

Liberals - Do Your Homework!

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 18, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

As sure as the sun rises in the East, you can bet that NARAL and NOW will be attacking the Obama administration's failure to rescind the entire set of conscience regulations proposed by President Bush. But, NARAL and NOW seem not to know the history of liberalism, being busy hijacking liberalism. This is a time for liberals to get back to their roots. Here are some key quotes.

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties." John Milton, *Areopagitica*, 1644.

"Although the magistrate's opinion in religion be sound, and the way that he appoints be truly Evangelical, yet, if I be not thoroughly persuaded thereof in my own mind, there will be no safety for me in following it. No way whatsoever that I shall walk in against the dictates of my conscience will ever bring me to the mansions of the blessed. I may grow rich by an art that I take not delight in; I may be cured of some disease by remedies that I have not faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust and by a worship that I abhor." John Locke, *A Letter concerning Toleration*, 1689.

"Be it enacted by General Assembly that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of Religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities." *Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom*, 1786.

"The right to express one's thoughts and opinions by means of the press or in any other manner, the right to assemble peaceably, the free pursuit of religion, cannot be forbidden." 1793 Declaration of the Rights of Man, Item 7.

"The French Constitution hath abolished or renounced Toleration and Intolerance also, and hath established Universal Right Of Conscience. Toleration is not the opposite of Intolerance, but is the counterfeit of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding Liberty of Conscience, and the other of granting it. The one is the Pope armed with fire and faggot, and the other is the Pope selling or granting indulgences. The former is church and state, and the latter is church and traffic." Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, 1792.

As that last quote from Paine indicates, Catholics were not at the time friends to the idea of liberty of conscience. The distrust was mutual. Milton had written in the same *Areopagitica* quoted above, "I mean not tolerated Popery, and open superstition." The Act of Toleration Locke was defending did not include Catholics either. Anti-Catholicism informed the political thought of many of the American Founders, who were thoroughly familiar with, and inclined to endorse, the thought of such as the Whig hero Algernon Sidney, whose anti-Catholic venom was extreme. Not until the Second Vatican Council did the Catholic Church endorse liberty of conscience in the Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*. There, the Council Fathers stated, "This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that

all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.?

I am waiting for more learned legal minds than mine to help me sort through the new conscience regulations adopted by the White House. But, it is as clear as day to me that liberals and Catholics should be on the same page on this issue.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/28/2017 - 08:07): <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/distinctly-catholic/liberals-do-your-homework>