

Catholic Women and Abortion

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In a study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, it was reported that Catholic women have an abortion rate 29 percent higher than Protestants. The study also concluded that about half of American women will have an abortion at some point in their lives. The gist of the findings is that a) the Catholic Church's teachings on abortion are falling on deaf ears and b) abortion is becoming a common procedure among women. But there is more to this than what the public has been left to believe.

To begin with, in virtually every newspaper account on this story, there was no mention of the fact that the Alan Guttmacher Institute is the research arm of Planned Parenthood, the nation's leading abortion rights organization that receives tens of millions each year from the federal government to service its mission. This is not to say that the Guttmacher researchers "cooked" the data, but it is to say that readers should be as suspect of their work as they would if the Pentagon had a research arm that produced studies indicating the need for an arms buildup.

If the Guttmacher Institute were truly interested in assessing the relationship between religion and abortion, it would have asked the women who listed a Catholic affiliation whether they were regular Church-goers. But they didn't. Nor did they ask those women whether they agreed with the Church's teachings on abortion. It is not unreasonable to assume that had such questions been asked, the results would not have been quite so dramatic.

It is well-known that non-white minority women have pressures on them that make comparisons with white women somewhat difficult. The report is not entirely useless in this regard,

though more data would allow for a more complete conclusion. Now consider the following.

The report says that although black women are 14 percent of the age-bearing class between the ages of 15-44, they make up 31 percent of all the abortions. Hispanics are 11 percent of the age-bearing segment yet they account for 20 percent of all the abortions. This is important because fully 20 percent of Catholics belong to minority groups: 14 percent of Catholics are Hispanic and 5 percent are black. As John Leo of *U.S. News and World Report* discovered after he examined this data, when black and Hispanic women are factored out, "Catholic women have an abortion rate 37 percent lower than average."

It must also be said that the 1 percent abortion rate among Jewish women is suspect. The majority of Jews profess no religion, and therefore it is entirely likely that when Jewish women were asked to choose which religion they belonged to, the majority checked off "None" as opposed to "Jewish," thereby underreporting their actual abortion rate.

The study does show that although only 6 percent of non-believers are between the ages 15-44, they account for 24 percent of all the abortions. Now if the researchers, as well as the media were fair, they would have highlighted this finding: women who have no religious affiliation are four times more likely than other women to have an abortion. But owing to bias, this was not done.

Finally, the data show that the abortion rate is not only declining, it is at the lowest rate since 1979 (the highest rates were born between 1983-1985). The present rate, 27.5 percent (and dropping), makes nonsensical the Guttmacher conclusion that half of all American women will have an abortion sometime in their life.

What this tells us is that if you start with a politicized agenda, you get a politicized outcome. In the end, there is no

substitute for independently checking the findings of any research report, especially those that are produced by highly politicized organizations that have a vested financial interest in the conclusions.