

Vatican official calls for stronger protection for conscientious objection

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c. 2012 Religion News Service VATICAN CITY (RNS) A senior Vatican official on Tuesday (April 17) called for stronger protection for conscientious objection for both the Catholic Church and individual Catholics when they are faced with laws that conflict with their "moral norms."

Speaking at Italy's Catholic University in Milan, Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo, former governor of the Vatican City State, waded into the fight between the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Obama administration over mandatory insurance coverage for contraception, saying the mandate raises "serious problems of conscience" for Catholic institutions and citizens.

Excerpts of his speech were published in L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican's semi-official newspaper.

Echoing the bitter dispute between the U.S. bishops and the White House in recent months, Lajolo stressed that it is "essential" that "the freedom of the church and of its institutions to live and act in conformity with its own religious conviction is always guaranteed."

The remarks, which carry the unofficial stamp of Vatican authority by appearing in the church-owned newspaper, represent one of the Vatican's first forays into the high-stakes political fight between the U.S. bishops and the White House.

He quoted recent U.S. laws concerning adoption and abortion, saying abortion has been treated as "a matter of reproductive health, imposing to all health institutions the obligation to insure for abortion coverage." The White House insists no entity will be forced to pay for abortion, but some critics say some birth control pills are akin to abortion.

Lajolo called for conscientious objection to be "enshrined in civil law as much as possible" and said that the church must conduct a "more articulated doctrinal elaboration" of its principles.

Conscientious objection, he explained, should be seen as an "instrument for interior freedom" that individuals and "institutions such as the church or other religious confessions" can "legally turn to when faced with laws that, for their moral consequences, are in contrast with official moral norms affirmed by religious authority."