

# Our Religious Liberty Is Under Attack

By Jim Seghers

Bill of Rights, Article 1 *“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances”* - ratified on December 15, 1791.

## The Crisis

On January 20, 2012, the Department of Health and Human Services issued regulations under Obamacare that would force employers, including many religious institutions, to pay for abortion inducing drugs, sterilizations, and contraceptives. These intrusive regulations did not allow exceptions for those whose religious beliefs rejected paying for procedures that violated their faith. There was an immediate outcry against these mandates, which strike at the heart of our fundamental right to religious liberty.

On Friday, February 10, 2012, the Administration issued its final rules, which reaffirmed “without change” the mandate to provide these services which many Christians consider morally objectionable. The so-called “compromise” was an exercise in cynicism because it did not exempt most nonprofit religious employers, the religiously affiliated insurer, the self-insured employer, the for-profit religious employer, or other private businesses owned and operated by people who rightly object to paying for abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization and contraception. In short, it was an added insult.

Therefore, despite the façade of compromise, this significant threat to our religious liberty remains. Tragically, the President seems to be operating under the fallacy that the basic right of religious freedom is a privilege that his administration can decide to give or not give. Subsequently, the powerful propaganda machine of the Obama administration and its allies in the media have pulled out all stops to misrepresent the true issue to the American people, which is the right of every American to be free from laws that prohibit the free exercise of ones religion. These false claims are the focal point of this essay.

## Lie # 1 – It’s about Contraception

This divide and conquer tactic is designed to pit those who have no moral objection to using contraceptives against those who do. While many American women use contraceptives, the exaggerated percentages propagandized by Planned Parenthood are highly suspect.<sup>1</sup> However, the use of contraceptives is not the issue. This tactic attempts to shift the focus away from the government’s attempt to force those who have a religious objection to contraceptives, abortifacient, and sterilizations to pay for these procedures.

---

<sup>1</sup> The statistics often floated in the secular media comes from the Guttmacher Institute, a research arm of Planeld Parenthood. For a critique, read Scott P. Richert’s evaluation, “Notes on the Guttmacher Institutes’ ‘Facts on Contraceptive Use in the United States’,” which is readily available on the internet.

Let's suppose the Obama administration passed a mandate that all food service business must serve pork. Many citizens in the Orthodox Jewish community who operate kosher delis, restaurants, and groceries would object to this restriction of their religious freedom. The fact that most Americans and many Jews eat pork is irrelevant. The issue is not pork, but freedom of religion. Similarly, the issue with this mandate is freedom of religion, not contraception.

## **Lie # 2 – It's about Women's Health**

To claim that the death lobby behind the Obama mandate shows the administration's concern for women's health has a much credibility as claiming that Hitler cared for the health of Jewish people. Fifty million aborted babies and the untold medical complications, including 300,000 breast cancer deaths,<sup>2</sup> women have suffered from abortions is not enough to satisfy the blood lust of the so-called progressives in this administration. They want to make abortifacients a mandatory part in all health plans. Let's consider the facts.

How is medicating a woman's healthy fertility a medical problem? How does it even make sense from a medical point of view? In addition, many women are not told that the back-up mechanism of the birth control pill is an abortifacient. In other words, if the pill fails to prevent conception, it aborts the fetus causing a hidden abortion. Women who are vehemently opposed to abortion would never use the pill if this fact were known to them.

However, the elephant in the living room few people want to talk about is the physical harm to women, including death, caused by contraceptives. Mandating abortion inducing drugs and contraceptives in all medical plans under the pretext that it is a health benefit for women makes as much sense as mandating that cigarettes be distributed in all medical plans as a health benefit. Tragically, this information is not widely circulated due to the influence of powerful interest groups like drug companies and Planned Parent together with the general moral decadence of our society. Consider the following data regarding the serious health risks of contraceptives, which the Obama administration is determined to promote.

- A team of 21 scientists from 8 countries in a study backed by the World Health Organization concluded that estrogen-progestogen oral contraceptives belong on a list of known cancer-causing agents. They were linked to a higher risk of cancer of the breast, cervix, and liver.
- The Alameda, California County Coroner's Officer confirmed that the death of 18-year-old Holly Patterson died from septic shock resulting from a drug-induced abortion. Holly's father lashed out: "My daughter went to a clinic a very healthy young woman, and a week later I watched her die in an emergency room."
- Researchers at the Arizona State University in 2011 linked the hormone in Depo Provera to memory loss. This shot can act as an abortifacient as well as a contraceptive.

