



**EPARCHY OF NEWTON**  
MELKITE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

7 February 2012

*Christ is among us! He is and always will be!*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I would like to speak to you today about a serious and alarming issue that threatens the right to religious liberty of all Americans and that harasses the Catholic Church in the United States. Three weeks ago, on January 20, 2012, President Obama phoned Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan of New York, the President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, to inform him that he had approved a new federal mandate issued by his Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under the new health care law that will require the Catholic Church and Catholic institutions to pay for insurance coverage for their employees for sterilizations, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception—each of which the Church considers to be intrinsically evil acts.

With this new mandate—the first such federal regulation in our nation’s history—this Administration has cast aside the First Amendment of our Constitution, and has denied Catholics, and people of all faiths, our first and most fundamental freedom—that of religious liberty. Despite the Church’s appeal, the only exemption to this new law the Administration will permit is limited solely to religious groups who hire and serve people primarily of their own faith. In reality, this narrow exemption is meaningless and does not include the vast majority religious institutions—including virtually all Catholic schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, and charitable agencies—which serve the common good of society and open their doors to all people regardless of their creed. Thus, practically every religious employer in the U.S. will be forced, under penalty of law, to pay for insurance coverage that violates both their religious beliefs and their rights of conscience.

In so doing, this Administration sends the alarming message that it regards pregnancy as a disease to be prevented and the killing of the unborn as a “right” that supersedes the religious and conscience rights of its citizens. This is an abomination, and should send a chill through every freedom loving American, especially every Melkite Catholic. How many of our parents and grandparents immigrated to this land of freedom precisely to escape a religious tyranny that reduced Christians to the status of second-class citizens and that sought to prevent them from publically professing and acting upon their Christian faith! Indeed, in the words of Cardinal-designate Dolan: “This latest erosion of our first freedom should make all Americans pause. When a government tampers with a freedom so fundamental to the life of our nation, one shudders to think what lies ahead.”

With prophetic words, our Holy Father Pope Benedict himself, just last month, warned a group of U.S. bishops visiting Rome of threats to religious freedom, that until only recently one would have considered unthinkable in America. He told the bishops: “it is imperative that the entire Catholic community in the United States comes to realize the grave threats to the Church’s public moral witness

presented by a radical secularism, which finds increasing expression in the political and cultural spheres.... Of particular concern," the Pope said, "are certain attempts being made to limit that most cherished of American freedoms, the freedom of religion." He further warned of "concerted efforts... to deny the right of conscientious objection on the part of Catholic individuals and institutions with regard to cooperation in intrinsically evil practices."

Therefore, I join together with my brother bishops and with the leaders of many other faiths across the country who speak with one voice: this morally offensive mandate cannot stand. We cannot—we will not—comply with this unjust and unreasonable law. Our ancestors, who came to these shores, made great sacrifices to secure and defend the God-given freedoms of this great country. Future generations demand no less of us: we must counter this infringement upon our religious liberty. In our great American tradition of government "of the people, by the people, and for the people," I ask you to heed the call of Pope Benedict who concluded his remarks to the US bishops last month by saying: "Here once more we see the need for an engaged, articulate and well-formed Catholic laity endowed with... the courage to counter a radical secularism."

My fellow Melkites, I ask two things of you. First, during this upcoming season of Great Lent, raise your minds and hearts to God with fervent prayer and fasting for an end to the assault on religious liberty in our nation. Second, call upon your members of Congress to support legislation that would reverse or repeal this Administration's unjust mandate. I encourage you to visit the website of the U.S. Catholic Bishops [www.usccb.org/conscience](http://www.usccb.org/conscience) to learn how you can make your voices heard.

Finally, let us make the words of Psalm 68 be our prayer: "Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered; and let those who hate Him flee before His presence!"

With my prayers and blessing, I remain

Truly yours in Christ God,

*+ Nicholas*

✠ Most Reverend Nicholas J. Samra  
Bishop of Newton