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Bishops: More Work to Be Done

Michael Sean Winters | Feb. 7, 2013 Distinctly Catholic

The USCCB **has finally weighed in** [1] on the Obama administration's announced changes to the HHS contraception mandate. The statement from Cardinal Timothy Dolan, president of the conference, is here [2].

Essentially, the bishops welcome some of the changes the administration made but continue to be worried by the distinction between a Catholic institution being accommodated and one being exempt. This is not a distinction that worries me, I might add, now that the pernicious four-part definition is gone from the original proposal. Nor do I share the bishops' concern about private, for-profit employers. I am dying to hear the Becket Fund explain why the right to religious freedom is absolute unless, of course, your employer says it isn't. If you must contribute to your insurance -- and who doesn't -- why shouldn't the employee have some say as to what is covered? Why does the employer's religious preferences count more than the employees? At a Catholic university, I think this is obvious. At a Taco Bell, not so much.

Still, the key thing is that the entire tone of this statement differs from what went before. Last February, the bishops adopted a stance of rejectionism. This statement is not that, and the tone could not be more different from the some of the apocalyptic language we heard during the Fortnight for Freedom or, more recently, in Archbishop Charles **Chaput's broadside** [3] this week. In fact, this may be the key change we need: Will the bishops try and make this work, or will they follow the Becket Fund and find ways to kill any resolution? I wish the bishops had been even more fulsome in accepting what the administration has offered. And frankly, I don't see the administration offering much more. But that is why God invented comment periods. More tomorrow.

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