German Bishops “Approve” a Morning-After Pill that Does Not Exist

Catholic hospitals and physicians in Germany left out in the cold by a decision that ignores science

PRI Staff / March 1, 2013

According to a new statement by the German Bishops’ Conference, Catholic physicians and hospitals can now prescribe and administer the morning-after pill (MAP) in cases where a woman is a victim of sexual assault as long as it does not cause an abortion.

The trouble with this declaration is that the morning-after pill is a known abortifacient. While it acts in some cases by preventing conception, in others it prevents the implantation of an already conceived human being. The embryo is aborted. Because it is impossible to say in any given case how it will act, a MAP abortion is always a possibility.

How did the German Bishops’ Conference come to such a pass? The short answer is that it caved under intense media pressure.

Last month in Cologne a woman who claimed to be a victim of sexual assault was given a prescription for the “morning after pill” by an emergency center doctor, Irmgard Maiworm. Maiworm later claimed that she had contacted nearby St. Vincent’s Hospital to do a follow-up exam on the woman but was refused. Both the hospital and the Cologne Archdiocese later denied that potential rape victims were being turned away.

Pardon me for thinking the whole scenario was a set-up.

Set-up or not, much of the German media seized the opportunity to attack Catholic hospitals and, by extension, the Church itself, for “refusing to treat victims of sexual assault.” At this
point the German Episcopal Conference attempted to placate its critics by announcing that it had approved the use of certain kinds of MAP in rape cases.

It justified its about face by referring to a presentation by Cardinal Karl Lehmann (Mainz), the president of the Doctrinal Commission of the German Bishops’ Conference. Cardinal Lehmann called for the use of the “morning after pill” to be reevaluated in the light of new formulations of the pill which may only prevent conception, not implantation. The text does not identify these “new formulations,” however.

Now as far as we at PRI are aware, no MAP pill exists, whatever its chemical formula, that does not prevent implantation at least part of the time. The "new formulations" referred to by the German bishops that supposedly do not cause abortions do not, in fact, exist.

If such formulations existed, then Bayer Schering Pharma, the principal manufacturer of MAP, would surely be shouting it from the rooftops. The company would prevail on the FDA to stop calling MAP an anti-implantation drug. It would shut down its shadow MAP factories in Latin America, which it created in order to avoid having the abortion controversy negatively impact its other business there. But Bayer Schering is doing none of these things. Instead, the company has this to say about its latest MAP, Levonelle:

---

**The precise mode of action of Levonelle One Step is not known.**

At the recommended regimen, levonorgestrel is thought to work mainly by preventing ovulation and fertilisation if intercourse has taken place in the preovulatory phase, when the likelihood of fertilisation is the highest. *It may also cause endometrial changes that discourage implantation.* Levonelle One Step is not effective once the process of implantation has begun. (italics added)

---

Not to mince words, but if you “discourage” a human embryo from implanting then you *kill*
it, plain and simple, by denying it nutrition and hydration.

There have always been those who—whatever cocktail of chemicals a particular brand of MAP contained—have denied an abortifacient effect. Their usual tactic is to define MAP abortions out of existence. They do this by claiming, falsely, that pregnancy begins at implantation, not conception. Thus they are able to tell women who have already conceived that “MAP can’t cause you to abort because you are not pregnant.”

To their credit, the German Bishops’ Conference does not rely on this “implantation deception” in approving MAP. But it is equally unscientific for the Conference to claim that “non-abortifacient” morning after pills exist in the absence of evidence of same.

Where human lives are at stake, we must always err on the side of caution.

As far as rape is concerned, the Church’s position is clear: In the strictest sense, rape is not a sexual act at all, but is rather a violent assault where the victim has the right to self-defense. To put it bluntly, the rapist has no right to have his sperm fertilize the eggs of the woman he has raped. It is therefore permissible to prevent his sperm from doing so by removing them from the body of a woman who has been thus violated. If there were a pill that acted only to prevent conception in cases of rape, then it would be licit to use it.

Once conception has occurred, however, the situation changes, since another human being has come into existence and, as such, is deserving of protection. The German Bishops’ Conference rightly rules out the use of “any methods that involve the death of the embryo.” To reiterate: every known morning after pill has abortifacient effects.

The German Bishops’ Conference has neatly boxed itself in. On the one hand it wishes, in cases of rape, to authorize the use of a kind of morning-after pill that does not exist. On the other hand it condemns the use of all kinds of morning-after pills that do exist.

This confusion has, not surprisingly, invited attack from those who wish to see the moral authority of the Church destroyed. A number of German media outlets have editorialized that the “approval” of MAP does not go far enough, and that the Church needs to accept abortion, at least in cases of rape. By the way, they add, it should also ordain women.

We hope the German Bishops’ Conference will reconsider its statement as soon as possible.
rest of the material on this site, such as pages, screens, and images, are under copyright by Population Research Institute. Please contact us for information on reuse. People pictured on this site do not thereby express agreement with our views.