

The image of God and the little pink pill

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I grew up along the beaches of Florida and couldn't get enough of that pounding on the sand. I swam against the tide and rolled with the force of the water. I loved the feeling of getting caught up in the turmoil of the waves until I didn't know which way was up.

But there was something I had to do before I could get to that shore. I often had to walk by a row of surfers, who would grade me. Standing with their lean, tan bodies, they looked me over and assigned me a number from one to ten, based on a few cuts of meat.

I went to school with most of them, so I could give them a big eye-rolling, undergirded with a sigh and a "seriously?" But the dreaded experience stuck with me. To this day, I wear a massive cover-up (it can also be used as a tent), until I get to the very edge of the water to shed it.

The sad thing is that women are not only reduced to their sexuality when they're on the shoreline. Even in our Christian theology, we have a terrible tendency to reduce the complicated facets of a woman—her intelligence, creativity, energy, talents, and fortitude—into one aspect. We can make it all about sex.

When St. Augustine wrote [On the Trinity](#), he tried to work out a conundrum. He wanted to figure out how women could be the image of God. He finally solved the puzzle by writing that when a woman is alone, then she is not in the image of God. It is only when she is joined with a man, when she is one flesh with him, she can be considered the image of God.

Of course, we cannot take our ideas of gender equality and try to compare them to a different time and culture. We shouldn't judge Augustine by our liberated standards. But, it is important to ask if we let Augustine's ideas seep into our current debates. Do we still do this? Do we reduce a woman's worth to her sexuality or her fertility?

It seems when we determine a woman's value based on whether she is sexually "pure," we do. In youth group, I was often told that if I went "too far" on a date, I would become "damaged goods." Like those surfers on the beach, the Christians around me were judging my worth solely on my sexuality.

Our current debates on birth control have the ability to reduce a woman to her sexuality as well. We know that contraception is good for the health of women. Birth control allows women to finish their education and be productive in the workforce. It keeps women and children out of poverty. Yet, Christians want to fight for a corporation's right to practice its faith by refusing to provide insurance coverage for contraception. The voices of politicians tell us that birth control is tearing at the moral fabric of our society and religious writers point to contraception as the reason for decline of Christianity.

(As an aside, the definition of when life begins has been very malleable. [Randall Balmer outlines](#) how the Southern Baptist Convention called for the legalization of abortion in 1971, 1974 and 1976. Then the pro-life movement defined the beginning of life as the moment of conception. Now some evangelicals want to talk about "[abortion pills](#)." Why is that? Do they want to push back the moment of conception?)

When the only religious voice is fighting against contraception, we tell a generation of women that Christians don't care about their education, productivity, or empowerment. We highlight the brooding sense that Christians don't want women to be intelligent, working beings, but we want a woman's worth to be solely based on her sexuality.

Where is the other faith narrative about birth control? Where are the voices that remind us that women are made in the image of God, whether they are joined with a man or not? Can we loudly proclaim that the moral fabric of our society will be stronger if women are educated and productive? Can Christians affirm contraception's ability to lift women and children out of poverty? Can we begin to understand that access to birth control is a social justice issue?

[As the Supreme Court gears up to hear whether for-profit corporations can act as individuals, extending their personal rights to the practice of religion](#), the voices of Christians who affirm a woman's rights to full health care and contraception have been drowned out. May we stand up with women, with the loud proclamation that we care about women's health and empowerment, because women are fully made

in the image of God.