

IDEAS 2

**International Online Teachers Society
Debate
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**International Online Teachers Society
Publishing Committee**



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THE 2ND INTERNATIONAL ONLINE TEACHERS SOCIETY ESSAY CONTEST

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REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH BILL – A CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

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The Reproductive Health Bill, popularly known as the RH Bill, is a Philippine Bill, promoting information on and universal access to both natural and modern family planning methods. It is formerly known as the Responsible Parenthood, Reproductive Health and Population and Development Bill. It was first proposed in 1998. Moreover, the principal author of this proposed Reproductive Health Care and Population Development Act of 2008 is Albay representative Edcel C. Lagman. Reproductive Health Bill is national in scope, comprehensive and according to him has no other intention than to help the Filipino families uplift their living from poverty and help the women avoid the life threatening risks of pregnancy.

Since then this bill has been very controversial since it has been a subject of many debates for almost a year. It is being opposed by concerned citizens, especially the pro-life, pro-family and pro-God groups regardless of creed or religion. Pro-life groups and even many professionals in the medical and nursing fields believe that physicians and policy makers should understand and respect the belief of their patients who consider human life to be very valuable from the moment of fertilization.

In the House of Representatives, this reproductive health bill is being presented as a health bill and anti-poverty bill at the same time. Actually, it is neither one of them. It is an ideological attack on human life, the family, our social and cultural values and it is very relevant to the debate about reproduction rights, which is the right to life. We all know that the Philippine Constitution says that the State "shall equally protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn since conception. If artificial contraceptives are medically proven to induce abortion as one of their mechanisms of action, then procurement and distribution of such family planning supplies are unconstitutional and illegal.

People from all walks of life have their own opinion about the bill, some are against it and others support it but a number of Senators also oppose the said bill. The church is against the RH Bill for the main reason that it contradicts the teachings of God. In fact even the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) still clings to the hope that anti-RH Bill members of the House will be able to block the controversial issue. Moreover, even the incoming CBCP president Archbishop Jose Palma expressed his desire of the ones in position to defend our stand for life, for God and for the sanctity of marriage.

The issue is very divisive for it even came to a point wherein the CBCP threatened to excommunicate the President, Benigno Aquino III if he supported the bill. On the other hand, others think that the RH Bill can help people especially the poor (to alleviate their way of living) and those who are ignorant about the proper family planning method usage. Therefore, population can be monitored and abortion can be minimized and lessened. The question still remains; will it be a solution to all known problems of the Philippine society?

Questions for discussion:

1. Will the RH Bill really come as a one-size-fits-all solution to the problems of the Philippine society?
2. Do the majority of the people support this advocacy?
3. Is the RH Bill an answer to poverty?
4. What is your stand about the Reproductive Health Bill?
5. Do the pros weigh more than the cons of this said bill?



RH BILL: THE ANALOGY, THE IRONY

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The proposed Reproductive Health Bill which is simply abbreviated as “RH Bill” has aroused the attention of many skeptics all over the Philippine archipelago. While others are skeptical, the bill has also gained sympathy from considerable number of supporters who undoubtedly believe on its provisions. Conflict arose between these two warring sides thus causing the explosion of a very big controversy. The RH Bill was proposed by its principal author Rep. Edcel C. Lagman of Albay who is strongly opposed by the intimidating unified forces of the church – the bishops, the priests, the nuns and other so called “pro-life groups.” However, is the bill worth the skeptical questioning? Is it something fearful? Let us examine what the bill covers first before we make any prejudgment. According to its proponents, the bill provides information and access to natural and modern family planning. It promotes breastfeeding and even prevents abortion. It addresses to violence against women and provides reproductive health education for the youth of appropriate ages. These provisions are clearly discussed on the complete copy of the proposed bill. With these provisions, the church and other “pro-life groups” completely believe just the opposite instead. They maintained that the proposed RH Bill is “anti-life.” That it will somehow spawn a culture of promiscuity and abortion rather. From these grounds, let’s delve into the analogy and irony of the issue.

