



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 1, 2012

Catholic Bishops Call for Righteous Defiance Over Obama Mandate

A battle appears to be brewing between the Obama administration and the Catholic Church over the President's insistence that religious employers provide free contraception coverage in their insurance plans. As reported January 23 in *The New American*, the White House announced "that under its 2010 ObamaCare medical legislation employers will be compelled to cover birth control for women free of charge, including controversial contraceptive drugs which can induce abortion early in a woman's pregnancy. The administration rejected an appeal from religious organizations, led by the Catholic Church, for an exemption on insurance provided to employees of religious institutions such as hospitals, colleges, and charities."



In response, Archbishop (and Cardinal designate) Timothy Dolan (left) of New York, president of the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#), declared that the President was trying to force Catholics to violate clear Church teachings on contraception, sterilization, and even abortion. "To force American citizens to choose between violating their consciences and forgoing their healthcare is literally unconscionable," he said in a statement. "It is as much an attack on access to health care as on religious freedom."

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At least three Catholic bishops have announced that their dioceses will not comply with the Obama "contraception mandate." One of them, Bishop Thomas Olmsted of the diocese of Phoenix, Arizona, suggested that Christians under his jurisdiction might turn to civil disobedience rather than obey the mandate in violation of the teachings of the Church.

In an [open letter](#) that was read aloud in parishes throughout the Phoenix diocese on Sunday, January 29, Olmsted told the faithful that "unless the rule is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled either to violate our consciences, or to drop health coverage for our employees (and suffer the penalties for doing so)." Added the bishop with a sense of spiritual authority: "We cannot — we will not — comply with this unjust law.... In generations past the Church has always been able to count on the faithful to stand up and protect her sacred rights and duties. I hope and trust she can count on this generation of Catholics to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less."

The bishop asked members of his diocese to commit themselves to "prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail and religious liberty may be restored," as well as to "contact Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration's decision."



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As reported by [TheBlaze.com](#), Bishop Alexander Sample of Marquette, Michigan, sent a letter very similar in content to the members of his diocese. And according to [LifeNews.com](#), Archbishop Dennis Schnurr of Cincinnati and Bishop David Ricken of Green Bay, Wisconsin, also agreed that their dioceses would refuse to comply with the Obama ruling.

In a [column posted on his diocesan website](#), Bishop David Zubik of Pittsburgh went as far as to write that, in making its ruling through Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, the Obama administration was, in effect, saying: “ ‘To Hell with You’ to the Catholic faithful of the United States. ‘To Hell with your religious beliefs. To Hell with your religious liberty. To Hell with your freedom of conscience.’ ”

Zubik noted that if followed, the mandate “would apply in virtually every instance where the Catholic Church serves as an employer. The mandate would require the Catholic Church as an employer to violate its fundamental beliefs concerning human life and human dignity by forcing Catholic entities to provide contraceptive[s], sterilization coverage, and even pharmaceuticals that result in abortion.”

He added that the ruling amounted to “government by fiat that attacks the rights of everyone — not only Catholics, [but] people of all religion[s]. At no other time in memory or history has there been such a governmental intrusion on freedom not only with regard to religion, but even across-the-board with all citizens.”

Similarly, in a [column on his diocesan website](#), Bishop James D. Conley, apostolic administrator of the Archdiocese of Denver, warned: “The bell is tolling for religious liberty in America. All of us should listen well.” Calling the faithful to action, Conley wrote that without an override of the Obama administration, “the Catholic Church, acting through our Catholic institutions, will no longer have legal protection for the free exercise of religion.” Noting that Sebelius had given religious institutions a year to adapt to the mandate, Conley declared that the “Catholic Church will not adapt by violating fundamental elements of our faith. Instead of adapting, this is a year to unify, and to fight injustice and flagrant disregard for the institutional protection of our religious practice.”

While scores of bishops have spoken out strongly against the mandate, they have also emphasized the importance of the involvement of rank-and-file believers in standing against federal intrusion in the area of religious liberty. Writing to the faithful in his diocese, [Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles](#) admonished: “Now is a time for Catholic action and for Catholic voices. We need lay leaders to step up to their responsibilities for the Church’s mission. Not only to defend our faith and our rights as Catholics, but to be leaders for moral and civic renewal, leaders in helping to shape the values and moral foundations of America’s future.”



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