

Forum

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differ, depending on whether the speaker is a teacher, theologian, priest or lay person. "There are several traditions engaging each other like the separate parts of an orchestra," she said.

McCarthy reiterated the opposition to artificial birth control and abortion as articulated by the church's magisterium, which considers the former a selfish interference with God's will and the latter a form of murder. Yet, she pointed out, theologians often have "as many questions as answers" on the two issues.

"Most American priests ... have stopped discussing the issues from the pulpit," McCarthy claimed, adding that pastors have seen "too many overworked fathers, too many overwhelmed mothers and too many teenage pregnancies," to continually pronounce magisterial teachings.

Although she said most lay people take a stance falling somewhere between strictly pro-life and pro-choice camps, surveys of American lay Catholics consistently show that the majority disagree with the Catholic Church's teachings on artificial birth control.

McCarthy also said that when the church preaches about birth control and abortion, "the sense of the unjust situation(s) of women is never protested as much as their attempts to change them."

The Rev. Cairns said he could not speak about these issues on behalf of all of Protestantism because various Protestant denominations generally approach moral questions from three distinct starting points of faith.

He said some Protestants hold "that God

determines every event that happens," while others maintain that God created that world and then left it to operate on its own, allowing people "utmost freedom."

The minister rejected the former position because it implied that God causes evil to happen as well as good, and he criticized the latter viewpoint because it suggests that God would leave it up to people to make all decisions which therefore would be "good."

"Not everything we think of is good," he said.

The Rev. Cairns explained his stance on birth control and abortion from a third Protestant viewpoint, which asserts that God is the "instigator of life and all of its processes," but nonetheless allows humanity a certain amount of choice in order to deal with chance occurrences.

"Every pregnancy is not the will of God," he said, adding that such circumstances as genetic disease in a fetus make it "not easy to know or choose the good."

He concluded his presentation by saying that God's call to people reveals itself in the different choices people make, but that those differences nonetheless point to the same underlying call.

"God acts with us," he said, and "even though the way we make choices may differ, I believe we can be respectful to that same call to faithfulness, love and goodness."

Shapiro started off his presentation by saying that Judaism also contains many conflicting views on abortion and birth control, and that at times the Talmud — which consists of text and argumentative commentary — does not answer the question of whether artificial birth control and abortion are morally wrong.

"In Talmudic law, one can always find arguments to support either side of the question," he said.

Shapiro commented that the Talmud sees the "fetus as an aggressor," and mandates abortion when a mother's life is threatened or her mental stability is endangered.

"What is important is a person's right to choose, and the right to choose is central to the modern core of Judaism," Shapiro said.

When asked by one audience member what he thought of the Mosaic commandment against killing, Shapiro noted that the text in its original meant "You shall not commit a murder," or "You shall not steal a soul."

Hence, Shapiro said, the question revolves around a determination of when the unborn child is "ensouled," an issue on which Jewish rabbis hold varying opi-

nions, some maintaining that one has a soul at conception, while others claim that one has no soul until birth.

The Rev. Cairns said that until society reaches a consensus on whether abortion is murder, deciding on its rightness or wrongness should be an individual matter.

McCarthy said that the Catholic Church — consistent with its position that abortion is murder — believes it must attempt to influence society to outlaw abortion. Such a conviction compels many Catholics to participate in civil disobedience against abortion clinics, she said, adding that in her view, such civil disobedience must always be non-violent.

Shapiro said that the Talmud notes the "law of the land is the law of the land," but then goes on to say, "you can influence it," and in some cases, one's moral duty may be to disobey the law.

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