

The Catholic Church's War on Birth Control: An Opinion Editorial

JOHN SHAFFER

Freedom of religion: it's a funny concept here in America. Whenever it comes to birth control or prayer in schools we Americans are busy thumping our religion-loving fists. We quickly forget about it whenever it comes to say, building mosques in New York City or preventing "Sharia Law" from taking over. It's our ignorance and our intolerance that make this new debate about birth control so very interesting.

For those of you who haven't yet heard, under President Obama's Affordable Health Care Act, organizations that provide health insurance must cover preventative contraception for women,

a feature Catholic institutions are not pleased with. Catholic leadership has come out in opposition to birth control for the sake of religious tradition. Catholic authorities deny one simple fact - people are having sex, and they have no intention of stopping. According to the Centers for Disease Control, a whopping 79.5%

of young people age 18-24 have had sexual intercourse. Additionally, 98% of sexually active Catholic women already use birth control, according to a Reuters poll. The church believes that providing birth control will make people have more premarital sex, but they clearly already are with or without it. We accept religion as "tradition" and never expect it

to change with the times. We forget that the teachings in sacred texts are two thousand plus years old. To strictly apply those teachings to our modern, hyper-sexualized lives is not only impossible, but detrimental. The Catholic denial of human sexuality is as backwards as it is harmful.

We also need to realize that in trying to protect people's religious rights, Republicans and churches are attempting to trample on those of women. The contraception part of Obama's bill was based on findings by the independent Institute of Medicine that states birth control coverage is necessary "to ensure women's health and well-being." Many women use birth control to prevent health

issues such as ovarian cysts. My guess is that the men in congress were completely unaware of these issues because women weren't interviewed whatsoever. At the congressional hearing on "Religious Freedom" the panelists were all male, not one woman was invited. I'd also be willing to guess that if it were men taking the birth control the church wouldn't have a problem. Even high ranking church official and Opus Dei member Francis J. Hoffman has come out in his support of the drug Viagra. The translation: it's okay to have sex just so long as you accept the unwanted, unplanned pregnancy.

Finally, the issue of unwanted pregnancies. If

there's one issue that unites the religious extreme more than anything, it's abortion. Aborted babies tend to come from unwanted pregnancies. Contraception has proven effective at reducing unwanted pregnancies, and in fact the Guttmacher Institute reports that teen contraceptive use in the United States reduced unwanted pregnancies amongst teens by a massive 86% between 1995 and 2002 (when birth control became more widely available.) So the logical step would be to provide contraception, right? It's time for the Catholic church to drop the dogma and face the facts. Our society is moving forward and we need a theology that supports that, or it may just be left behind.

Student Poll:

Should Catholic Institutions that receive public funding be forced to offer employee-benefits that include contraceptives and birth control?

"If they were privately funded, they could do whatever they wanted. However, if they are using government money, the government can tell them to do anything."

-Anonymous, Sophomore

"If and only if the employee requests it."

-Mike, Senior

"I decide what goes in my body, not the church."

-Anonymous

"If there is public funding they should abide by public regulations."

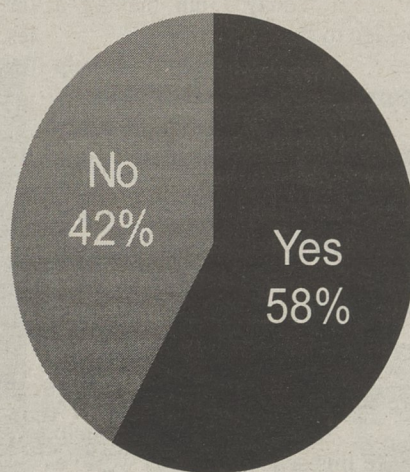
-Sean McKenna, Sophomore

"The employee should not be punished for the institution's views."

-C. Gingrich, Sophomore

"It's just against Catholic morality."

-Anonymous



Poll conducted in The Millstream Café with a total of 72 voluntary responses.

"All institutions that receive federal or state funds should be subject to the same rules as other publicly funded institutions."

-Coty Covert, Sophomore

"There's a big difference between being offered birth control and being forced to take it."

-Anonymous

If federal aid is accepted some considerations should be made."

-Ross Holland, Sophomore

"They are publicly funded ... if they were privately funded it would be a different story."

-Anonymous

"I don't think any institution should be forced, however, if that is what will happen, then yes."

-Nicholas Pastura, Sophomore

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