

Middle ground disappears on abortion issue

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Anna Quindlen is a young Catholic journalist who writes so well that *The New York Times* talked her out of a brief retirement. She had been doing regular essays on its inside pages, and now, on her second time around, she is published on its prestigious op-ed page.

Her recent column in the *Sunday Times* of January 28 is a disturbing piece. She argues that the middle ground in the abortion debate has, for all practical purposes, disappeared and that the usefulness of continued dialogue and debate is over.

"Today, on the issue of choice," she writes, "it is time for us to choose it, or lose it."

She readily concedes that those who believe that abortion is murder are "morally obligated to oppose it." Indeed, they have "no choice but to fight until they win."

"To say that this is imposing religious beliefs on others is absurd," she continues. "We have long ago agreed as a society that killing innocent people is the worst of our crimes."

But while Quindlen accepts the moral sincerity of the anti-abortion forces and defends their right to press their views, she does not accept their basic premise that abortion is murder.

She believes, like many others on the pro-choice side, that "in fact it is possible to be a little bit pregnant." For her, a fetus is a potential human being, not a human being itself.

"I know what pregnancy is like, and what parenthood is like, too," she concludes. "And if, some day, my daughter should find herself pregnant and unfit or unwilling to have a child of her own, I refuse to allow my country to treat her like a criminal."

Hard-liners can dismiss the Anna Quindlens of the world, but it would be an act of folly to do so. She speaks for many, many women — inside as well as outside the Catholic church. No threat of excommunication or hell fire will intimidate them.

What is clear is that those of us who are convinced of the immorality of abortion haven't been able thus far to convince others.

Too many Catholics as intelligent and as thoughtful and as gifted as Anna Quindlen are satisfied that abortion is a matter of women's rights alone.

It's not that they are callous about the rights of the unborn baby, nor that they approve the murder of one innocent human being to protect the freedom of another.

The fact is that they don't look upon the unborn fetus as a human being, but only a "potential" human being. And so for them it isn't an open-and-shut case of murder, as the anti-abortion side believes it to be.

Until now, many have placed their hopes in the so-called middle ground. Middle grounders know that an absolute prohibition is politically out of the question, but they believe that reasonable people (a majority) are morally offended by most abortions and are, therefore, open to some restrictions.

Those on opposite sides of the debate won't settle for any compromises. If you believe abortion is murder, how can you compromise? And if you don't believe abortion is murder, why should you compromise? The result: a stalemate.

That leaves it a political battle entirely, and the stronger side politically will win.

In the present circumstances, the pro-choice side would win the contest hands-down. Even the Republicans are beginning to cave in on the issue.

Lee Atwater, GOP national chairman, assures us now that his party is big enough for pro-choicers and pro-lifers alike. He promises that there will be no "litmus test" for Republican candidates. What is more important, President Bush has said the same thing.

Which means, therefore, that President Bush and his party will be supporting pro-choice candidates for the U.S. Senate in Illinois, and for the governorships of Pennsylvania and California this year.

For the pro-life purist that means that the Republican Party is now home for murderers and accomplices to murder. But mark my words, the Catholic pro-life lobby will find a way to absolve President



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Bush. You can count on it.

Meanwhile, the challenge remains on the table for middle grounders in this debate to make a convincing moral and political argument against abortion.

As Chicago's Cardinal Joseph Bernardin said in an address at Georgetown University in October, 1984, we have to make "a rationally persuasive case." I expect the authority of the state and the civil law to be invoked on this issue.

But if Anna Quindlen is right, time has already run out on us. One hopes she's not.

Jealousy brings Moses' sister almost to disaster

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

Miriam left her tent before sunup. She went quickly through the Hebrew camp until she came to the tent of her brother, Aaron.

Just before she entered, she glanced at the tent directly to the right. Inside she could hear the soft crying of Moses' son. It's not fair, she thought. Her anger churned inside her soul like a fire.

"Aaron, we must talk," she said. "Now that Moses has seen fit to marry that foreign woman, something must be done."

"Miriam, I'm afraid I don't understand," Aaron said wearily. "Zipporah died. Moses wanted the boys to have a good mother. There's nothing wrong in that."

"I was as good a mother to those boys as if they were my own!" Miriam cried bitterly. "There was no need for Moses to marry again."

"Why have you come here?" her brother asked pointedly.

"Do you think it is fair that God only speaks to Moses? Had it not been for me, Moses would have been drowned in the Nile River like so many other unfortunate Hebrew babies. Because of me, he grew up in a wealthy Egyptian household with his own mother to nurse him."

"Miriam, you are still not making any sense."



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She vented her frustration against Aaron. "How could I expect you to understand how I feel? You were made a priest by Moses and all of your sons after you. What have I ever received for all of my troubles?"

"What do you propose to do about it?"

"I want to go before God, like Moses, and see if he will speak to me," Miriam replied.

The sky was tinged with the rosy hues of dawn as the two of them went to the tent of the Lord's presence. Moses had erected the tent here in the wilderness to symbolize the Lord's presence among the Hebrews as they journeyed toward the Promised Land. This is where Miriam had seen Moses go to pray. His face had been radiant after the Lord had spoken to him.

As soon as Miriam and Aaron had both prayed, they heard the Lord speak. His words were angry and sharp against them both.

"How dare you talk against Moses! I speak to him face-to-face because I have chosen him to be my servant to the Hebrew people."

Local dance students will compete in world Irish dance contest

ROCHESTER — The senior dance group of the Murphy School will compete in the World Irish Dancing competition in Cork, Ireland, April 8-14.

The dance school — under the direction of Edward Murphy Jr. — qualified for the competition in Ireland after placing second in the Eastern Regional competition in Tarrytown, N.Y. last November.

Dance school students, many of whom attend parish schools in the area, performed a 12-hand choreography at the Eastern Regionals.

Four students from the school will be participating in solo events. Michael Galvin, who attends St. John the Evangelist Church in Rochester, placed first in the young men's solo category in

November. It marked the second time that Galvin placed first in the young men's category. He will compete against 30 other dancers from all over the world this April.

The group will spend the upcoming weeks rehearsing, performing and fundraising in preparation for the competition in Ireland. Once again this year, Rochesterians can see the dancers in the St. Patrick's Day parade and other related events in the community.

Neither Aaron or Miriam dared to utter another word. Both of them contemplated their sin in the clear light of day.

The next sound was a shrill cry from a soul twisted with unspeakable anguish. "Miriam, what's wrong? Oh, no!"

"Don't touch me! It's leprosy," Miriam managed to say. Her skin was ghastly white with the disease.

Together they went to see Moses. "When has God ever denied either of you? You've had all of your needs taken care of here in the desert," he said angrily.

"Please, Moses, it was foolishness," Aaron beseeched him. "Don't let our sister suffer because of it."

This time it was Moses who stood at the tent of the Lord's presence. "Please, God, heal my sister," he said.

Miriam was shut out from the Hebrew camp for seven days. Alone in her agony, she humbled herself before God. After that, the leprosy was gone from her skin and the jealousy from her heart.

As soon as she was well, the Hebrews set out again for the Promised Land. Moses led them for 40 years according to all of the instructions which the Lord gave him for the people.

Scripture Reference: Numbers, Chapter 12.

Meditation: The 10th commandment is this: You must not be envious of anyone.

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