What is the analogy of it? First, the RH Bill has been akin to a boxing match between the raging church and the equally powerful state. Both sides have been throwing solid combination of punches against each other leaving the Filipino masses knocked down instead. Moreover, this bill is like the destructive earthquake that hit Fukushima, Japan that left nothing other than disorder, chaos and divisiveness among men. With the emergence of this controversy, the Filipino esprit de corps has once become divided. Divided by the disparity of moral precepts; torn down by conflicting ideologies. Shall we wait for another Pacquiao’s fight to make us united again as one nation?

What’s the irony of it? First, the church, though legally separated from the state as mandated by Article 2, Section VI of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, still exerts substantial influence on politics and public opinion. This practice has been rooted from the Spanish-era “friarocracy” in which no rule should be obeyed other than a “friar rule.” In fact, President Aquino was even threatened by the CBCP to be excommunicated the moment he approves the bill. Is this a Christ-like attitude? I don’t think so. Furthermore, Catholic authorities and other “pro-life” groups persistently opposed the passage of the bill while majority of Catholic church-goers are in favor of it as proven in different reliable surveys. Pulse Asia Survey on September 2008 showed that 71% of Filipinos are in favor of the passage of the bill. In fact, 76% of them are Catholics. In addition, ABS-CBN concluded on their survey on November 2010 that 7 out 10 Filipinos are in favor of the RH Bill. Now, if the majority has already spoken; if we believe on “vox populi, vox dei” – that the voice of the people is the voice of God, shall we still hesitate to give the best interests for our people?

On the verge of these contradicting ideologies between the church and the state, there are still voices left unheard – the masses. Though the majority of them favored the passage of the RH Bill as shown on reliable surveys, it does not reconcile both ends. The lawmakers and the clergies still continue to squabble instead.

To put an end to this controversy, the state with the support of the church should initiate a plebiscite to come up with an impartial decision whether the RH Bill should be approved or not. It might costs a lot but it’s the only way to end the fight. No need to excommunicate anybody. All we need is a collective consensus from the masses. After all, the supreme power of the land should supposedly emanate from the voice of its people, neither from the state nor from the church alone. We did a bloodless People Power Revolution in 1986. Why not make a peaceful referendum today. Hopefully, this makes sense.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is an analogy? How it differs from irony?
2. What is your stand on the RH Bill controversy? Defend your answer.
3. What do you mean by “friarocracy”? Elaborate your answer.
4. Comment on the statement, “The voice of the people is the voice of God.”
5. Should the church be ideally and legally separated from the state? Defend your answer.



RH Bill is unnecessary

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The passing of the Reproductive Health Bill, known as the RH Bill, has not only been a controversial issue but has raised a lot of objections upon the Filipino people. There were a lot of contentions on the pros and cons of the said bill but at the end of the discussion, the question still remains, "Is this bill really necessary to be enacted as a law?" A lot of critics even government officials has been very vocal about this measure, i.e., they strongly oppose the passage of this bill.

The RH Bill is unnecessary and superfluous. Many of its provisions are already included and well covered in the Magna Carta for Women which recognize the rights of women and families in their choices of family size and the rearing of their children. As it is, we have enough laws and the executive branch has sufficient administrative powers to enforce what the vaunted RH Bill purports to provide. All that this bill will bring about is to promote promiscuity since you will let the people believe that contraception prevents pregnancy. It will then encourage young people to engage in premarital sex. This promiscuity is what brings about "unwanted pregnancies" and when contraceptives fail, abortion follows.

The passage of this bill will also mean that the employers will be compelled to provide free reproductive health care services, supplies, devices, surgical procedures (including vasectomy and ligation) to their employees and if they fail to comply will be subjected to fines or even imprisonment. The bill also makes a recommendation for two children per family (the basis of which is population reduction) but in doing so it begins to encroach upon the constitutional statement that "The State shall defend the right of spouses to found a family in accordance with their religious convictions and the demands of responsible parenthood". Parents too will not agree to the RH Bill, that their children (ages 10-17) be taught their sexual rights and the means to have a satisfying and safe "sex" life as part of their school curriculum. They also lose their parental authority over a minor child who was raped and found pregnant. As citizens, we would not want to be subjected to imprisonment or fine for expressing an opinion against the RH Law if passed.

