Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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NCR published a recent editorial titled "Extremist attitudes on abortion get us nowhere," in which we wrote that state legislatures have busied themselves enacting laws to either restrict abortion rights or expand them, with extreme results in New York and Alabama. There is a reasonable compromise. Following are letters to the editor reacting to the editorial. They have been edited for length and clarity.

Men who are moralizing and preaching about abortion in churches and universities and publications, men who are legislating abortion bans, men who are funding supreme court seats in order to protect abortion bans, men who are pretending to care about the welfare of children while supporting structures that starve and abuse them: sit down.



You want to promote legislation for an abortion ban after a detectable heartbeat is present. I offer you this: no abusing anyone with a detectable heartbeat. No justification of the bombing of anyone with a detectable heartbeat. No shooting anyone with a detectable heartbeat. No beating anyone with a detectable heartbeat. No poisoning the food, the air, or the water of anyone with a detectable heartbeat. The angel of God said to Abraham, "Do not do the least harm to him."

When you have ended your violence against all those with a heartbeat, you can take a seat and listen to women's experience of the awful choices you have forced on them around reproductive health care. Meanwhile, without you in the room, women can address and take care of their health, their families and their communities in public the way they have always done in private.

CATHERINE MARESCA

Washington, D.C.

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"Democracy depends on compromise. There is a reasonable compromise." Do we compromise on the death penalty? Homicide? Nuclear weapons? Child abuse? Torture? Rape? Corruption? Subverting democracy? There are issues on which we do not compromise.

"One of NCR's principal objections to much pro-life rhetoric and policy has been its historic indifference to the traumatic circumstances, to say nothing of the financial precariousness women in such a situation often face." Guttmacher 2005 survey of "Reasons US Women have abortion": Socioeconomic reasons predominate. Why not remedy the social and economic factors and ensure support for women in precarious situations, rather than terminate the pregnancy?

"Nature itself dispenses with a high percentage of fertilized eggs." Nature itself eventually dispenses with every human life. We do not use that as a reason to justify similar action by us.

"Human life, whether it is a child in the womb, a child in Iraq, or a child at the U.S. border, should have its dignity respected and its life protected." Why don't we do that?

Procreation, pregnancy and childbirth concern the whole of society. Society provides some support, but in crisis, leaves the woman to act in desperation rather than out of freedom, or, dare I say it, love. Our social and economic system deters us from addressing the social determinants of abortion. This is our sin.

PÁDRAIG MCCARTHY

Dublin, Ireland

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While I don't always agree with your editorial stances, this one makes sense. Our insistence on our way or no way has resulted, I believe, in the destruction of multitudes of babies. We should have "compromised" back in the 1970s with the first trimester. That could have been a plausible pedestal on which to continue the fight.

But we were the purists and nothing but the moment of conception was acceptable. Being practical temporarily, compromising in this increasingly godless world may not

be ideal but it would have been real and it could have saved babies. Let's honor some reasonably acceptable position. For God's sake, it would be, at least, a beginning to an end.

JOAN MARTIN

Yonkers, New York

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I agree that the majority of Americans are somewhere in the middle and want to keep abortion legal, at least in cases of rape, incest and danger to the mother's health.

To me, the problem when discussing abortion is deciding when human life begins. I believe that the official Catholic teaching is that life begins at conception. If this position is accepted, then abortion is always a sin — but should it be illegal?

Others debate when the fetus can be considered a "person." I am not sure what that means, but it seems more of a legal term than biologic. To me, by the time the fetus has a nervous system, brain and beating heart and can feel pain by 8-10 weeks, this represents a human life, with its own unique DNA. I suspect that this may become clearer as science and ethics continue to advance.

Some also argue that abortion should be permissible until the fetus becomes viable outside the womb. One could argue that a one month infant is not viable outside the womb since it could not survive without total support from another person. I think that it is futile to use the non-viability argument in the abortion debate.

