

Laws don't change minds and hearts

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In the recent decision by the Supreme Court, some have found victory and others despair, but I have found neither. The reason being that laws don't change hearts or minds; they do not bring about conversion in people. They also do not always set a standard for the moral right or wrong. They are human creations based on an ever-varying set of cultural standards. What remains is a multi-faceted issue that is not resolved and even worse, the possibility of dialogue is now further away. People are entrenched in their ideologies and political positions and the language is so emotionally charged that shouting is the order of the day. In the meantime, reason and civility are lost, and the real issues are never actually spoken about. Pro-life, Pro-choice, conservative, liberal are words without meaning since none of them have any consistency of thought and all lack the ability to affect change that is inherent to the common good. But, since I have been challenged to make a statement, I will and if I do my job well, I will both offend and find support from all sides if my thoughts are consistent.

Over the course of time, two major monikers have been created to "define" the opposing positions. The "pro-choice and pro-life" camps are not actually either when you look at the positions, they hold on to in various issues. Though neither group likes the titles, pro-abortion or anti-abortion, but it is in fact what they most hold to as their political stance. If the groups were pro-choice or pro-life, they would propose a litany of consistent positions. Let me give you some examples.

A pro-life person for example would not only hold that abortion is wrong, but they would also support relaxing immigration laws, promote the concept of a living wage, be an environmental activist, be anti-war, support tougher gun laws, be for the expanding of social services and Medicaid. They would also endorse expanding equal rights legislation, ensuring fair and equitable housing policies and advocate for wider access to voter legislation only to name a few.

On the other hand, a pro-choice person would be for less government intrusion into private lives, would reject the government requiring such things as taking a vaccine, they would support less gun laws, not be an advocate for anything that in any way infringed on the rights of any individual to choose what or what not to do.

In the end, what is usually defined as liberal is promoting less freedom and a more top-down approach to government and what is often defined as conservative is in fact advocating for more personal freedom. Ironic, isn't it? Either way, both positions look to the Government to be the answer. Personally, I think that is the wrong approach.

On the abortion issue, I will refrain from the theological or religious points so as not to simply have my views dismissed on that basis alone. In a desire to engage in a discussion, the sheer mention of God is a hinderance rather than an aid and only further ignites the emotional aspect of the conversation bringing us back to the shouting match I so long desire to avoid.

It would be fair to say that the Founders of our country had no concept of enshrining the practice of abortion in the Constitution of our country. The advocacy of the courts 50 years ago was a judicial overreach because it created legislation. The purpose of the court is to interpret laws not to create

them. If the Congress was inclined to create such a law or to establish a separate amendment to the Constitution, there is a proper procedure at both the state and federal level. Further, the concept of “rights” also requires the natural limitations that arise from the common good and from natural law. A “right” is not a blanket permission to do as I please, otherwise we would have anarchy, and no one is advocating that position.

It must also be accepted, based on science alone, that a human woman who is impregnated results in the producing of a human baby. Nothing else can result from that reality. Even the question, “when does life begin” is easily answered by simple science. Life begins at conception, since it is then that the process begins. The changes happen and are rapid and the result is undeniable. To deny this reality by the using of scientific names is only intended to dehumanize the process and thus make it more acceptable to end what is naturally occurring. The declaration that it is a child is not subject to the desire of the woman.

Before we move further into the merits of the positions taken by those in the abortion issue, it is important to also look at the establishment of Planned Parenthood. The organization was started in 1916 by Margret Sanger, who had founded the American Birth Control League, prior to it morphing into Planned Parenthood. It was not until recently that the organization of Planned Parenthood even denounced many of the beliefs of its founder. Margret Sanger held many opinions that should be repulsive to any person of conscience. She held that those who sought to be parents, should have to request permission from the state after evaluation as to if they would be good parents. She further held that being given permission once, did not mean that you would be given permission again. Sanger held many opinions that are offensive against people of color and the poor and that was one of the reasons so many of the Planned Parenthood offices were placed in low-income areas. Even a cursory review of the opinions of Margret Sanger causes one to question why it took until only a few years ago for this group to disavow her positions. Interestingly, Sanger also believed that abortion would not be necessary if people had easy access to birth control.

Now, let us look at the merits of some of the arguments that are used in support of abortion on demand. I state it that way, since in fact, that is what is at the core of the debate today. There are some cases, where in as a secondary cause, an abortion could be seen as acceptable, but the focus of many people who support abortion promote the “on demand” aspect of the issue.

One phrase often used is the “my body, my choice” position. This stance is flawed on the very simple fact that you can’t do what you want to your body simply because it is yours. For example, you cannot request that your left arm be removed since you are primarily right-handed or vice versa. It is not an acceptable weight loss procedure to remove a leg. Yet extreme as those examples are, they do follow the logic of the proposed statement of support. Yet again, even though I have rights, there are limits to those rights and thus I cannot do as I please, even with my own body. Further, the abortion is directly impacting the body of another. Though the child is inside of you, it is not your body but the baby’s body that is directly impacted. Even if you could do what you wish to yourself, you are not free to do what you wish to another.

The second common argument revolves around “reproductive health care”. Unless there is an impending risk to the life of the woman, how can this be an issue of health care? There is an argument that could be made regarding birth control, but abortion should not be used as a form of birth control. No woman is expected to bear untold number of children and every married couple should make that

decision based upon their conscience. The vast array of options regarding birth control in our society provides every woman with easily accessible options of birth control to choose from other than aborting a child.