---

<sup>2</sup> *Coalition on Abortion/Breast Cancer*. Regarding the empirical data, Dr. Angela Lanfranchi, MD testified under oath in a 2002 California lawsuit against Planned Parenthood that she had private conversations with leading experts who agreed abortion raised breast cancer risk, but they refused to discuss it publically, saying it was "too political."

- A study by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, concluded in April 2009, showed a strong correlation between the use of oral contraceptives and a particularly deadly form of breast cancer. The Coalition on Abortion/Breast Cancer questioned why this study has not received major media coverage.
- Zakiya Kennedy, an 18-year-old, died from blood clots as a result of her use of a hormonal birth-control patch. The *New York Post* noted that the FDA and the manufacturer of the patch warned that the contraceptive, like the pill, carries the risk of forming potentially deadly clots.
- On July 29, 2005 the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) released its findings that showed that combined estrogen-progesterone oral contraceptives are carcinogenic to humans. Specifically, this report demonstrated an increased risk in breast and cervical cancer.
- Depression is another problem associated with oral contraceptives. According to a study carried out by Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, Australia, women taking the pill are almost twice as likely to have depression as those not taking it.
- On April 13, 2002, the British Medical Journal published an article reporting how Dutch doctors are being advised by their professional association not to prescribe a new, low-dose oral contraceptive, marketed under the name of Yasmin. This drug was approved by several European countries in 2000 and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2001. A 17-year-old Dutch girl taking Yasmin died from venous thrombosis.
- On April 12, 2002, the *Times of London* published a report on how a new contraceptive pill led to the death of 15-year-old Claire Louise Stanley. She developed deep vein thrombosis in her legs after taking the pill Cilest, and died from a massive clot in the lungs, described by one doctor as the biggest he has ever seen. According to the *Times*, Cilest is popular with teens in the United States because it also helps clear skin conditions.
- On March 26, 2002, the BBC reported that women who have taken contraceptive pills at any stage in their lives have an increased chance of developing breast cancer. Their risk rose by 26% compared with women who have never used contraceptives. However, the risk of breast cancer rises to 58% for those who have taken the pill over longer periods and to 144% among women over the age of 45 who were still using the pill.
- The journal *Contraception* published the results of a 10-year study that showed that the use of contraception doubled the number of abortions.
- The medical journal *The Lancet* published a report on October 4, 2011, that the most used pharmaceutical contraceptive in sub-Saharan Africa doubles the risk of contracting the HIV virus.
- The International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization lists estrogen-progestogen oral contraceptives in “Group I: Carcinogenic to humans.” The

American Cancer Society website has published that list, where the pill ranks along with asbestos, coal tar, benzene, and tobacco products.

With the overwhelming evidence of the health risks connected with contraceptives, it seems inconceivable that parents would allow their daughters to use these dangerous drugs if they were fully aware of their significant health risks. How could any man who truly loves a woman and knows about these risks, allow her to use these contraceptives and endanger her life?

### **Lie # 3 – It will be Free**

This false claim is another obvious attempt of the Obama administration to con the public. When was the last time insurance companies covered any additional benefit without increasing the premium? Answer: “Last time? When was the first time!”

Insurance companies have already resounded that this mandate will increase their cost. Therefore regardless of this accounting gimmick suggested by the administration, the employer who pays the premium will bear its expense. For the religious organizations that self-insure, even the administration’s claim that insurance companies will provide it free of charge is nonsensical.

Furthermore, the attempt to force insurance companies to provide a “free benefit” raises other constitutional issues. Where does the Obama administration get the constitutional authority to force a company to give away its product? It doesn’t take much imagination to see the potential excesses that could follow such a mandate.

### **Lie # 4 – It only affects Catholics**

It is true that the Catholic bishops of the United States have universally opposed this mandate. However, many non-Catholic Christians equally object to its implementation. Many Baptists, for example, are vehemently opposed to abortion. They recognize that the Obama administration would also force its members and institutions to violate their consciences and their religious liberty. Therefore opposition to the Obama mandate has come from many quarters in addition to Catholic bishops.

