

Many religious conservatives understandably are upset with the latest Obamacare mandate, which will require religious employers (including Catholic employers) to provide birth control to workers receiving healthcare benefits. This mandate includes certain birth control devices that are considered abortifacients, like IUDs and the "morning after" pill.

Of course Catholic teachings forbid the use of any sort of contraceptive devices, so this rule is anathema to the religious beliefs of Catholic employers. Religious freedom always has been considered sacrosanct in this country. However, our federal bureaucracy increasingly forces Americans to subsidize behaviors they find personally abhorrent, either through agency mandates or direct transfer payments funded by tax dollars.

Proponents of this mandate do not understand the gravity of forcing employers to subsidize activities that deeply conflict with their religious convictions. Proponents also do not understand that a refusal to subsidize those activities does not mean the employer is "denying access" to healthcare. If employers don't provide free food to employees, do we accuse them of starving their workers?

In truth this mandate has nothing to do with healthcare, and everything to do with the abortion industry and a hatred for traditional religious values. Obamacare apologists cannot abide any religious philosophy that promotes large, two parent, nuclear, heterosexual families and frowns on divorce and abortion. Because the political class hates these values, it feels compelled to impose—by force of law—its preferred vision of society: single parents are noble; birth control should be encouraged at an early age; and abortion must be upheld as an absolute moral right.

So the political class simply tells the American people and American industry what values must prevail, and what costs much be borne to implement those values. This time, however, the political class has been shocked by the uproar to the new mandate that it did not anticipate or understand.

But Catholic hospitals face the existential choice of obeying their conscience and engaging in civil disobedience, or closing their doors because government claims the power to force them to violate the teachings of their faith. This terrible imposition has resonated with many Americans, and now the Obama administration finds itself having to defend the terrible cultural baggage of the anti-religious left.

Of course many Catholic leaders originally supported Obamacare because they naively believe against all evidence that benign angels in government will improve medical care for the poor. And many religious leaders support federal welfare programs generally without understanding that recipients of those dollars can use them for abortions, contraceptives, or any number of activities that conflict deeply with religious teachings. This is why private charity is so vitally important and morally superior to a government-run medical system.

The First Amendment guarantee of religious liberty is intended to ensure that Americans never have to put the demands of the federal government ahead of their own conscience or religious beliefs. This new policy turns that guarantee on its head. The benefits or drawbacks of birth control are not the issue. The issue is whether government may force private employers and private citizens to violate their moral codes simply by operating their businesses or paying their taxes.