To sum it up, will the RH Bill benefit the people (to combat poverty) or is it against our moral principles and the use of public funds for contraceptives alone? For me, the RH Bill is a question of conscience; one can not legislate or enact any law which is directly related to conscience. If this will be passed as a law, it becomes mandatory for each couple to follow some of the provisions of the bill. Then, it is no longer according to the dictate of their conscience or any other institutions except the government.

Questions for discussion:

1. Is the RH Bill necessary to be passed as a law?
2. Will it be better for the RH Bill to be a policy instead of a law?
3. Will the passage of the RH Bill prove beneficial to the people?
4. Wouldn't we lose some of our human rights the moment RH Bill is passed?
5. What does your conscience dictate about the RH Bill?



RH BILL: Church versus State: The Battle over Responsibility

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It is just funny how things turned upside down with the emergence of the RH Bill controversy. Funny, in the sense that concerned authorities from both the church and the state are giving their all to outwit each other. Funny, because this issue has already dwelt into the deepest part of each other's emotions unveiling a lot of pride, throwing a lot of foul words, evoking a lot of anger, causing a lot of disappointments and even shedding a lot of tears from either side. After all, we are still humans and are capable of many emotions.

The lawmakers had proposed a bill that would answer to the growing problems of violence against women, overpopulation, pre-marital sex, poverty, abortion and the like. But the clergies and other anti-RH Bill groups opposed to it with all their might since accordingly, it can aggravate to the growth of the problems instead. The rationality of the lawmakers was countered by the suspicion of the clergies.

Now, who really owns the responsibility of taking good care of the herd? Who really has the sincere concern for the masses? Is it the church or, the state? If the church has done something to prevent pre-marital sex, unwanted pregnancies and abortion, then why is it that the Philippines, based on reliable surveys, still recorded a high rate of pre-marital sex cases, unwanted pregnancy incidences and abortion? Isn't it worth the skeptical questioning considering that most of the involved are Catholics? What an irony! If the church has taught decent and moral living to these people, then there must something be wrong with their teaching. So if the church can't handle it, the state should take over but still in accordance with the moral precepts taught by the church.

Now, what does it mean if the RH Bill is enacted as a law?

Does it necessarily mean proliferation of premarital sex cases? The answer is NO! Why it proliferates if it is happening already? Instead, if the bill is enacted as a law, it provides reproductive health education to the youth of appropriate ages. It was never mentioned in the bill that the teacher should encourage or even compel his students to do pre-marital sex. As a Christian, I believe that the teacher will never ever do that even if the bill is approved or not.

Does it necessarily mean upholding the culture of abortion? The answer is NO! Why it upholds if abortion is happening already? The bill maintains that abortion should still be considered a crime except for the few necessary abortion cases done by doctors. Does it necessarily impose two-child policy? The answer is No! Instead, families are encouraged to control. The bill will never force or compel families to bear only two children.

Does the rejection or disapproval of the RH Bill means salvation of all from the raging fire of hell? The answer is NO! The approval or disapproval of the bill does not guarantee your salvation. Salvation is individual, it has never been collective. The way we lived our lives on earth is the sole basis for our salvation whether you support or reject the RH Bill. The incessant battle between the lawmakers and the clergies about the RH Bill has become a challenge to all of us. It has made us think and weigh things carefully. It has led us to different possibilities.

But, there's one thing that should be considered. The RH Bill is a perfect shield to address the threat of the growing pre-marital sex cases, unwanted pregnancy incidences and abortion rates. These problems have been existing, and are transparent. Thus, it can never be answered by ignorance alone. The proponents are just trying to combat the problem in a perfect way of skirmishing it. Nonetheless, the state did not, and will never deny the Christian teachings. In fact, the bill was polished according to the Christian's standard of morality. I hope everybody will understand it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Based from the essay, what makes the RH Bill funny?
2. Why is it that the other Christian religious denominations favored the passage of the RH Bill?
3. Aside from teaching and preaching, what can the church do to prevent the problems of pre-marital sex, unwanted pregnancies and abortion?
4. If you were to change the title, what could it be and why?
5. Get the main points of the essay and comment about it.



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