If we can ever agree when the fetus becomes a human life, then we can set a gestational stage limit under which abortion is permissible for any reason. Beyond that time, then we would need to decide if and when it would be permissible to end a human life and also how late in a pregnancy even these conditions would justify an abortion.

Abortion is an obviously a complex, emotional, legal, biological and moral issue. I do object to making it solely a woman's rights issue or a fetal rights issue. We have to reach some kind of ethical consensus acknowledging the rights of both parties and the interests of society.

STEPHEN FLYNN

Westlake, Ohio

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Your recent editorial on abortion ignores two facts that you should know well, but have decided to ignore for reasons that only you and God can understand.

1.The human zygote is a human being and its destruction, as well as that of the embryo or the fetus into which it evolves, is morally equivalent to a homicide.

2. Only in one case abortion can be justified: When the continuation of the pregnancy seriously menaces the physical health of the mother, and no other available treatment can be effective. Such cases are, fortunately, very rare nowadays.

As a physician with more than 50 years dedicated to the care of patients, I am well aware of the sufferings and emotional sequelae associated with a pregnancy caused by rape. But it is well known, though intentionally ignored by many, that an abortion does not solve most, and more than once has worsened them.

The destruction of an embryo or fetus generated by a rape is the only known case in which the penalty for a crime is a death sentence inflicted on the offspring of the criminal, while the latter is infrequently prosecuted.

As Christians, our efforts should be directed to the sanctioning of laws that would guarantee the physical, emotional and economic support of women with unwanted pregnancies, and a streamlined implementation of effective adoption procedures.

ALBERTO ACHAVAL-GIRAUD

Córdoba, Argentina

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One thing I think you missed in your editorial about abortion is the fact that religious leaders, especially Catholic bishops, have failed miserably in their roles as teachers to convince their followers.

They have chosen to use the issue as pretense for promoting the agenda of their Republican friends rather than developing a real, reasonable, compassionate teaching that recognizes the diversity of teaching among various religious and non-religious groups in this country.

Catholic bishops have no credibility anymore. And are trying to overcome their failure as teachers by using U.S. law to enforce their agenda.

W. W. O'BRYAN

Hepler, Kansas

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Your recent column on abortion ended with a reflection that there are countries that have pursued a compromise that include "programs are enacted that would make abortion rarer." It would be helpful to support such a perspective with detail and statistics. If one compromises on the direct killing of individual human life, it can be argued that such a compromise is an "extreme" deviation from the laws of God as revealed by Moses.

The compromising option would further dilute any inertia that exists to provide the effective maternal care that is critical for women facing challenging pregnancies. We can do much better. Presenting as a nation that stands for human rights while maintaining a legal framework for massive domestic killing is a colossal discredit for the entire world to observe.

ANTHONY GUTEK

Calgary, Alberta

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In the 17th century, Frenchman Blaise Pascal said the greatest of evils is civil war. Abortion is today's civil war in America. Every year we kill almost as many of our children as Americans killed in all our wars combined.

The revered Mother Teresa said, "Abortion is really war against the child, murder by the mother herself." She also said, in essence, that a nation who would condone the murder of a baby in the womb, has lost its soul.

In 1973, the Supreme Court, in *Roe* vs. *Wade*, discriminated against an entire class of living Americans solely on the basis of age and place of residence. How sad that the most dangerous place in the world for an American child is in their mother's womb.

Ending this war on our children is the civil rights movement of our generation. Abortion remains the greatest social injustice of all time. Every day in America, over 2,000 babies are denied justice and executed with no judge, no jury, and no trial.

We need to speak up and stand up for those who cannot speak for themselves. There just may not be a higher calling than defending the defenseless and being a voice for the voiceless.

TERRY McDERMOTT

Rancho Santa Margarita, California

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So, what did Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have to say about societal compromises on abortion? The issue could stand a little compromise.

TED KONDEK

Edmore, Michigan

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