

BULLETIN -- OCTOBER 15

IMPORTANT NEWS. A week ago, the White House announced broad religious and moral exemptions from the federal Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate, which required health insurance coverage of morally objectionable drugs and devices. The Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) commented on the decision, saying these revisions should provide greater assistance to religious entities that have been forced to defend their First Amendment rights in federal court. Here is an excerpt from MCC's statement:

"Since its creation the mandate has represented a divisive and unnecessary attempt on the part of the government to force its ideology into the lives of religious institutions, something wholly unprecedented in American history. Michigan Catholic Conference now looks forward to resolving its ongoing legal dispute over the HHS Mandate and settling its case against the federal government."

That the Church had to spend money to seek legal relief from the obvious contempt manifested by the government was outrageous in the first place. The government should have an interest in defending and promoting the rights of the people rather than circumscribing them with a narrow, secular viewpoint that is not representative of people of faith. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also welcomed the recent announcement, saying:

"The Administration's decision to provide a broad religious and moral exemption to the HHS mandate recognizes that the full range of faith-based and mission-driven organizations, as well as the people who run them, have deeply held religious and moral beliefs that the law must respect. Such an exemption is no innovation, but instead a return to common sense, long-standing federal practice, and peaceful coexistence between church and state. It corrects an anomalous failure by federal regulators that should never have occurred and should never be repeated."

Predictably, Democrat congressional leaders Charles Schumer and Nancy Pelosi both slammed the move, calling it a step backward that jeopardizes women's access to health care. This, as figures from the National Center for Health Statistics indicate that the U.S. fertility rate sank to its lowest level ever in the first quarter of 2017, 61.5 births per 1,000 women of childbearing age. If Sen. Schumer and Rep. Pelosi rejoice in seeing human fertility in the U.S. plummet to rates below replacement, as it has in much of Europe, who is going to pay for the expensive programs they continue to propose for an increasingly aging population? Equating access to birth control and abortion to health care is like equating access to cigarettes to *mental* health care. Sure, there are people who are convinced they need to smoke; but if that's a personal choice, why should everyone else be made to pay for it? And, because pregnancy is not a disease, birth control should not be considered health care. As everyone knows and the Church has taught for centuries, helping people to learn *self-control* is the safest and surest way of regulating births. And it doesn't require anyone to ask, "What's in *your* wallet?"

Wisdom from a Founding Father. We have heard a great deal of speculation since the Las Vegas murders on October 1 about how we might go about changing laws and imposing restrictions so that such things could not happen. Ultimately, most of these

proposals result in the loss of freedoms which we treasure here in the United States. I recall a marvelous TV mystery over 40 years ago, a 2-hour joint episode of *Ironsides* with Raymond Burr and *Sarge* with George Kennedy. They joined their special talents to try to figure out who was killing off priests in some unnamed diocese in California. They got a clue that the attacker was plotting his masterwork at an upcoming conference of priests and seminarians at the local seminary. They had uniformed and undercover cops everywhere on the grounds to observe any unusual behavior. At one point during a conference in the chapel, one after another, the priests and seminarians began falling to the floor. No one could figure out what was going on until someone noticed that those nearest the altar had fallen first. A crazed former seminarian had fitted all the candlesticks with candles made from a cyanide compound that let off an odorless, poison gas as it burned. Once they got everyone dragged out to fresh air and revived, they caught the culprit and solved the mystery.

I share that old and interesting story just to illustrate: we can NEVER ALWAYS stop those who have gone mad from buying into the wiles of the evil one. And we can NEVER figure out rationally why someone would want to inflict so much harm and pain on so many. There is no real answer to the problem of a Hitler, a Stalin, or even your garden-variety terrorist other than their being lured into a satanic trap and choosing to act upon it. Remember Andrew P. Kehoe? He was the mad farmer and former school board member who blew up the school in Bath, Michigan, on May 18, 1927, with 44 killed and many more injured. No snap decision, that. Townspeople and neighbors found that he had been plotting the mass murder and his own suicide for over a year. The fact is, no matter how we try, we can NEVER make sense of such events. Just think of the crowds enthusiastically welcoming Christ to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and then being whipped into a fury, calling for his crucifixion by Friday noon. We call it *Holy Week* because of what *He* did, not because of what *they* / *we* did.

This doesn't mean we stop trying to anticipate the movements of terror cells or monitoring people who seem to be a danger to themselves or others. We don't lay off the people at the Center for Disease Control just because epidemics occasionally break out. But we do have to remember that much of the realm of evil is out of our control. Our best defense against it is to strive to live virtuous lives and to encourage others to do likewise. The quiet testimony and example of Christians themselves ultimately led to the conversion of the Roman Empire, and eventually of a large portion of the world. But it still has not stopped martyrdom for the faith, and it never will. It's something we owe the world because we are Christ's priestly people, not just as a means of self-defense.

I confess that one of the things that has haunted me a bit about the Las Vegas tragedy was the remark of the murderer's brother, that his brother had been a regular guy, with nothing unusual, **no religion** or other suspect affiliations. I know that was not intended as a pot-shot against religion, but it did reflect the way many unchurched people instinctively *think* about religion. For an increasing number of people in our society, religion equals fanaticism and danger. And that should concern us, if only that we certainly need to be on guard against portraying life in Christ as lunacy. We've all met people who are 'way heavy on faith and 'way light on reason, which is an un-Christian imbalance. The two are meant to assist each other, not to be in contradiction. Just keep in mind the prescient words in our "Thought for the Week" at the end of this column. They were written long before any large-scale mass murders or horrors had taken place

on our shores. And they clearly state the limits of our power to protect ourselves, as well as the qualities we must strive to cultivate, if we are to be a spiritually prosperous people. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other” (President John Adams, 1798).