

Freedom of Religion

By Fr. Thomas J. Loya

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The “theology of the body” means that all of creation, most especially the human body, reveals something beyond itself. The physical world points to and makes present spiritual or transcendent realities. Everything in creation “speaks” a language. It tells us the truth about itself. The human body reveals the person and all that comes with that very potent word, “person.” The theology of the body reveals that we are gendered persons. This observation opens up for us an infinite world of insight into why and how we are hardwired as male or female persons. These insights in turn help us to know how to live as a male person and a female person and in turn how to be truly happy and fulfilled. Looking at life, especially the human person, through the lens of the theology of our bodies is actually crucial to civilization. When we do not see life through the theology of the body we can end up with something that threatens civilization. This threat to civilization actually occurred in America just recently. It is the erosion of the most cherished of American freedoms, the freedom of religion.

The Obama administration, through the department of Health and Human Services, has mandated that non-profit institutions such as church-affiliated hospitals, colleges and social service agencies will have to cover free birth control for their employees as the “preventive services” dimension of health insurance coverage. These birth control items include abortifacient drugs and sterilization. In essence, this mandate requires religious institutions to choose between violating their consciences or foregoing healthcare plans for their employees. This is a direct attack on First Amendment rights, access to health and on religious liberty. The Catholic bishops of America have called this action by the Obama administration, “literally unconscionable.” Supporters of the Obama administration’s mandate claim that this decision is putting access and the reproductive rights of women first. Furthermore, supporters claim that women who work for religious institutions will no longer have to settle for a lower standard of health coverage.

Since when is pregnancy a disease? And since when is preventing pregnancy considered to be “medicine?” Why is our natural gift for love and fruitfulness, stamped in the very language and theology of our bodies seen as something that just gets in our way, something to be suppressed or eliminated at all costs? We are fond of saying in our country that no one religion should impose its values on the rest of us. So, when did government get the right to impose its values on religion? When did government get the right to disregard personal or corporate conscience? The answer to all of these questions is when we fail to see the human person honestly—through the prism of the theology of the body. The language of the theology of the body tells us that freedom is intrinsic to us as human persons—the freedom to believe and live according to that belief. This is something that the Founding Fathers of this country knew and built in to our Constitution. Our Founding Fathers designed the United States of America around a view of the human person, not just around some ideology, trend or the latest fad of political correctness.

Ironically, (or Providentially) on the very same day that the Obama administration was committing this unconscionable blow at religious liberty, Pope Benedict XVI was addressing American bishops in Rome about the challenges they face in protecting things like the freedom of religion and conscience that are currently under threat in the United States of America. The Pope reminded the bishops, and the world, that “when a culture attempts to suppress the dimension of ultimate mystery and closes the door to transcendent truth, it inevitably becomes impoverished and falls prey to reductionist and totalitarian readings of the human person and the nature of society.” Get the theology of the body right and you get America right.