

# Religious Liberty

By Dr Steven White, MD

Courageous men and women throughout American history have made heroic sacrifices, even unto death, defending our God given rights to life and liberty. Religious liberty was so esteemed by our Founding Fathers that it was made the first freedom protected in the Bill of Rights. James Madison, the author of the First Amendment said, “Conscience is the most sacred of property.”

Tragically, this most cherished freedom is now under assault from within our own government. Those who have sworn an oath to protect our constitutional rights are now acting deliberately to deny them.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services, with the approval of the President of the United States, has mandated that all health insurance plans must provide free of charge - contraceptives, sterilizations and “morning after pills” which cause chemical abortions. Because the Obama administration has created a new and restrictive definition of “religious institution,” most Catholic schools, health care facilities, social service organizations, as well as individuals and business owners, will be required to pay for these “services” even though it violates their faith. For 2000 years the Catholic Church has clearly and consistently upheld the truth that contraception, sterilization and abortion are immoral actions. For the government to force people to participate in activities which are contrary to their ethical and religious convictions is a grave injustice and a direct assault on the freedom of religion. And while this particular assault is directed against Catholics, every American should be mindful of the ominous warning of the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemoller who wrote, when “they came for the Jews I was not a Jew, so I did not speak out. And when they came for me, there was no one left to speak out for me.”

The Vicar of Christ on earth, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has expressed his serious concern regarding this issue. “It is imperative that the entire Catholic community in the United States come to realize the grave threats to the Church’s public moral witness...Here we see the need for an engaged, articulate and well-formed Catholic laity with a strong critical sense of the dominant culture and with courage... .”

The Catholic Bishops of the United States vigorously oppose this healthcare mandate and have spoken out clearly and in absolute unanimity. They are calling for a nationwide campaign in defense of religious liberty for all Americans, including a “Fortnight for Freedom” from June 21 (the vigil of the Feast of Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher) through the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. This is intended to be a special time of prayer and penance, education and public action on this vital issue.

The time has come to make a choice. Defend freedom or be subject to government oppression; defend truth and justice or be subject to the dictatorship of relativism; defend Christ and His Church or be a subject of the powers of this world. “You cannot serve two masters” (Luke 16:13); “Each one must judge whether it is right to serve God or man.” (Acts 4:19)

We must unite for the cause of freedom, for love of God and for authentic love of one another.

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