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Birth control controversy erupts anew

Robert McClory | Feb. 17, 2012 NCR Today

The controversy over the Catholic bishops and the Obama mandate has spawned a veritable Pandora's Box of discussion and argument far beyond anything the bishops expected.

In an especially perceptive online New York Times essay, Gary Gutting, a Catholic and a philosopher, contends that the bishops are wrong in claiming birth control is contrary to the teachings of the Catholic church. There may have been a time, he says, "when the vast majority of Catholics accepted the bishops as having an absolute right to define theological and ethical doctrines. Those days, if they ever existed, are long gone. Most Catholics ... now reserve the right to reject doctrines ... and to interpret in their own way the doctrines they do accept."

"The ultimate arbiter of religious authority is the conscience of the individual believer," Gutting says.

"It follows that there is no alternative to accepting the members ... as themselves the only legitimate source of the decision to accept their leaders as authorized by God."

Since 98 percent of sexually active American Catholic women practice birth control and 78 percent of Catholics think a good Catholic can reject the bishops' teaching on this matter, says Gutting, "the bishops' claim to authority in this matter has been undermined. ... The immorality of birth control is no longer a teaching of the Catholic Church."

Read the whole essay here [1].

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[1] ?http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/15/birth-control-and-the-challenge-to-divine-authority/?emc=eta1?