By a vote of 227 to 121 the New Hampshire House of Representatives became the first legislative body in the US to condemn the Obama mandate. In the words of speaker William O’Brien this vote “stands up for our religious institutions that have long-held principles and teachings under assault by a president and his ideology that seeks not merely to reject, but to tear down our liberties.”

On February 24, 2012 it was reported that 7 states – Florida, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas – have filed a federal lawsuit against the Department of Health and Human Services in an attempt to block its mandate requiring insurers to cover contraceptives, sterilization, and some abortion-inducing drugs. According to the Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette: “Any rule, regulation or law that forces faith-based institutions to provide for services that violate their free exercise of religion, or that penalizes them for failing to kneel at the altar of government, is a flat-out violation of the first Amendment.”

President Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council reported that more than 1,500 pastors and evangelical leaders signed a letter to President Obama asking him to reverse the mandate. He pointed out, "This is not a Catholic issue. We will not tolerate any denomination having their religious freedom impinged upon by the government." Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, also challenged the Obama ruling: "We are not going to stand by and allow our God-given rights, protected by the Constitution, to be atrophied, neutered, confined and restricted."

Writing in *The Wall Street Journal* on February 15, 2012, David B. Rivkin Jr. and Edward Whelan affirmed: "The birth-control coverage mandate violates the first Amendment's bar against the 'free exercise' of religion. But it also violates the Religious Freedom Restoration Act." The *USA Today* editorial board concluded that the Obama mandate "Not only crossed the line. It galloped over it."

### **How to Respond**

This assault on our religious freedom has two components: one political and one spiritual. Politically, citizens should contact their representatives and senators and demand that legislation be passed that will prevent this mandate. A major outcry from the electorate will have a great influence in an election year.

Spiritually, we need to pray daily that God will give us the grace to reverse the descent of our country into a godless secularism.<sup>3</sup> We especially need to pray for divine guidance in the upcoming elections. For Catholics, I recommend the daily meditation on the Rosary. For non-Catholics, I recommend at least fifteen minutes devoted to the prayerful reading of the Gospels – particularly the Passion accounts. Political activism is important, but prayer is vital.

### **What about Contraception?**

This attempt to thwart our religious liberty together with the utter disdain the death lobby has for contraception should make all Christians pause and reconsider the Catholic Church's stand against contraception – a position that all Christian churches held until 1930. This is exactly what Michael Brendan Dougherty and Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry did in their reflective article "Time To Admit It: The Church Has Always Been Right On Birth Control," published in the *Business Insider*, February 8, 2012. Some of the points made in this article are given below:

"The Church teaches that love, marriage, sex and procreation are all things that belong together. That's it. But it's pretty important. And though the Church has been teaching this for 2,000 years, it's probably never been as salient as today. Today's injunctions against birth control were re-affirmed in a 1968 document by Pope Paul VI called *Humanae Vitae*. He warned of four results if the widespread use of contraceptives was accepted:

---

<sup>3</sup> Unless you think the expression "godless secularism" is an exaggeration, consider the following recent developments. A bill pending in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, Canada would make it illegal for Catholic schools and home schools to teach that homosexual acts are sinful, according to reports by LifeSiteNews and the Home School Legal Defense Association. The *Journal of Medical Ethics* published an article calling for acceptance of "after-birth abortion" – infanticide, that is, the destruction of unwanted children after they are born. The article, written by two ethicists with university affiliations in Australia, Italy, and England, argues that since abortion is now accepted, infanticide should be allowed, since "both fetuses and newborns do not have the same moral status as actual persons."

1. General lowering of moral standards
2. A rise in infidelity, and illegitimacy
3. The reduction of women to objects used to satisfy men
4. Government coercion in reproductive matters.

Does that sound familiar? Because it sure sounds like what's been happening for the past 40 years."

Those who wish to prayerfully consider this matter from a biblical perspective, should reflect on the following biblical passages: Gen 1:27-28; 9:1; 35:11 38:9-10; Deut 25:5-10; Ex 23:15-16; Ps 127:3-5; 1 Chron 25:5; 26:4-5; Hos 9:10-17; Rom 1:25-27; 1 Tim 2:11-15; Gal 2:20; Rev 9:21, 21:8 (the Greek word *pharmakeia* – abortifacients).