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The church's influence on the morality of Catholics

Pat Perriello | Oct. 9, 2013 NCR Today

There is some interesting new research [1] coming out of the Pew Research Center. The survey includes data on a variety of issues, including abortion and in vitro fertilization.

Abortion is considered a moral issue by 49 percent of adults. Only 38 percent consider abortion either morally acceptable or not a moral issue. One would have to say that those arguing against abortion, including, Catholics have had some dramatic impact on public opinion.

The picture, however, is quite different on other significant issues. A total of 68 percent of adults consider embryonic stem cell research either morally acceptable or not a moral issue. And 79 percent of adults consider in vitro fertilization either morally acceptable or not a moral issue.

When surveying Catholics alone, the survey found that 66 percent of Catholics consider embryonic stem cell research either morally acceptable or not a moral issue. That figure reaches 77 percent of Catholics who consider in vitro fertilization either morally acceptable or not a moral issue.

Perhaps Pope Francis is thinking about some of these realities as he works to change the focus of the church. Clearly, the U.S. population is not looking to the church for direction on moral issues. It seems that not even Catholics are looking to their church for moral guidance, especially when it comes to sexual morality. The outdated focus of Catholic morality on notions of natural law continues to separate the church from its people on these issues.

When you add to this data the fact that 79 percent of American Catholics have a favorable notion [2] of Pope Francis, with only 4 percent having an unfavorable view, it may be that the church may actually be getting back to what Christianity is supposed to be about. Catholics seem to agree that it is time to talk about something other than abortion and gay marriage.

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Links:
[1] http://www.pewforum.org/2013/08/15/abortion-viewed-in-moral-terms/
[2] http://www.pewforum.org/2013/09/12/six-months-into-papacy-large-majority-of-catholics-continue-to-express-favorable-view-of-pope-francis/