

IT'S NOT A 'COMPROMISE,' AND IT NEEDS TO BE RESCINDED

Weekly Column by Archbishop Charles Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
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Creighton Abrams, arguably America's best general in recent history, was an uncommon man. A biographer said that "he touched those who came to know him in a way they valued and would never forget." It's easy to see why. He led by example. He embodied the virtues of courage, honesty, dedication to mission, personal humility and unfailing fidelity to his wife and six children over a marriage of 38 years.

Abrams never degraded his opponents. He never demeaned himself by demeaning others. He lived by the highest ethical standards, and he demanded the same from the people around him. One of his favorite sayings was "Never wrestle with pigs: You get dirty, and the pigs love it."

Those words came back to me this past week. The trigger was the fierce public debate over the Obama administration's misleading February 10 "compromise" on a Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate. The original HHS mandate, announced on January 20, would have forced nearly all Catholic institutions, organizations and private employers to provide contraception and abortifacients as part of their health coverage.

As many Catholic legal scholars have observed: The February 10 "compromise" does not solve the problem. It continues, in its practical effect, to force faithful Catholic employers to violate their religious beliefs. In short, the HHS mandate is coercive and deeply troubling in its implications for the rights of conscience. Nor is this accidental. The administration, despite the good will it has enjoyed from many Catholics, has taken a path that it *knows* to be unnecessary and *knows* to be hostile to Catholic belief.

The contempt dumped on Catholic teaching in our mass media over the past few days of debate tells us quite a lot about our critics. It also underlines the need for fighting respectfully but vigorously for what we believe. When a columnist in a major news daily claims, for example, that "The Catholic Church basically endorses one form of birth control, the rhythm method, which is contraception for stupid people," we can learn two things: Neither accuracy nor civility matters when it comes to demeaning how faithful Catholics try to live their lives. In the task of pushing birth control, sneering is fully licensed.

Of course, people are free to join or leave the Catholic community. They're free to criticize Catholic belief in any way they choose. But they're *not* free to force Catholic institutions, organizations and individual employers into violating their religious convictions. They're *not* free to mislead the public about a flawed and dangerous HHS mandate. And they're *not* free to ignore the concerns of Catholic citizens who are rightly

angry about the current administration's indifference to religious freedom and the rights of conscience.

A friend of Creighton Abrams once said that, despite his humility and mastery of self, when it came to matters of principle, he "could inspire aggressiveness in a begonia." It's an interesting line. The Christian life does not need aggression. It doesn't return hatred with more hatred. Living the Gospel depends on virtues like justice, charity and mercy. But it also depends on courage. It does require fortitude. And that means a great many Catholics need to wake up and take a hard look at what's happening to our country. They may not like what they see. They *shouldn't* like what they see. And if they don't, they need to fight -- without apologies -- to turn things toward the good.

The current HHS mandate is not a real "compromise." It's bad law with very dangerous implications. It needs to be rescinded, and it doesn't matter how ugly or deceptive our critics choose to be. I ask every Catholic who reads these words and takes his or her faith seriously, to please contact your U.S. senators and representative. Do it today. Press them to rescind this destructive HHS mandate.

I know: We all have so many issues that compete for our daily attention. We're often tempted to ignore the whole lot.

But this one is urgent. This one really matters.

[Please visit the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference website at www.pacatholic.org to learn how to contact your federal Representative and Senators.]