

Romney and rape

Robert McClory | Nov. 3, 2012 NCR Today

I have a problem. Just now as the presidential election campaign is coming to a climax, a bevy of Catholic bishops is stating and re-stating its virtual support for Mitt Romney and urging the faithful to reject Barack Obama. The reason: Obama is trampling on Catholicism by requiring health insurers to provide contraceptive coverage. This, they insist, is an abomination comparable to Pontius Pilate's agreement to crucify Jesus.

So here's my problem. Why aren't these bishops pouring at least equal criticism on Mitt Romney, who claims to be pro-life but isn't. Yes, after much shifting and shuffling, Romney says he is opposed to abortion except ? and here's the point ? except in certain, rare cases, including rape. That was his position when he last addressed the subject explicitly, and he's given no indication of changing his mind at the last minute.

Now nothing could be clearer than the Catholic Church's position on the subject: A fertilized embryo is to be treated as a human person from the first moment of conception. No exceptions. So why haven't these bishops confronted the Republican candidate with their reservations? Why haven't they said publicly, "If a woman who has been raped becomes pregnant as a result of that crime, she must carry that new human being to birth, regardless of the brutality and violence she has experienced. If she seeks an abortion, she commits a mortal sin, and if she obtains one, she is excommunicated from the church, along with the medical personnel who cooperated with her."

I think I know why you haven't heard that position from the bishops or from your parish priest either. They are fully aware of the sort of reaction it would bring from their own people, the sort of reaction the contorted explanations Todd Akin and Richard Mourdock recently provided in efforts to portray themselves as completely pro-life without reservation or exception.

I know how priests who deal with victims of rape struggle to be pastoral, to express compassion and, when there is a pregnancy, do all they can to help the woman to prayerfully consider all her options and not act too hastily. In the end, they help the victim to carefully form her own conscience and act accordingly.

But that doesn't address the real problem, which is the church's outmoded moral theology concerning sexual matters and practically everything else related to sexuality. I don't know the answer, but until these issues are faced, we will find church leaders sometimes acting hypocritically to support their own interests or saying nothing when leadership is needed, lest they endanger their clerical status.