

Changes necessary in fight against abortion

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated Columnist

It's time for a sea-change in the leadership of the pro-life movement — religious and political alike. Otherwise, those who are committed to the defense of human life all across the spectrum run the risk of losing everything.

This has been a year of ominous reversals for the pro-life cause. It began, ironically, with the Supreme Court decision in July (*Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services*) that was initially hailed by pro-life forces as a dramatic turn in their favor and against the pro-choice movement.

But pro-life fortunes have been going steadily downhill ever since, culminating in the recent defeat of gubernatorial candidates tarred with the anti-choice brush.

The extent to which the pro-life side has lost ground is nowhere dramatized more tellingly than in a nationally syndicated column last month by the well-known conservative commentator, James J. Kilpatrick.

Kilpatrick taunts and mocks fellow conservative Henry Hyde of Illinois, the U.S. Congress' most outspoken opponent of abortion and the author of the famous Hyde Amendment. The amendment made federal funding of abortions illegal.

What stirred Kilpatrick's ire was Hyde's opposition to the Boxer Amendment, which would have permitted poor women and girls to obtain abortions through Medicaid if they become pregnant by reason of rape or incest.

Kilpatrick ridiculed Hyde's use of the word "inconvenient" (in his speech against the amendment) to characterize a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest.

He challenged Hyde and his Congressional allies on the issue to consider what they would do if one of their own daughters had become pregnant through rape.

Would they honestly insist that she carry "the despised infant" to term? Would they then claim the child as their grandchild? Would they regard this as a mere "inconvenience"?

Read Kilpatrick's mocking words: "Inconvenient. What a jolly little word! Madam finds it inconvenient to play bridge

on Tuesday. Would it also be inconvenient to have tea on Friday?"

He continued, "Dear me, says the gentleman from Illinois, what an inconvenience it is to have inconvenient things happen. The gentleman cannot imagine a woman's living for nine months with the product of hate and brutality growing in her womb.

He would spare the well-to-do such an inconvenience. Their right to obtain an abortion would not be disturbed. It is only the poor woman, dependent upon Medicaid, who would effectively be compelled to undergo this ordeal.

Sweet Henry! Fair Henry! He weeps for the innocent embryo; he has no tears left for the innocent woman."

When the highly experienced Republican political consultant Eddie Mahe recently described the anti-abortion leadership as "stunningly inept" (*The New York Times*, Oct. 13), he knew what he was talking about.

In opposing funding for abortions even in the case of rape and incest, the pro-life lobby shows itself to be politically inept indeed.

Since the effect of such opposition is only to prevent the funding of abortions in the case of poor women and girls, many Americans — including those opposed to abortion in principle — perceive the pro-life lobby to be morally inconsistent.

It's acceptable for rich and middle-class women and girls to have abortions in such circumstances, but not for the poor.

But this pillar of U.S. conservatism, James J. Kilpatrick, went beyond the ridicule of a fellow conservative in his October column. He also blasted away at the notion that abortion is a "public matter" (Hyde's words).

"A more intensely private matter could not be imagined," Kilpatrick declared. "If there is one basic tenet of the conservative philosophy, it is that government must not interfere with the private lives of a free people."

In a major address at Georgetown University in October, 1984 (at the end of a presidential election campaign in which abortion became a major issue), Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago argued that abortion is indeed a question of "public morality."

God provides for those people who have faith in his teachings

By Cindy Bassett
Courier Columnist

Even in the scant light of dawn, the woman already could see from her window that today's cloudless sky held no promise of rain. There was not even the dull, humid mist that usually hung over the landscape to offer the parched earth a few meager drops of moisture.

Everyone in the region knew the story that preceded the misery of the great drought. Three years ago, the prophet, Elijah, had gone before King Ahab and predicted it. "Thus says the Lord, because you have turned away from Me to worship the pagan god, Baal, there will be no rain until I say so," he said.

King Ahab had ordered the entire nation of Israel to pray to Baal for rain. No rain had come. Now all of the brooks and

streams were nothing more than hardened, empty crevices to serve as a reminder of what they used to be.

She would never pray to Baal no matter how many edicts King Ahab issued. And yet, she thought wryly, the same relentless sun shines on poor widows and kings alike. Soon everyone would perish without food or water.

As she turned from the window, she gazed at her young son still asleep and she quickly stopped these gloomy thoughts. Even in the midst of suffering, there were still things to be thankful for in life. As she uttered a prayer to God, an idea occurred to her. There was enough flour and oil to prepare one last loaf of bread. Together they would eat and thank the Lord for this small blessing.

"Come, little one," she called out to the boy. "Help your poor mother gather sticks for a fire."

The two went out, hand in hand, to do their simple task. They were nearly finished when she looked up and saw the stranger standing nearby. His face was tired and dusty from what must have been a long journey.

"Please, may I have a drink of water?" he said to her.

She could not deny this humble request. But, as she prepared to get some water, his second request stopped her. "I am very hungry," he said. "Bring me some bread,



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

But he also acknowledged that this claim is not self-evident. It is we who have to make "a rationally persuasive case," he said, if we expect the civil authority to intervene on this matter of high moral consequence.

Obviously, we haven't as yet been able to make that case.

We have to keep trying, to be sure, but it seems clearer than ever that our efforts will come to nothing so long as right-wingers — doctors, politicians, bishops, the whole lot of them — are leading the fight.

One may despair of the likelihood that a sea-change in the pro-life leadership can occur at this late date. But unless it does, the struggle to defend the sacredness of life before birth is doomed to failure.

The one-issue crowd has lost the fight. It's time — at long last — to try on the seamless garment.



THE BIBLE CORNER

too."

"Sir, I have nothing left in my house but a few drops of oil and a bit of flour — enough perhaps for one last loaf of bread for me and my son."

He was not the least put off by her circumstances. "Do not be concerned," he told her. "Go now and prepare this bread for yourselves. Before you do, make a small loaf for me. For this is what God says: 'I will not allow the jar of oil or the bowl of flour to diminish until I send rain to the land.'"

The widow was stunned. Was this promise the raving of a man too long in the hot sun? "Who are you?" she asked when she found her voice again. "I am the prophet, Elijah," he replied.

Those words sent her quickly on her way. When she returned a short time later, she invited Elijah back to her house to share the meal. Together, the widow, her son and the prophet gave thanks to God. Afterwards, the oil and flour did not run out until the rain finally came just as God had promised.

Scripture Reference: 1 Kings 17:1-16.
Meditation: "Always be joyful. Always keep on praying. No matter what happens, be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

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