Having proper access to quality medical care is a right. With that I agree. We should provide all people with the care that is necessary. The dilemma arises between what we want and what we need. The focus on want over need leads us to the problem that arises from the prominence of situational ethics. What that position produces, to use a popular phrase is to keep moving the goal posts. In situational ethics, what is right in one case may not be right in another. It is not the principle but the situation that is the determining factor. So, if someone were to kill a person I loved, I can demand the full force of the law on the perpetrator, but in the case where someone I loved committed the act, I would request the mercy of the court. See the problem? If the value is justice, then that should be the determinate in either case. When we see the situation as it impacts me personally as the primary determinate, then we have lost the value of the virtue.

Once we have lost the virtue, we become subject to the currents of life. Instead of having something to help direct our actions, we allow the waves to take us where they please. The person and then society drifts from position to position without any consistency of thought or purpose. The "good" is only understood regarding how something directly impacts me at this moment. We are unable to determine even the common good as a result of situational ethics. The result of this thinking is clear is it not? The ambivalence of society, the contradictions in thought and policy, the obsession with the individual, the over consumption of resources, the reduction of other people to the level of objects for my personal gratification and so forth are the fruits of generational plantings of the seeds of situational ethical thought.

Another appeal to the emotional aspect of the issue of abortion is found in the cases of rape and incest. It is important to note that rape is placed under the civil law in the section on violent crime rather than sexual crime, since in most cases, power and not sex is the driving factor in the rape. Further, in very few cases, is there even the possibility of pregnancy as a result of a rape. That argument is not valid but is a powerful tool on the emotional level. In the end, no matter how the child is conceived, it is not the fault of the child. I am not detached from the emotional and traumatic reality of a child conceived as a result of rape, incest or human trafficking on the woman. No one is telling her that she must raise the child and more must be done to provide for that woman for her mental as well as physical care, but the termination of the life of the child is also not the solution. The removal of the child will not eliminate the need for support for the woman to recover from the trauma but could very likely, only increase it into the future.

If the debate about abortion were about its limited use, the debate would be significantly different. The problem is about it being on demand and at any point in the pregnancy. Almost everyone I know agrees with the need to do more to protect women from abuse. We need to make sure that all people have proper access to health care, both physical and mental. There is no argument that we need to do more to make sure that people have enough to live on, support their children, provide access to safe and affordable housing. We need to provide adequate resources so that women can pursue their education and professional careers while ensuring proper childcare options. More must be done to provide flexibility in the workplace for women, especially single mothers. More must be done to hold men accountable for the children they are equally responsible for. Women should not face poverty

while the man is free to pursue his education, career or another life with no sense of obligation to the child. It isn't fair and it isn't just.

There is almost no conversation about the emotional impact on women who have had abortions. We treat it rather cavalierly and present it as if there were no lasting consequences. Women suffer emotionally from the effects of abortion. There are physical implications in many cases that are not spoken about. We want to believe that it is "safe" but that is not always the case. Legal steps to assure safety such as requiring clinics that perform abortions to have certain standards of medical safety or be connected to a hospital have often been met with resistance by the clinics themselves and abortion proponents primarily because of costs. That seems contrary to the desire to provide safe abortions.

This does not diminish the reality of what happens to the child, especially those aborted due to late term abortions. The child is not buried with the dignity due a human person and the discarding of the child is idiomatic of the nature of the problem.

I believe that government is not the answer to our problems, we are. If we want to see an end to abortion and to care for women, then we must take concrete actions to make that happen. Government should reflect the society and should not be the driver of attitudes. For example, there are many empty school buildings, why is not more being done to renovate them into affordable housing for single mothers that includes a day care center in the same location? The role of government is to make sure that such efforts are possible and not create roadblocks to the redevelopment of these buildings.

If the goal is to bring about an end to abortion and to care for women, both sides should be working together to address the root causes of what is driving women to seek this procedure. Both sides should be looking to the systemic realities that lead women to the point of desperation. No law will change those realities. Government often seeks to put band-aids on problems and then pat themselves on the back as if they have solved the problem. Every time I hear some politician say that "this is the solution", I have a mental image of Neville Chamberlin coming off the plane with a piece of paper in his hand waving it and telling people that "we have peace in our day" after a negotiation session with Adolf Hitler. We all know how that turned out.

We often pray for our country, but what are we doing as an individual, as a society or as a community of believers? If we took real steps not to change laws but to change lives and situations of lives, what need would there be to eliminate a pregnancy? What are we doing to create a more just society? Government is not some omnipotent reality, though often those in those positions see themselves as demi-gods. We fail at our responsibility when we look to others to solve our problems. The solution is in our hands. But the first thing we need to do is to stop yelling and start listening. We need to see what we agree on and how can we bring about actual solutions to real problems. Abortion is the part of the iceberg that we see and eliminating the top will not make it better. The Titanic did not hit the part of the iceberg it saw, but the part under the water and that is what caused it to sink. If the two sides only look at the top, it will cause our society to sink as well.

That is why I am neither rejoicing nor falling into despair. I believe that this moment in history is providing us with an opportunity to set a new course for our country. It is not about making abortion legal or illegal, it is about making it unnecessary. If we really care about women, if we really care about the unborn, then we better find a way to talk to each other and find real solutions to the real problems.

