

Archbishop Lori: Hobby Lobby ruling ‘wonderful victory,’ but no assumptions on other lawsuit outcomes

Interview by Maria Wiering

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Archbishop William E. Lori called the June 30 U.S. Supreme Court ruling exempting Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ contraception mandate “an affirmation of the right of individuals to bring their faith into the work place.”

Hobby Lobby, an Oklahoma-based arts and crafts retailer, and Conestoga Wood, a Pennsylvania-based cabinet-making company, argued that complying with the mandate violated their religious convictions. Hobby Lobby’s owners are Evangelical Christians; Conestoga Wood’s owners are Mennonite.

Archbishop Lori is the chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty. On June 21, he celebrated the opening Mass for the Fortnight for Freedom, two weeks dedicated to prayer, education and action on religious liberty issues. This year’s Fortnight theme is the “Freedom to Serve” and highlights charity as an expression of faith by Catholic institutions.

Currently 100 lawsuits representing more than 300 plaintiffs – most of whom are Catholic – have been filed against the federal government over the HHS mandate, a measure of the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare. The mandate requires employers, including most religious employers, to provide insurance coverage for contraception, sterilization and abortion-causing drugs, which violate Catholic teaching.

The Catholic Review spoke with Archbishop Lori shortly after the ruling was announced. The interview was edited for clarity.

Q: What was your reaction when you heard the ruling this morning?

A: I certainly want to welcome the ruling. I think it’s a wonderful victory for Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties and other businesses that are organized as they are. It is an affirmation of the right of individuals to bring their faith into the work place and, at least for certain types of companies, to include, as part of their

ethos, their religious convictions and faith convictions.

Q: What do you think the ruling says about religious freedom in our country?

A: Today's ruling is a bright spot. It's a recognition of the rights of employers and individuals to bring their faith and the convictions borne of faith into the workplace. The church has always taught that religious freedom is not just confined to the sanctuary, but it's something that you bring with you into the world.

Q: How does this ruling affect Catholics' concerns about religious freedom in the country?

A: Certainly we're very happy for the victors today, but it's too early to tell how it will affect the nonprofits and the religious organizations. We will certainly continue that struggle in the year ahead.

Q: Do you have any insights into how it might affect the other HHS-mandate-related lawsuits against the federal government?

A: No, not yet. That will take a little more analysis. The ruling has just come down. I would be cautious in drawing too many parallels.

Q: You want people to be cautious in assuming this is a win for all of the lawsuits?

A: Absolutely. These other cases will be decided in due course, and I don't have a crystal ball.

Q: What are your hopes or concerns going forward?

A: My hope is that as Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties had their religious freedom rights vindicated today, the religious freedom rights of all of our citizens and our church and institutions will be similarly vindicated.

Q: How significant for you is it that the ruling came during the Fortnight for Freedom?

A: That's one of the reasons we have the Fortnight when we have it. Oftentimes there are significant decisions coming down from the Supreme Court. This should give us a real boost. This should make us all the more ardent in embracing the theme of this year's Fortnight, the "Freedom to Serve" because the 98 remaining lawsuits are really all about the freedom to serve, the freedom to serve the poor, the vulnerable (and) to education the young in accord with the convictions that flow from our faith.

Q: How might this positive ruling affect religious liberty efforts throughout the country?

A: I just hope it's a source of encouragement - that people will say, "You know, it's worth having this struggle." We don't know how any future ruling might turn out, but this should give us encouragement, put a spring in our step and say, "Let's continue the struggle." There will be ups, there will be downs, but it's worth the

struggle.

Q: The Archdiocese of Baltimore, CR Media and others are part of a class-action lawsuit against the mandate. Why was it important to be part of it?

A: The Catholic Benefits Association afforded us the opportunity to join with other dioceses, religious entities and other private employers – who would have won a pretty good victory today – in vindicating our rights as best we can. We’ve won a preliminary victory, but like all the other ones, we’ll have to see where that goes.

Q: Do you know when the decision about a permanent injunction might be handed down?

A: I don’t know.

Q: What else would you like to add on the ruling?

A: We’re at the midpoint of the Fortnight, and I encourage everybody to pray for religious freedom, to reflect on the theme the “Freedom to Serve,” and if they know about any parish events that they would participate in them. Today’s ruling shows you it’s worth praying about this, and it’s worth the struggle.

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