

Corporations should not be considered individuals when it comes to religious freedom

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

December 3, 2013

The courts have been inundated by cases from corporations who refuse to provide insurance for contraception based on the religious beliefs of their owners. [The Supreme Court will be hearing the cases soon](#). As a clergyperson, I'm obviously concerned about people being able to have the freedom to practice their faith. Yet as a woman, I am concerned about the health and dignity of people who need contraception.

What happens when those two things contradict one another?

That's where we find ourselves. The Obama administration exempted many religious groups from the health care law's requirements for contraception coverage, but now companies who say that they run their businesses on godly principles are refusing to provide coverage.

There are many questions for us to struggle with here, as people of faith. For one, **can a secular corporation engage in a religious exercise?** I would say no, because the argument that a company should be able to deny access to contraception is based on the **corporate personhood's right to free speech**.

Since 2010, corporations have been able to make political expenditures based on a First Amendment right granted to individuals. This has allowed all kinds of money to pour into our political system. This empowerment of corporations takes power away from individuals, because the voice of that corporate cash is too influential to ignore.

One might argue that corporations are made up of individuals. That might be true, but the individual opinions—opinions that are so vital for a democracy—are not taken into account equally. I live in a country where I can push a broom at a large corporation and still go to the polls and make my opinion known. My vote should be counted in the same way that the CEO of my corporation's vote is counted.

But when we talk about corporate personhood and its political expression (i.e., huge amounts of cash flowing into the political system), if my opinion broom-pushing clashes with the company's power holders, my voice is ignored, then my individual personhood is diminished.

Treating a corporation as a person when it comes to religious rights would have the same effect. It would take away from the influence of the individual.

I have a core, theological, Christian belief that women are made in the image of God. If a woman never has a child, she is a person of dignity because she is created by God. I practice that belief by using birth control.

I believe that sex is good, a gift from God, and can be enjoyed. Some would say that women should not have sex without consequences. They argue that sex without consequence wears down the moral fabric of our society. I object to that opinion, and I practice my belief by using birth control.

The United Nations has declared birth control a basic human right. They understand that women in poverty are often most affected when they are denied access to birth control. I agree with them. And I practice my belief by using birth control.

What happens when we allow corporate personhood to practice religion? Then we can deny the religious practices of the powerless individuals in that corporation.