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A Balancing Act

Catholic teaching on the Church's rights and the rights of all

BY ANTHONY ANTONY ASASSANN

Although the presidential election is only months away, some rhetorical fires are already raging. Key issues, as identified by some analysts, are the Catholic bishops' influence on abortion, gay marriage and contraception. Rightly or wrongly, many people think no political compromise is possible on these matters. In this year's electoral politics, religious freedom is being invoked in ways that contrast particularly with what in the past the bishops have done. Their opposition to same-sex relationships and gay marriage to their exercise of religious freedom. They state that the human rights of all persons must be protected. But that this should be one without sacrificing the role of society that is marriage and the family and without violating the religious liberty of persons and institutions. His lineage echoes controversies about whether Catholic institutions are legally required to provide family health care benefits for the partners of employees in same-sex relationships. Provide a special services to gay couples or financial plans that cover contraception.

These questions present in the current electoral cycles
join to exist in that overlapping issues moral pluralism
among the population and an increasing political action
of

should frame civil laws on matters about which there is considerable moral and religious disagreement. Should the government use civil legislation and coercive regulation to prevent abortion and same-sex relationships? Or on these matters should the hierarchy and other moral educators limit the family's freedom to develop the virtue in people affected?

negotiation with the hierarchy is disproportionate. We need not see the re-entrenchment of religion as drawing a line in the sand or as a direct threat to Catholic religious freedom. As Cardinal Timothy Dolan, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has argued, following standard principles of the Catholic moral tradition, some compromise between hierarchy and state on this matter and so forth.

The Commission on the Constitution's declaration on religious freedom states that the only government should respond to matters on which there is moral or religious disagreement should be based on a presumption in favor of freedom. Freedom is to be respected as far as possible and curtailed only when and in so far as necessary. As Cardinal Murray adds, that this means freedom should be limited only so far as necessary to preserve society's very existence.

Cardinal Murray and the commission specify when such threats exist and thus when religious freedom and its limitations are appropriate. When it cannot be determined whether the standards of proportionality or equality or equality in law are three elements, still, which secures the rights of all citizens, proportionality peaks when itself is grown in, still, and those standards of proportionality morality on which consensus exists in society, equality or equality is a moral concept the minimal level of morality that protects the most basic prerequisites of social life. These pre-

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morally, justifiable or when they conclude that in some tragic
circumstances an abortion might be with regrets. It is justifiable that
it is appropriate here to recall that an individual's rejection of the ear-
lier Catholic position that error has no rights

is not a justification in a moral sense.



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This week, the Supreme Court of the United States will hear the most important religious liberty case in a generation, and it's **time for us to pray**. The cases are Hobby Lobby Stores and Conestoga Wood specialties versus the United States government's mandate that employers provide insurance for contraception, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs. Behind that is the larger question of what it means for the Constitution to guarantee the free exercise of religion.



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to impose them on others. We simply ask the government not to set itself up as lord of our consciences.

Many Americans will disagree with us heartily about the things we believe. But even Americans of no religious faith at all have an interest in the protection of these liberties. Do we really want the sort of civil society in which the consciences of the people are so easily swept aside by government action?

If the federal government can force organizations and businesses to pave over their own consciences, to choose between being believers and being citizens, what will stop the government from imposing its will on anyone's conscience next?

As Christians, soul liberty is about more than political principle for us. We believe, as our Lord commands, that we should render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar. The conscience does not bear the image of Caesar, and cannot be swept into the federal treasury by government fiat.

So let's pray that the Court listens to the case being made. Let's pray for the justices. Let's pray for the attorneys. Let's pray, as the Apostle Paul commands us, for "all who are in high positions, that we may live a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way"

