

# American Catholics challenge church's birth control rules

## Guest commentary

What are reproductive ethics? Who decides what they will be? It depends upon whom you ask.

A chance encounter with *Conscience*, a journal of pro-choice Catholic opinion, introduced me to a very large community of people who think reproductive decisions for themselves lie with themselves.

These, I discovered, are not libertine, anti-institutional, anti-government people on the fringe of society. Rather, they are serious, caring individuals well-versed in the issues of reproduction, contraception, abortion, social health and family life. They include priests and nuns, scholars and teachers,

and, of course, parishioners.

Their journal is forthright in announcing its purpose. Its goal, it declares, is to promote sexual and reproductive ethics "based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being, and respect and affirm the moral capacity of women and men to make sound and responsible decisions about their lives." Despite the low media profile of this group, the majority of the American Catholic community thinks this way.

About 59 percent of Catholic women of childbearing age practice birth control, essentially the same percentage as the larger American community. In addition, a stunning 88 percent of American Catholics think someone who practices birth control can still be a good Catholic.

This Catholic community must have its emotional struggles, for their decisions run counter to the church they love and counter to efforts of the church hierarchy to have them accept church teachings. Despite proscriptions on behavior, threats of excommunication, denial of sacraments, generous doses of guilt, and that favorite tactic, claims of the infallibility of the church and Pope, these Catholics know that they and they alone will determine their most personal matters.

As one person put it, "Bishops never acknowledge that family planning assistance saves lives and enables women and families to take better advantage of economic and educational opportunities." Why this disparity? Why this profound

difference between Catholic leadership and American parishioners?

Simply put, American Catholics are well-educated. They are conversant with world affairs and trends. In that distinctively American way, they're not blindly subservient to authority. They know, as the Alan Guttmacher Institute reports, that access to affordable contraception can reduce a woman's chance of having an abortion by 85 percent. They know that worldwide, unsafe abortions are the leading cause of maternal deaths. They know that pregnancy and childbirth take the lives of 600,000 women each year. They know that unbridled reproduction can be devastating to themselves and the children they do want.

So where does this dissenting majority go from here?

Even more than Americans at large, they support efforts of the United Nations Population Fund to slow population growth. They continue to confront that most patriarchal of institutions, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. They force public dialogue on public policy, community life, social thinking and teaching, and women's health and personal development. It's quite an ambitious undertaking, but it will determine the quality and character of their lives and the lives of their families.

They will not go quietly into the night.

Glen Kaye lives in Salem.

## Protesters need to review their belief system

### Guest commentary

Well, I support free speech and the right of people to assemble and demonstrate peacefully. However, there are a few things that I'd like to point out to all of you protesters.

First, this war isn't about oil! If you think it is, stop driving your car! You're like the "vegetarian" that wears leather shoes. You don't have a moral leg to stand on.

Second, some of you are just hippie want-to-bes and aren't sure what you believe. You're just jumping on the bandwagon or have a hidden agenda.

Third, what if Sept. 11, 2001, would have happened in Portland, Eugene or Seattle? Do you honestly think you would still be against the war? I think not. Iraq and Saddam Hussein are bent on the destruction of Israel and the west. Are you anti-semitic, or does your loathing of our government reach new heights? By the way, did you

vote? The Muslim extremists will stop at nothing to include suicide bombings to kill you (yes, you)! It is an automatic ticket to heaven in their eyes. It doesn't matter how, to kill an infidel is a rubber stamp to heaven! Ticket punched.

Fourth, President George W. Bush is looking after the safety of the U.S. citizenry. His job is to protect us, get it? Stop arguing about the legitimacy of his presidency. Get over it and get behind him and the defense of our way of life.

Fifth, I am a soldier and have been for 22 years. I was born and raised in Oregon. I was born and raised to protect the environment, like most of my fellow Oregonians. We need to get over our dependency on oil and especially foreign oil. If oil was worth nothing, those people over there wouldn't have the money to hurt us and just wouldn't matter anymore. I didn't say this was about oil. I said they wouldn't have the money to hurt us anymore.

Sixth, many men and women of all races have died to make this country free and an example of what is right in the world. Isolationism isn't the answer. We are not safe when our own technology is used against us (airliners full of innocent passengers). I do not question your patriotism; I only question your thought processes that went in to your position.

Finally, soldiers fight for each other. We are sworn by oath to defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic and to obey the orders of the president of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over us according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. That is not an oath that I take lightly. You may call it blind obedience. I call it making sure that you have the right to stand in the street and state your opinion.

Richard A. Berger is in a 'C' Company Aviation Unit stationed in South Korea.

### Letter to the editor

#### Petroskey's censorship correctly portrayed

It is rare to find a published column that successfully combines passion with skilled writing. The Emerald's Philip Huang achieved that with his column about the arrogance of Dale Petroskey, president of the Baseball Hall of Fame ("Unsportsmanlike conduct," April 15).

Petroskey showed his feet still are mired in the mud of the Reagan administration, which he once served as an assistant press agent, when he banned showing of the baseball movie, "Bull Durham." Huang accurately portrayed him as a right-wing censor.

What Philip wrote reminds us that this nation and its national game still should honor freedom of expression. The actions of a petty man — Petroskey — remind us we need to stay watchful as the politics he supports continue to threaten the rights of a people, as well as the credibility of our national game.

George Beres  
Eugene

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