

Abortion and Contraceptives: Catholic Views on Existent Issues

Throughout history, the Roman Catholic Church has portrayed unwavering views on abortion and the use of contraceptives in the community. Today, many individuals within society assume that all Catholics comply with pessimistic beliefs of abortion and contraceptives, but few scholars have examined why the Catholic church views these two issues so harshly. In this paper, therefore, I will examine which elements of Roman Catholicism allow adherents to hold strong negative views on abortion and the use of contraceptives, and discuss the prevalence of pro-choice Catholic individuals and groups.

When Gudorf (2003) acknowledges the issues of abortion and the use of contraceptives within the Catholic religion, he establishes that Pope Pius XII addressed midwives and stated that Pope Pius approved of contraceptives but still agreed with the ban on abortion or any chemical methods that prevent the fertilized ovum from being implanted. The Pope also clarifies that the Catholic system still continues to oppose any form of artificial conception, believing that it changes God's intention of human nature and that life is declared from the moment of conception.

The *Catholic Insight Journal* (2004) states that, despite being Catholic, the Trudeau family is pro-choice. Justin Trudeau, the newly elected Canadian Prime Minister, disagrees completely with the Catholic beliefs on abortion. He believes that every individual is allowed to have one's own personal views and beliefs, and should therefore be able to dictate one's own life choices. He so strongly agrees with this stance that he divulged that the Liberal Party is a pro-choice party and that, as they

continue in power, all new members and candidates must agree with his stance and be pro-choice.

By contrast, Barzelatoo and Dawson (2003) look at how abortion and contraceptives are both used and viewed throughout the world. They determined that fertility regulations such as birth control pills have been massively introduced and contraceptives are legal practically everywhere now. They state that, since there are so many women who die from giving birth, and so many of those births are from unwanted pregnancies, we should first focus on preventing those unwanted pregnancies which would result in fewer abortions. From these findings, it is proven that there are multiple views on abortion and contraceptives, as well as opposing views of these issues within the same religion. In this paper, I will investigate how the beliefs from the Roman Catholic system have affected present views on abortion and contraceptives as well as if there are additional pro-choice Catholic individuals and groups within society.

Method

In order to determine the current stance of the Roman Catholic Church on abortion and contraceptives, I examined the Church's Fifth and Sixth Commandments as well as speeches made by Pope Paul VI, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. I also used statistical data and speeches made by pro-choice Catholic individuals and groups, such as Justin Trudeau and Catholics for Choice, in order to provide different opinions on these pressing issues.

Results & Discussion

Firstly, the Roman Catholic Church commandments act as a base set of beliefs for Catholics. The Fifth Commandment is relevant towards Catholic views of abortion stating that large families are a blessing from God. Since life is a creative action of god, human life is sacred and under no circumstance should an individual claim the right to terminate an innocent human being. The commandment also continues to state that from the moment of conception, every single human life must be protected and the moral sin of abortion should never be an option. In addition, the Sixth Commandment promotes the belief that it is morally unacceptable to use any means of contraception or direct sterilization. The way the commandments are worded leaves no room for misinterpretation towards the Catholic stance on abortion or contraceptives.

Secondly, Pope Paul VI (1968) focused his speech on contraception. He permitted African nuns to take birth control pills during the Belgian Congo Crisis in fear that they could possibly get raped. Despite the commandments, Pope Paul wanted to decrease the number of unwanted pregnancies for these nuns through family planning, and used this specific circumstance to slacken his views and allow for the use of contraception.

In a speech, Pope Benedict XVI (2011) begins by asserting the Fifth Commandment by stating that children are God's treasure and we must always defend human lives. Pope Benedict believes that physicians wrongly tell women that abortion is a morally acceptable solution. He states further that abortion is not only

a sin, but also causes psychological damage to the women who abort their unborn child, as their conscience cannot handle it. When Pope Benedict (2014), addresses contraceptive use he disagrees with the use of family planning. Despite his disagreement, Pope Benedict believes that condoms can be morally justified to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Pope Francis's (2015) speech about the "grave sin" follows the same principles as the past Catholic beliefs, but he is also aware of the pressure women face that lead them to have abortions. Due to this, Pope Francis will allow all "Missionaries of Mercy," also known as priests, to grant absolution in confession in the upcoming Holy Year to women who have undergone abortions. The Catholic Church will forgive these women and the women will be freed of their sin. When he discussed the Zika virus that is spreading around Brazil, Pope Francis stated that he would allow the women exposed to that virus to use forms of contraceptives to avoid contracting diseases such as microcephaly. Woods and Bistro (2014) define microcephaly as a "clinical condition characterized as having a smaller brain with the occipito-frontal head circumference less than standard deviation". Despite the fact that over 4,000 babies have been born with this disease due to the Zika virus (Sherwood, 2016), Pope Francis will not allow termination of any fetuses even if they do have serious birth defects as it still goes against the church's position.

