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Caught in the crossfire

Nicole Sotelo | Jun. 10, 2010

Two weeks ago the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops sent a letter to congress stating their opposition to ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. The bill would provide people of all sexual orientations with equal protection in the workplace, similar to what the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did for people of all races. Despite the bill's religious exemption clause, the bishops are still opposing it and effectively promoting discrimination not only against fellow Catholics but against ordinary citizens.

Over the last six months, the bishops have taken extraordinary measures to ensure that fundamental rights are withheld from people based on their sexual orientation. Having already limited the ability of Catholics to receive certain sacraments depending on one's sexual orientation, the bishops have now expanded their focus to restricting people from receiving equal treatment not only in the church, but in health care, education, and the workplace.

And the bishops' battle does not just affect people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. History tells us that when the rights of a minority group are trampled, that the majority suffer, as well. Less than 50 years ago, bans against interracial marriage not only hurt people of color, but also hurt whites by telling them whom they could, or could not, marry.
Similarly, the bishops scorched earth policy against people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender burns heterosexuals as well.

Here is just a sampling of examples from the last three months:

Most recently, Bishop John Wester of Salt Lake City, chairman of the bishops' conference committee on migration, issued a statement on behalf of the bishops in support of comprehensive immigration reform, but only for heterosexuals [1]. The bishops have urged congress to strip the equal protection provision from the legislation so that bi-national families with homosexual partners will not be offered the same path to citizenship. Knowing that the bishops were willing to kill health care reform over one issue, one wonders if they would go the same distance on immigration reform, ultimately ensuring that nobody -- heterosexual or homosexual alike -- benefited from the reforms.

Two months ago, Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver approved of a priest who removed two children from a local Catholic school because their parents were lesbian [2], affecting not just the parents, but their children and the entire school body.

Three months ago, Archbishop Donald Wuerl defended Washington, DC's Catholic Charities' decision to remove spousal health benefits [3] from all future employees so as not to inadvertently provide health coverage to partners who may be homosexual. In doing so, both homosexual and heterosexual spouses will go without health care benefits.

What is true in war is true in politics: When there is crossfire, it may not just be your enemies who are caught in the line of fire. In the bishops' struggle to maintain heterosexual supremacy, everyone is being wounded.

[Nicole Sotelo is the author of *Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace*, published by Paulist Press, and coordinates **www.WomenHealing.com** [4]. A graduate of Harvard Divinity School, she currently works at Call To Action.]

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