has certainly been a whirlwind. The pace has been lightening fast, and that’s because we are getting pounded on all fronts. If it’s not the Obama administration trying to strip us of our First Amendment rights, it’s some jerk recording artist mocking our religion in front of millions. We live in sick times culturally, and in dangerous times politically. But there’s another side to this story, and that’s the incredible outpouring of support we’ve been receiving.

Here’s one good example of how our side is reacting. In February, I went to Naples, Florida to speak at the 25th

anniversary of Legatus, an organization of Catholic CEOs founded by Tom Monaghan; I also received the “Defender of the Faith Award.” Over 600 Catholics from all across the country were there, as was Cardinal Raymond Burke, President George W. Bush, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal, and a host of other stellar personalities. EWTN’s Raymond Arroyo did a fabulous job as the Master of Ceremonies, and Catholic League member Laura Sacha did an equally fabulous job organizing the event.

I was happy to discuss my new book, *Why Catholicism Matters: How Catholic Virtues Can Reshape Society in the 21st Century*; it will be published May 29 by a Doubleday imprint, Image. The book covers a wide range of topics, concentrating on the monumental contributions that the Catholic Church has made to civilization. Although the crowd was genuinely interested in what I had to say, many spoke to me before I took to the podium practically begging me to say something about the frontal assault on our religion coming from the Obama administration.

I did not disappoint them: they took to their feet to let me know how much they appreciated my remarks. Never have I seen our side as fired up as they are now. They’ve had it. Obama has unleashed a Catholic rebellion, and it isn’t going to be quelled by his Johnny-come-lately “accommodation.” Father Virgil Blum, who founded the Catholic League in 1973—he was a Jesuit Marquette University professor of political science—used to say that Catholics are eunuchs. He must be looking down at us now with a smile, as they have clearly rebooted.

It’s not just Catholics who are angry. You would not believe the number of e-mails, phone calls and letters we have received from evangelicals, Jews, and Mormons, in particular. They know that the First Amendment is not divisible, and that they may very well be next. They also know that they can depend on the Catholic League to step forward if their religion comes under assault. At stake is more than Catholic

rights—secular extremists are on the march, gunning for all religions.

Something happened, however, when I got to JFK that I would like to share with you. At first I thought it was just an anomaly—a bizarre and unfortunate experience. But after discussing what happened to me with many people in both Florida and New York, some of whom I hardly know, I'm less sure that it was a freak.

I was carrying a small suitcase (I could only stay one night) and a briefcase. Both went through the conveyer belt monitors without incident. Ditto for me when I walked through the detector. But then something strange happened: a TSA employee told me to step aside and stand before another detector, with my hands up. No bells or whistles went off. I asked if I could go and was told, no, I had to proceed to another detector. When I reached back to get my wallet (which was still on the conveyor belt), I was told not to move. After another round of screening, I asked if I could finally go. Then another TSA official stepped forward, and the two of them escorted me to a room where they closed the door.

In the room, they told me they would be touching every part of my body. They did. One man even put his hands down the front of my pants. When they were done, I asked if I was "clean." They said yes. I told them that as an Air Force veteran I understood their need to obey orders, but I wanted an explanation. Why did they subject me to this? One of the employees asked if I was taking medication, and I told him that yes, I was on anti-gout medicine. So what? He said it is possible that the detector picked this up. But there was no saliva test. Moreover, I had the same medication in my body the next day when I left, and there was no problem.

Was this just happenstance? Maybe. But it could also be that I am on a list. Some say that all of this was meant to intimidate me, hoping that it would lead to an altercation.

Wouldn't that be a story for the evening news?

I am not going to go into it right now, but trust me: I have been subjected to intimidation by powerful people who are in the tank for Obama. Indeed, it happened right after he was elected in November 2008.

Not to worry—I am not going to be intimidated by anyone. I have absolutely no intention of amending my ways or changing my style. I have one objective, and that is to fight for the rights of Catholics. No one is going to stop me.

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## **OBAMA PUSHED US TOO FAR**

During our fight against the Obama edict mandating that Catholic organizations provide coverage for abortion-inducing drugs, contraception and sterilization, we made international headlines and were featured on the Drudge Report.

The Obama administration made three strategic errors: 1) this issue is first and foremost not about contraception—it is about religious liberty 2) by mandating that Catholic entities provide coverage for abortifacients, the Obama administration made it clear that its ultimate goal was to demand that all healthcare plans provide for abortion coverage, and 3) it seriously underestimated the clout of the bishops.

