

## THE SECRET HISTORY OF SEX, CHOICE AND CATHOLICS

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“The Secret History of Sex, Choice and Catholics” features interviews with leading experts in the fields of theology, philosophy and ethics who examine Catholic traditions, teachings and beliefs on the following key issues:

- Abortion & Contraception
- HIV & AIDS
- Sex & Sexuality
- Religion in Public Policy

### ABOUT

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**Catholics for Choice** seeks to shape and advance sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women’s well-being and respect and affirm the capacity of women and men to make moral decisions about their lives.

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### DISCUSSION GUIDE

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CATHOLICS  
FOR  
CHOICE

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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

- 1. What does being Catholic mean to you, your family and your friends?** Do you go to church? Do you share core beliefs with other Catholics, or is it more that you share an outlook on the world? What do you think of the statement made by Anthony Padovano at the start of the video: “You are a Catholic when you are baptized—period.” Is he right?
- 2. Dan Dombrowski talks about feeling like an oddity growing up.** He felt disconnected from other Catholics because he held very different views than those he heard all around him. Do you think his experience was common, and do young Catholics feel the same sense of disconnect with the church today?
- 3. Do open disagreements on issues of faith and belief weaken or strengthen the church?** If we disagree about matters of faith, do we run the risk of reducing our faith to merely another cultural identity?
- 4. Dan Maguire discusses the three traditional sources of truth within the Catholic church—the church hierarchy, the theologians and the *sensus fidelium*.** The *sensus fidelium* refers to the collective truth held by the congregation of the faithful. How does the laity contribute to Catholic doctrine? Should the views of ordinary Catholics play more of a role in shaping church teachings? For example, should Catholics’ widespread use of contraception influence church doctrine on this issue?
- 5. All of the speakers explain that the church’s teachings on contraception and abortion have changed quite dramatically over time.** In the 16th century, for example, all three pillars of the church—the hierarchy, the theologians and the laity—recognized that abortion was an acceptable choice in certain circumstances: when the life of the woman was threatened; when her reputation could be damaged; or if a married woman’s fidelity would be called into question. And in the 1960s, the ideas on contraception that seem so fixed now were actually much more fluid. Were you aware that the church has shifted position on these issues? And should the fact that the teaching on abortion has changed over time impact the validity and weight that we attribute to the church’s teachings today?
- 6. What is conscience? Do we all have one? Is it possible for an institution like the church to have a conscience?**
- 7. Thomas Aquinas said, “He who acts against his conscience always sins.”** What does this mean and why is conscience so central to our moral decisions? If our own conscience must be our guide, what, if any, role does the church play in shaping our moral choices and actions?
- 8. Does following our conscience mean that we should impose our moral outlook onto others?** For example, does a pharmacist who has a conscientious objection to contraception have a right to refuse to dispense birth control pills to a woman whose conscience has led her to choose them? Is it possible to act in good conscience when such actions prevent others from exercising their own moral autonomy? How is this dilemma to be resolved?
- 9. Sheila Briggs compares the hierarchy’s slowness to take up demands for civil rights in the 1950s with the hierarchy’s opposition to gay marriage today.** She fears that the church may once again be on the wrong side of history. Is this comparison valid? Are there other issues you would like to see the church embrace?
- 10. Does the church have an obligation to periodically modernize in order to stay relevant? Or does seeking relevance come at the risk of undermining the church’s capacity to remain a distinct religious institution?**