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On birth control and NFP

Heidi Schlumpf | Jul. 20, 2011 NCR Today

Yesterday's news [1]that a government advisory panel recommends that all health care plans cover birth control (among other preventative health care for women) was followed by the predictable response from the U.S. bishops [2], arguing that, if implemented, it would violate freedom of conscience for Catholics.

I agree that religious folks have every right (and even the responsibility) to try to persuade our society, including our government, to adopt--or at least respect--their values, especially when it comes to human rights. But in the end, we all end up having to support, financially with our taxes, at least, things with which we disagree or even find abhorrent. That's democracy, for better or worse.

What caught my eye in the Washington Post [1] story about the panel's report was mention of a Guttmacher study "that found that 98 percent of sexually active Catholic women and nearly 100 percent of evangelicals have used contraception at some point, compared to 99 percent of women overall."

Yes, 98 percent. Talk about losing the persuasion battle.

This reminded me of a recent blog post [3] at *Christianity Today* (a blog cleverly titled, "Her.meneutics") about Natural Family Planning (NFP), which the Catholic Church recommends to couples who want or need to space their children. More than just the "rhythm method," NFP involves tracking a woman?s ovulation and limiting intercourse to days when she is not fertile.

I apparently missed the big story a few years back about Sam and Bethany Torode, authors of *Open Embrace: A Protestant Couple Rethinks Contraception* [4], who reversed their pro-NFP opinion, arguing that it is not as medically effective as contraception and could actually harm a marriage. The couple, who had four children, divorced in 2009, according to this *New York Times* article [5].

I agree with much of what Her.meneutics blogger Ellen Painter Dollar says. I have friends who swear by NFP, although more use it to try to get pregnant than avoid pregnancy. I, too, have not used NFP as a married person, because as an infertile person, I don't need it.

What I most agree with is one of her final thoughts, about the need for humility, which is so hard when someone is convinced they have the capital-T Truth. Says Dollar:

> "If there is a lesson to be learned from the Patchin/Torode story, it?s not that NFP ruins marriages. Rather, perhaps it?s that humility is the number-one quality necessary for dialogue about how to live as Christians, and that we should not be too quick to either give or receive advice that hasn?t been tested by years of living and plenty of challenging discourse."

As we debate what type of health care for women should be included in insurance plans, is humility possible--or at least respect?

Source URL (retrieved on *06/19/2013 - 20:15*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/birth-control-and-nfp

Links:
[1] http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/birth-control-coverage-proposed-for-all-health-insurance-plans/2011/07/19/gIQAcqS7NI_story.html?hpid=z3
[2] http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/bishops-pro-life-chair-strongly-opposes-recommended-mandate-for-birth-control-sterilization-in-private-health-plans-125846953.html
[3] http://blog.christianitytoday.com/women/2011/07/why_we_dont_use_natural_family.html
[4] http://www.amazon.com/Open-Embrace-Protestant-Rethinks-Contraception/dp/0802839738/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1311199998&sr=8-1
[5] http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/09/us/09beliefs.html?_r=1