

Now that Congress is back in session, we can expect the debate over Health Care reform to resume. Of course, we know that President Trump made it one of his campaign pledges to repeal and replace the Affordable Health Care Act that Barak Obama had enacted when he was President.

As Catholics, we want to understand what the Church has to say in order that we may form our own opinion about the debate over health care, and in order to evaluate the various bills that may be presented in Congress. As we are all aware, some of our principle objections to Obamacare were that it required employers to cover contraception and abortion in their insurance plans. This of course, is an assault on our religious freedom, requiring the Catholic employer to pay for practices that are intrinsically evil, and thus violating their conscience. The very heroic Little Sisters of the Poor, who run Nursing Homes for the elderly poor throughout the world, and have 20+ homes in the U.S. Valiantly contested this mandate in the US Courts, and were able to temporarily get an exemption from this requirement.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on.” (CCC#1908). So, the government, which is the legitimate authority, has the duty to make sure that “health” is accessible to its citizens. In other words, the role of government is to insure that each citizen is given the access to health care that is owed to them as a human being. This can be done in any number of legitimate ways, and has been done down through the centuries by the Church herself. In fact, it was the Catholic Church which pioneered the organization of health care with her many institutions and religious orders who devoted themselves to the care of the sick.

One of the basic principles that should govern the discussion of health care, is the principle of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity simply means that matters ought to be dealt with on the lowest and most local level possible in preference to higher or more remote levels. Pope Pius XI taught this in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*: “it is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order to transfer to the larger and higher collectivity functions which can be performed and provided for by lesser and subordinate bodies”, (#79). In other words, when something can be done in the private realm—for instance in the family or private associations, whether for-profit or non-profit— it is morally imperative that it be done there. It is only when the evidence shows that something is truly needed in the first place and that it cannot be done privately, that it is justified bringing it into the governmental realm. In other words, while there is a moral obligation to assist the needy, it can be immoral if it's done in a way that involves the government when it is not necessary.

We all know that when government gets involved in running things, there is a tremendous amount of waste and inefficiency. The bureaucracy that is put in place to run the thing becomes grossly overloaded and itself becomes a burden on the taxpayer. Pope St. John Paul II says in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, lists the troublesome results of the welfare state: the loss of human initiative, massive increases in public spending, and less concern with those being served than with the bureaucratic ways, (#48). If you wonder why the European nations are not rejecting the mass immigrations that are coming to them, it is because they need more people to tax to sustain their bloated public welfare spending.

This raises another moral problem, that is addressed by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. That great Pontiff wrote, “the state acts unjustly when it takes more than is fair from its citizens by taxation, as it is an indirect violation of the right to private property” (#47). One of the criticisms of Obamacare is the many millions that would be added to state budgets, which of course

means higher taxes.

So, do we need the government to provide health care for the needy? Evidently Congress thought that the answer to that question was “yes” when it enacted Medicaid during Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program. Historian Allen J Matusow has written that there is no evidence that since its establishment, Medicaid has provided either more access to health care or a better quality of care for the poor than the previous charitable care did. Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* that it is no way inevitable that centralized, bureaucratic structures are needed to provide social services and assistance. He called on nations to develop a more “devolved and organic” system (#60).

Now, with the Popes saying that problems ought to be dealt with on a local level before they are turned over to higher, more remote levels for answers, and that the taxation required to fund these bureaucratic monsters is unjust, it is curious that our American Bishops have expressed again and again their concern that government should be the solution to America's health care impasse.

Are they not concerned that so many Catholic health care institutions which had such a magnificent history of caring for the poor without charge, are disappearing from the American scene at an alarming rate? Right here in central New York, we have seen the disappearance of Catholic institutions such as St. Elizabeth's Hospital, St. Joseph's Nursing Home, and St. Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse. They may have Saint's names still on them, but they have been secularized and are no longer operated by religious orders of the Catholic Church.

We should encourage government leaders to reform state laws to reinvigorate and expand non-profit health care institutions and charities. The president should do the same on the national level, so that government only need be involved in health care where it is absolutely essential. We should turn to the examples of our great Saints like St. Marianne Cope to inspire and help us find ways to serve Christ in His poor and elderly.