We were inundated with support from Protestants, Jews, Mormons, and others. When the federal government seeks to impose a radical secular agenda on religious entities, denying them the right to exercise their doctrinal prerogatives, it is trampling on the First Amendment rights of the faithful.

Everyone knows that contraception is not only inexpensive, it

is widely available free of charge. What the Obama administration did by demanding that Catholic non-profits provide coverage for abortion-inducing drugs was to put the camel's nose in the tent—the slippery slope mandating that Catholic hospitals perform abortions has been stepped on.

Today's crop of Catholic bishops, led by Timothy Cardinal Dolan and Bishop William Lori (he heads the *Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty*), is more willing than ever before to engage the culture and not walk away from a fight. So Obama's advisers really blew it big time when they counted on the usual Catholic passivity—these are not ordinary times.

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## **BIRTH CONTROL IS NOT THE ISSUE**

In covering the Obama edict, those in the media greatly missed the point: they casted the problem as if it dealt solely with birth control which was not the case.

In a name association game, when most people hear the words “birth control,” they think of the pill. Most Americans, including Catholics, treat the pill as something altogether different from abortion. So when pollsters asked about the Obama healthcare plan, framing the issue as one about birth control, it was never going to set off the alarms: once abortion was mentioned everything changed. Consider the evidence.

On February 9 we conducted a Lexis-Nexis search linking the words “Catholic” “Obama” and “birth control,” and found that in the previous week, there were 345 stories with those terms

(there is always some repetition, particularly with wire services). Within this same grouping, when the words “morning-after pill” were included, the number dropped to 62; when “abortifacients” was linked to the initial three terms, there were 31 stories; and when the term “abortion-inducing drugs” was included, the number dropped to 20.

In other words, the media framed the issue in terms of the least offensive issue.

Add to this the fact that so many Americans just take a glimpse at the headline, which uniformly cites birth control, and the result is a massive distortion of the truth.

The bigger question is: Why does the Obama plan include drugs that induce abortion? Because that’s where he wants to go—he would like nothing better than to force all religious institutions to provide abortion coverage—and this is his way of prying the door open.

This issue is, first and foremost, about the First Amendment right to religious liberty. Secondly, it is about abortion. The lust for abortion that this administration has is unparalleled, and its unrelenting drive to shove its radical secular agenda down the throats of the faithful is equally unprecedented.

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## **SEBELIUS CATHOLICISM**

## **DISRESPECTS**

In an article titled “Our Rule Respects Religion,” Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius recently wrote in the *USA Today* that “we specifically carved out from the



[healthcare] policy religious organizations that primarily employ people of their own faith.”

Sebelius knows very well that Catholic agencies have a long and distinguished record of hiring and serving non-Catholics, so to say that they can only qualify for an exemption by turning away those who are not Catholic from Catholic schools, hospitals, hospices, orphanages, shelters for battered women, and the like, is a plea for *discrimination* and an insult to Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

She was wrong to say that the administration’s rule is identical to that of states like California. As Carol Hogan of the California Catholic Conference said, her state’s rule is not identical. Moreover, in states like Wisconsin, which are weighing various options on extending exemptions to religious entities, they are in a holding pattern until it is clear how Obamacare flushes out nationally. It was a non-starter for Sebelius to compare the contraception mandate to similar mandates in state law: each of these states allowed for religious employers to self-insure or some other avenue to ensure that they would not have to cover services that conflict with their religious tenets.

Sebelius did not address the fact that Obamacare allows at least two religious groups an exemption—the Amish and Christian Scientists. So why does the policy discriminate against Catholics?

At the recent National Prayer Breakfast, President Obama said that “We can’t leave our values at the door.” Someone needs to tell him that this moral imperative includes Catholics.

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# GAG RULE ON MILITARY CHAPLAINS

On January 26, Archbishop Timothy Broglio joined with his fellow bishops in issuing a pastoral letter criticizing the Obama administration for violating the conscience rights of Catholics. The only difference was that Broglio's letter, which was to be read from the pulpit by military chaplains, was initially censored.

The Army's Office of the Chief of Chaplains notified Archbishop Broglio that he was not authorized to have his letter read from the pulpit. Broglio shot back saying he stands "firm in the belief, based on legal precedent" that the Army had no right to issue the gag order. He said the attempt to muzzle his free speech violated his rights and "those same rights of all military chaplains and their congregants."

