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Abp Lori at the National Press Club

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 3, 2013 Distinctly Catholic

My colleague Josh McElwee has the news story [1]about yesterday's press conference at the National Press Club, featuring Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, who serves as chair of the USCCB's ad hoc committee on religious liberty, Dr. Russell Moore of the Southern Baptist Convention, Professor Anne Henderschott of Franciscan University at Steubenville, and Dr. Yuri Mantilla of Liberty University Law School. The group released a statement opposing the HHS contraception mandate. I attended the event as well.

I asked a very simple question: "Will compliance with the Mandate constitute illicit material cooperation with evil and, if so, do you anticipate closing ministries if the Mandate takes effect? If not, why is so much money and time being spent on this campaign?" Archbishop Lori essentially punted on his response.

I asked Dr. Moore: "As you know, many people had religiously-based, conscience objections to the Civil Rights Act and made arguments similar to those you are making today. Why is this situation different from that, especially as regards private, for-profit employers?" He, too, punted.

There is much in the statement group released that strikes me as tendentious but this sentence is especially problematic: "Very simply, HHS is forcing Citizen A, against his or her moral convictions, to purchase a product for Citizen B." This has more than a faint echo of the line used by GOP operatives against the employer mandate in the Affordable Care Act. You remember - can the government force people to buy broccoli? But, really, what is the difference between the government requiring an inn keeper to rent rooms to black folk and the government requiring a businessperson to purchase insurance? These are not easy questions. And, to be clear, I still think the HHS mandate is bad policy and bad law. But, it is time for the histrionics laced with GOP-talking points to stop. It is embarrassing and counter-productive.

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