

# Health Care, Politicians and the Catholic Conscience

## A Troubling New Development Appears in American Politics

Carl Anderson - 12/7/2009 (Zenit.org)

For decades, Americans have been subjected to the arguments of certain Catholic politicians who argued that while “personally opposed” to unjust policies like abortion, they were nonetheless unwilling to “impose” that view on the rest of the country. The argument was disingenuous, premised on the fact that somehow a “Catholic” conscience had to be put to the side in the public square.

Now, the very people who argued that they couldn't bring their private conscience into a secular public square are poised to use the law to impose a particular view on their fellow Catholics. By working and voting to include abortion coverage in health care legislation, several Catholic politicians stand at the precipice of being the deciding votes in forcing a particular immoral view on their fellow Catholics, by forcing them to fund abortion through their tax dollars.

While professing that they cannot impose their conscience on anyone else, these politicians seem to have little hesitation about imposing a political view “one they claim to oppose in principle” on the consciences of their fellow Catholics.

### Far from Kennedy

Catholic politicians willing to forsake their own consciences and impose a directly anti-Catholic view on others have come a long way from the legacy of American history's highest profile Catholic statesman, John F. Kennedy, who while discussing his role as a Catholic and candidate for president said: “If the time should ever come and I do not concede any conflict to be even remotely possible” when my office would require me to either violate my conscience or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office; and I hope any conscientious public servant would do the same.”

And while some might consider that Catholic politicians have disagreed with the public policy recommendations of their bishops in a variety of areas, the key is this: Many issues are prudential and open to reasonable disagreement; but the inalienable right to life in the context of abortion is not – it is fundamental and it may not be compromised.

As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, noted about Catholic politicians in 2004: “Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion.” He added: “While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion.”

### Unjust Law

Catholic politicians must now consider the effect of national legislation mandating Catholic cooperation in abortion. In his famous pro-life encyclical, “Evangelium Vitae,” Pope John Paul II said: “The passing of unjust laws often raises difficult problems of conscience for morally upright people with regard to the issue of cooperation, since they have a right to demand not to be forced to take part in morally evil actions.”

He said further: “Christians, like all people of good will, are called upon under grave obligation of conscience not to cooperate formally in practices which, even if permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to God's law. Indeed, from the moral standpoint, it is never licit to cooperate formally in evil. This cooperation can never be justified either by invoking respect for the freedom of others or by appealing to the fact that civil law permits it or requires it. Each individual in fact has moral responsibility for the acts which he personally performs; no one can be exempted from this responsibility, and on the basis of it everyone will be judged by God himself.”

It is doubly ironic that a law that would force millions to violate their conscience by paying their taxes and would entangle thousands of Catholic physicians, nurses, hospitals and charities in the evil of abortion is being considered at precisely a time when the majority of Americans “in greater and greater numbers” are increasingly becoming more pro-life.

Catholic public officials in Washington have the power to prevent this moral tragedy from happening. They should not hesitate to do so.

## Supreme Council News

### Federal Court Victory in Pledge of Allegiance Case

(10/1/2009 ) The Knights of Columbus scored an important victory in federal court in New Hampshire on Wednesday, Sept. 30, when U.S. District Judge Steven McAuliffe upheld the constitutionality of the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Atheist Michael Newdow had filed the lawsuit against the school system in Hanover, New Hampshire on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, in a case that mirrored his earlier lawsuit against schools in and near Sacramento, California.

As with the California case, the Knights of Columbus sought and received permission from the court to become a “defendant intervenor,” allowing attorneys representing the Order (from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty) to participate directly in the court proceedings.

The California case, argued before a panel of the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in December 2007, has still not been decided. Read the New Hampshire court decision.

### Knights Send Relief to Haiti

(1/14/2010) In an effort to come to the aid of the people of Haiti, who are suffering a humanitarian catastrophe of huge proportions in the wake of Tuesday evening's 7.0 earthquake, the Knights of Columbus has today sent an immediate contribution of \$50,000 to Catholic Relief Services, and we invite Knights to make contributions through the Supreme Council so that we can maximize the impact of the funds raised, and document the amount donated in this tragedy by members of the Order.

Donations by individual Knights can be made on line, and this feature should be available on the Supreme Council website ([www.kofc.org](http://www.kofc.org)) by later this evening. Checks should be made out to Knights of Columbus Charities, Inc. and mailed to 1 Columbus Plaza, New Haven, CT 06510. Please write "Haiti Earthquake Relief" on the memo line of the check.

Contributions will be used to provide assistance wherever it can have the most immediate impact, and where the need is greatest. We ask all Knights and their families to also offer their prayers for the victims of this terrible disaster.