

MEDIA IGNORE SURVEY ON RELIGION AND TEEN SEX

According to a new survey by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, there is evidence that teenagers who are religious are less likely to have sexual relations outside of marriage.

In fact, the survey found that conservative Protestant and Catholic girls delay sexual activity longer than their less religious cohorts. Moreover, it is religious activity and parental influence that has the greatest effect on teenagers, not advice from the clergy. William Galston, who worked in the Clinton administration, chaired the task force.

The Catholic League's main interest in this story was the way the media reacted, or more accurately failed to react, to the report.

To begin with, there is perhaps no area of survey research on human behavior that is more neglected than the influence of religious values on teenage sexual activity. That is why it was so important to have such a respected group of Americans come together to support this effort.

Unfortunately, the media ignored the important findings of the survey. With the exception of AP stories on September 25 (the day the report was released) and a story in the *Washington Times*, the survey was ignored (the *Washington Post* never even covered it).

The Catholic League charged that the news blackout was intentional. For example, when the surgeon general, Dr. David Satcher, issued a report in June that argued the need to go beyond abstinence in sex education, the media gave it front-page coverage. When a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation was published in October 2000 concluding that parents want

more sex education in the schools, the media did the same. Yet when a study was issued in January 2001 showing that virginity pledges can be effective, it was generally ignored.

It is the league's contention that stories on national security do not explain the blackout. For instance, a health story on arthritis made the A-Section of the *New York Times* the day after the report was released. No, the reasons were political.

"To be specific," we told the press, "our cultural elites, as well as the sex ed industry gurus at Planned Parenthood and SIECUS, are motivated by a strong animus against religion." It was for this reason, we argued, that they "censor evidence that threatens their beliefs and their pocketbooks."