

The Marginalization of the Church

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 20, 2009 NCR Today

The Washington Post this morning has a useful [?Status Report \[1\]?](#) on the health care debate. It lists eight key questions about health care reform such as [?What are the major differences between the various bills??](#) and [?Where do the major health-care stakeholders stand??](#)

Nowhere on the list are the central concerns raised by the USCCB. There is nothing about the status of abortion coverage in either a public option or through subsidies. There is nothing about a conscience clause. And, there is nothing about extending health care coverage to immigrants. In short, this [?Status Report?](#) confirms a sad, and important, fact about the political culture. The concerns of the Catholic Church have been marginalized.

There are a variety of reasons for this marginalization, but the first to be noted is the opposition to health care reform in virtually any and all incarnation expressed by such prominent Catholic conservatives as Raymond Arroyo at EWTN and Deal Hudson at InsideCatholic. As well, the pastoral letters from Archbishop Naumann, Bishop Nickless and Bishop Finn further muddied the waters. If it appears to the White House that the Church will oppose reform no matter what the final legislation looks like, the powers that be have no reason to listen to us. Conversely, some liberal Catholics have been unwilling to put down markers on issues like precluding abortion coverage from any public option.

But, the deeper reason is that the Church's leadership has lost the ability to articulate a Catholic vision of a just society that persuades all Catholics. Some Catholics, on both the left and the right, put their politics first and so they would resist any specifically Catholic vision that challenges their political aspirations. Still, the marginalization of the Church's concerns on such a central issue shows that we need to do a much better job catechizing our own flock. Health care reform is as obvious an example of the kind of social policy called for in Benedict's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* as I can think of. Wouldn't it have been great to have seen among the Post's questions this: [?Why are Catholics so fervently supportive of health care reform??](#)

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[1] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/health-care-8-questions/index.html?hpid=topnews>