

Will abortion debate ever be resolved?

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Last week's column posed a challenge to some pro-life advocates to attend more carefully to the rhetoric employed in the debate over abortion.

Specifically, if they continue to characterize abortion as murder (or its moral equivalent) and the fetus, at whatever stage of development, as a child or a baby, then it follows, as some extremists in the pro-life movement are saying, that the killing of abortionists and their assistants in defense of the unborn is not only morally right, but even praiseworthy.

In the interest of balance, this week's column poses a challenge to some pro-choice advocates.

During a press conference held at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., and televised on C-Span just before the Cairo conference on world population, Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice, was asked by an Italian journalist to articulate her own view on abortion.

Although I do not have a transcript of her remarks at hand, I recall her making two points: first, that abortion is a difficult moral choice which only the woman can make since she alone bears the consequences of her pregnancy; and, second, that the political system must respect a woman's right and capacity to make such a choice, without fear of criminal penalty or other legal restriction.

On the second point, Kissling made



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a special plea for the victims of botched abortions in places where abortions are still illegal. She cited a statistic that some five hundred women die every day under such circumstances.

I should advise the reader that this column is not about to hit Kissling over the head, but only to point out an apparent lacuna in her reply.

Indeed, Frances Kissling is an intelligent and articulate Catholic, who has been unfairly demonized by some who disagree with her views.

What one did not hear from Kissling at the press conference earlier this month and what one rarely, if ever, hears from comparable spokespeople for abortion rights is any "moral" reference to the human life

that is terminated in every abortion. But clearly there is more to the morality of abortion than the need to respect the conscience of women.

Let's use an example. Say a woman is trying to decide whether to go on vacation when she really can't afford to do so. In fact, if she decides to go, her children will not have school clothes and will be on a nutritionally inadequate diet for the rest of the year. Her husband objects and does everything in his power to prevent her from making vacation plans.

Staying with the example, many pro-choice advocates talk about abortion as if the only relevant moral issue were the husband's use of coercion to prevent his wife from making a choice to take a vacation. There is no mention of the effect of her choice on the children.

In the case of abortion, there is a separate life developing within the pregnant woman, and even if many would not yet call it a baby, or a child, or a person, that life is human, with the unassailable clear potential of becoming a baby, a child, and eventually a fully developed human person.

The fact that the life is totally dependent upon the woman, that its life-system is inextricably bound up with hers, does not make it simply a part of her body so that her choice to terminate the pregnancy would be a term of elective surgery.

Even if abortion cannot be described as murder and even if abortionists cannot be characterized as

baby-killers, abortion is still the termination of a distinct human life — a life that, according to both Catholic teaching and the natural law, merits reverence and respect.

Those who hold that unborn life is personal life quite logically argue that such life deserves not only reverence and respect, but some measure of legal protection as well.

Moreover, even if one were to grant that an abortion may, under certain limited circumstances, be a morally right choice, what makes it always a tragic moral choice is that, no matter what else is involved, a distinct human life is terminated.

If many pro-life advocates oversimplify the moral question, many pro-choice advocates impoverish it. Accordingly, if pro-choice advocates would just as consistently acknowledge the sacredness of the human life of the unborn as they do the sacredness of the conscience of women, the debate over abortion would rise to a higher moral level than it is on today.

To be sure, abortion seems like an intractable problem, but we are living in times when other seemingly intractable problems are already on the path toward resolution, what with the new relationships between the former Soviet Union and the West, between the Palestinians and Israelis, and, more recently, between the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the British government.

How far behind can abortion be?

Baseball is spiritual through child's eyes

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

I love to watch my 6-year-old son, Nathaniel, play baseball. He displays real talent for it, even at his young age.

Although he is realistic enough to have a backup plan, Nate already plans to be a professional baseball player when he grows up. ("In case I get hurt or something, I'll become a sports photographer," he says with great seriousness.)

Nate plays baseball with what I call the "four Ps."

Passion. In his T-ball league of 5- and 6-year-old players, Nate stands out because of the intensity with which he plays the game. He is always alert, knows what he is going to do with the ball, hits and runs and throws and catches to his ultimate ability.

No catcher is used in T-ball, for example, so once a runner passes third base it is pretty much a given that he



FAITH AND WORK

or she is going to score. Not to Nate, however. No matter what position he happens to be playing, if the play is toward home plate, you'll find him there — usually waiting fruitlessly for

his teammates to throw the ball to him.

Persistence. I would hesitate to guess how many hours Nate and I have played baseball in the back yard. But he has swung at so many pitches that he is now a competent hitter — from both sides of the plate. The most recent example of this persistence is he has taken to having me throw fly balls just over the chain-link fence in our back yard so he can practice leaping over the fence to catch them. If he times his leap just right, he can actually do it sometimes, but I know that he will keep at it until he can do it most of the time.

Pleasure. The main thing you notice about the way Nate plays baseball, however, is the pleasure he gets from the sport. He loves to dive for a ball or steal a base or reach down and hit a low pitch over the fence. When he does something well, he has this funny way of sticking his tongue in his

cheek to keep himself from smiling. It makes you feel as if he is in tune with the universe.

Perspective. Despite the passion, persistence and pleasure he displays toward baseball, Nate somehow manages to keep it all in perspective. When one of his favorite players, Ryne Sandberg, recently announced that he was suddenly retiring from baseball, I asked Nate how he felt about Sandberg's decision, not knowing how he would react.

"I wonder who they'll have play second base," was his only response. Likewise, when the players and owners went on strike, I thought Nate would be very upset. Instead, he just dug out his old Nintendo baseball game and started a fantasy league of his own.

Wouldn't all of our work be holier if we approached it with the passion, persistence, pleasure and perspective of this little boy?



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