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## Who Controls Birth Control?

by Ken Briggs

NCR Today

The overwhelming percentage of American Catholic laity, sometimes with the tacit consent of their parish priests, rejected the official ban on contraception, many in the name of the internal forum, or conscience.

A sad aftermath is in play as the leadership of the U.S. church reacts against the Obama Administration's ruling that most major Catholic institutions must provide insurance coverage to their employees. The protest is done in the name of conscience.

Their case would be a lot stronger if those institutions weren't presumably staffed primarily with Catholics who were themselves practicing artificial birth control or approving it for others.

It's easy to imagine an institution comprised principally of Catholic employees or students being required to enact a policy in the name of the leadership's conscience which violates their own consciences. Especially when the lay majority has had no involvement in establishing the morality of the contraception issue itself.

So far as I'm aware, the effort to convince the vast majority of Catholics that artificial birth control was wrong has long ago lost steam. If clergy once put lay people on notice that their use of the devices was seriously sinful, that message has been at best muffled.

Now the rebuff to Obama revives the issue, but isn't it at bottom the same one? Isn't this action against the very lay and many clerical Catholics who are part of Catholic institutions?

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