All of the information provided by the three Pope's speeches proved that the Catholic Church system still strongly believes in the commandments. Even though each one of them relaxed their views for very specific cases, they did not forget to remind everyone that abortion and using contraceptives is a sin against God's

wishes and hard work.

Thirdly, data presented by the pro-choice group “Catholics for Choice”, shows that not all Catholics follow the Vatican’s strict belief system. As part of a group surveyed, 99% of the woman over the age of 18 use contraceptives to avoid unwanted pregnancies and HIV. In terms of using more long-term forms of family planning such as birth control pills or IUD’s, 76% of the woman professed to adapt these forms of contraceptives. Looking further into the data, it was revealed that 86% of Catholic women approved of abortion when it came to the woman’s health being in danger and 74% agreed to it if the child having severe birth defects or if the pregnancy was caused by rape.

Comparing the mentioned case above with Justin Trudeau and his stance on abortion as well as the data presented by Catholic’s for Choice, it proves that despite being in a religion whose main belief system is negative on abortion and family planning, individuals continue to hold their own beliefs about these issues even though they may go against the Vatican. These examples also kill the stereotyped that everyone who actively or inactively practices the Catholic religion will disagree with abortion or the use of contraceptives, as “believers simply do not behave in a consistent manner, despite the official, more or less homogeneous and integrated version of their religion.” (Droogers, [1995] 2006, p. 29)

As discussed above, direct abortion is never permitted in the Roman Catholic religion. However, an indirect abortion which is defined as a “life threatening diagnosis being treated, and that treatment leads to the death of a fetus,” (Coleman, 2013, p. 127) may be permissible in grave situations. Even though abortion is

tolerable, in certain situations, there have been cases where the Catholic community has responded negatively to cases of indirect abortion. Tanne (2009) provides an example of how St. Joseph's Hospital in Phoenix, Arizona lost their designation status as a Catholic hospital because they helped carry out an indirect abortion to save the life of a woman with severe pulmonary hypertension which Shah (2012) defines as "elevated pulmonary artery pressure" (2012, p. 1366). Bishop Thomas Olmstead told the hospital that he would remove his endorsement unless he received written notice that the hospital violated the Catholic policy by performing the abortion. The United States Conference in 2010 then provided the definition of an indirect abortion that is similar to Coleman's explanation but the Catholic Church did not accept this. This example finds that the Catholic religion is still very strict on their beliefs and their actions involving abortion. Although there are those individual's out there who are Catholic and pro-choice, there are still groups that follow the commandments statements on how one should view abortion.

Killian (2003) discusses woman's rights in the community on whether or not it is acceptable to fashion their religious articles for cultural expression. She also examines how age and education were the best predictors of the responses to the headscarf affair and how those who were poorly educated made different arguments as they used different Islamic principles. This correlates to the issue of abortion in the Catholic system, as some believe that it is the woman's right to dictate what happens to her body where others disagree and state that they should follow their religion's principles. Age and education also play a big role in the Catholic community as those who those who are elder and more traditional tend to

stick with the commandment's views on abortion whereas those who are younger have been encouraged to think on their own and form their own opinions.

The commandments stance on abortion and contraceptives is what has shaped the Roman Catholic Church to hold such negative views on abortion and contraception. These negative views affect the lives of those who practice the religion and if an unwanted pregnancy occurs, the woman must establish her stance on these issues and make a decision based on either her or the churches beliefs, no matter the consequences that may follow. Also, despite the fact that the Catholic Church disagrees with these methods, it still does not stop individuals, such as Justin Trudeau or Catholic pro-choice groups to disagree with the church and form their own opinions.

Conclusion

Abortion and contraceptives appear to still be a popular topic among society and there are many different opinions on whether or not abortion and contraceptives should be permitted. The findings above signify that in the Catholic religion, some agree with the Vatican where others disagree and have proposed individual beliefs. Further research can be done regarding how the Catholic religion correlates with abortion and contraceptives as well as individuals could learn more about the disputes between religion and existing societal issues. This research is very limited as it only focused on one religion, therefore a comparison of other religions could be done to determine their stance on the issue of abortion and contraceptives and if they differ from Catholicism. Another topic that can be

explored is whether or not there are ways to make the Catholic Church more accepting of these issues.

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