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December 5, 2012: Is Abortion Next?

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Title: Is Abortion Next?

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12/5/2012—A friend of mine, who is as likely to vote for a Democrat as I am for a Republican, and whose opinions I find thoughtful and worthwhile, has told me that if the contraception mandate is approved and applied to protesting Christians, a widespread requirement for employers to provide abortion coverage will be next, and soon. Although we did not discuss the matter, I presume he is making a slippery slope kind of prediction. It is true that some of the arguments that are being made today to defend the contraception mandate from challenge under RFRA and the Free Exercise Clause would apply to an abortion mandate—that providing insurance that covers a procedure is no different from paying an employee a salary whose proceeds are then used for contraception and therefore the mandate is not a substantial burden on religion. And it is also true that some secularists and liberal believers are astonishingly indifferent, maybe even hostile, to conservative religious beliefs. I have been amazed at how lightly people I know can propose outlawing male circumcision for children without much concern about how such a proposal would be regarded in the Jewish and Muslim communities. I suppose a person who can propose outlawing circumcision would not hesitate to force Christians to provide insurance for abortions. But I wonder, if my friend proves right, whether Christians, particularly the Catholic Bishops, are not at fault for making false moral equivalents in the first place. It was the Bishops who declared the contraception mandate the equivalent to war against religion and it is some Christians who treat gay marriage as some kind of irretrievable line in the sand. Without presuming to tell Christians what they ought to believe, no one believes that abortion is morally equivalent to contraception and gay marriage. They ought not to be mentioned together at all, with the exception for any contraceptive that operates as a very early abortion agent. (There is dispute about the facts with regard to how some contraceptives work, but none about something like sterilization, which only prevents conception.) Simply put, most of the Catholics objecting to the contraception mandate are going to be embarrassed if the courts permit them to be questioned about their own contraception practices. Some Catholic institutions actually covered sterilizations in their insurance before anybody noticed. And even if gay marriage is bad for society, it is certainly better for the partners involved, who at last can express genuine and committed love for each other within a socially accepted institution. These matters are nothing like the destruction of human life in abortion. If my friend's prediction turns out to be correct, which I hope is not the case, maybe the failure of religious believers to make reasonable moral compromises will turn out to have played a role.