After Archbishop Broglio met with Secretary of the Army John McHugh, a compromise was reached: the letter would be allowed to be read providing that the last sentence, "We cannot, we will not, comply with this unjust law," was excised; the government argued it could be seen as a call to civil disobedience. Still, the damage was done, and once again the Obama administration unnecessarily picked a fight with Catholics.

That this abridgment of the military chaplains' First Amendment right to freedom of speech—protesting the abridgment of the First Amendment rights of Catholics to religious liberty—should come from an administration that supports the right of the "Occupy" movement thugs is unbelievable. But this is what we've come to in 2012. This could be a long year.

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# OBAMA SPOKESMEN ARE INSINCERE

As Catholics expressed their outrage over the Health and Human Services contraception mandate, a couple of President Obama's spokesmen defended the healthcare plan.

Obama advisor David Axelrod said that "We certainly don't want to abridge anyone's religious freedom, so we're going to look for a way to move forward that both provides women with the preventative care that they need and respects the prerogatives of religious institutions." Similarly, White House press secretary Jay Carney said that "the president is very interested in finding the appropriate balance between religious beliefs and convictions."

Both were insincere. It is known that there was division in the Obama administration when the edict was being contemplated, but the president decided to side with extremists like Kathleen Sebelius. So they had plenty of time to figure out a way not to punish Catholics, and they still decided to drop the hammer.

White House supporters of Obama's edict pointed to a poll that showed a slight majority of Catholics supporting the plan. But the poll was flawed. The poll never mentioned that the federal government would place sanctions on Catholic institutions if they did not comply, and that ultimately it could lead to pulling federal funds to Catholic hospitals, effectively shutting them down. Nor did the poll mention that the plan mandates that Catholic entities provide abortion-inducing drugs. In short, the question was dishonest.

Obama is just trying to open the door for the mandatory coverage of abortion in every health care plan.

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# HUGE DEFEAT FOR OBAMA

Last October, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments on a case involving the “ministerial exception,” a provision that bars the government from making employment decisions regarding church ministers. Leondra R. Kruger represented the Obama administration and made the striking claim that the government should not be barred from policing the hiring policies of churches.

In January, in a very rare unanimous decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that churches are entitled to make employment decisions without interference by the government. In doing so, the high court affirmed the doctrine of “ministerial exception.”

This was a great victory for religious liberty and a huge defeat for the Obama administration. When the Supreme Court heard oral arguments in October, the Obama administration’s lawyer proved to be such a secular zealot that she stunned even the more liberal members of the high court. Kruger made such an extremist argument that she even got Justice Elena Kagan to agree wholeheartedly with Justice Antonin Scalia.

Had the Obama administration won, the government would have been able to order the Catholic Church to accept women priests.

Many thanks to Leondra for blowing it big time.

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# POPE'S OBLIQUE SHOT AT OBAMA

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI addressed the U.S. bishops at their "Ad Limina" visit. During his address, the pope took a veiled shot at the Obama administration.

Without explicitly naming Obama, Pope Benedict XVI made it clear that he sees the administration as a threat to religious liberty. He spoke eloquently of the role of religious freedom in American history and the importance of natural law. He also said, "The legitimate separation of Church and State cannot be taken to mean that the Church must be silent on certain issues," calling attention to the "grave threats to the Church's public moral witness presented by a radical secularism which finds increasing expression in the political and cultural spheres."

How do we know that he was addressing the Obama administration? Speaking of his discussions with U.S. bishops, the Holy Father said: "Many of you have pointed out that concerted efforts have been made to deny the right of conscientious objection on the part of Catholic individuals and institutions with regard to cooperation in intrinsically evil practices. Others have spoken to me of a worrying tendency to reduce religious freedom to mere freedom of worship without guarantees of respect for freedom of conscience."

The pope was referring to the public pronouncements of those who objected to the Obamacare mandate that Catholic institutions provide sterilization and contraceptive services (including abortifacients), and the denial of funding to a Catholic agency that combats human trafficking because the Church opposes abortion.

The term "freedom of worship," was coined to distinguish it from "freedom of religion." It expresses a highly privatized

understanding of religious liberty that does not embrace the public expression of religion. It is also the preferred term of our nation's president and secretary of state.