

ABORTION: PROPOSING A TEMPORARY COMPROMISE

How would the ideal society handle this difficult issue? The complications are due to the fact that both sides have valid concerns. The war is about ethical priorities. I would like to propose the specifics of a temporary truce.

Compromise is an option that has not been discussed. It's considered preposterous. The two sides of the abortion war are absolute in their goals and therefore keep struggling toward total victory. A person suggesting to them the acceptance of less than their every wish would probably be ridiculed by both. Yet a truce is what I want to urge. People say they cannot compromise a woman's right to choose or compromise an emerging life. I say that they should compromise because a torn, continually warring society is not acceptable either.

I want a compromise, for a reasonable period (such as 18 years, the numerical value of the Hebrew word for "life"), during which each camp will get some but not all of what it wants. We could all rest for a while from the strife. The two sides could experience the agreed-upon terms and maybe regroup, refining their objectives if still unsatisfied. It would be a more tranquil time and one in which we could feel some progress toward reaching a better society. Let's start visualizing peace in the abortion area.

What would be the components of this compromise? I will give my opinion but please feel free to offer your own constructive suggestions. The important thing is that you think "negotiation" rather than "crushing the opposition".

My position on the abortion issue is inspired by the Bible, and in particular, by the following teachings that I see there:

* Creating new life carelessly and extinguishing it needlessly are contrary to the harmony of nature. Termination of a pregnancy is to be avoided, unless there are other, even more important values that intervene.

1. One of these higher values is the mother's life and long-term health. Any danger to either is to be discussed with medical personnel and the decision will be made by the mother.
2. A second higher value is to avoid a lifetime of suffering on the part of the new human being (as with serious defects or diseases). Again, the decision is to be made by the mother.
3. A third is to prevent the fruition of rape and incest. Once again the decision is to be made by the mother.

The two sides would agree that these three special circumstances are the only reasonable basis for an abortion. Lacking these conditions, pregnancies would be encouraged until birth. What do I mean by "encouraged"?

- Society would adopt and teach the value that since a life has been started, the proper (ethical) course of action on the part of the mother is to have the baby. Both sides would convey this attitude.
- We would not take the nonsensical position that we want to preserve life but are not willing to support it during pregnancy. Therefore, society, at public expense, during the pregnancy, would provide economically for the mother and future child's material needs if other support was not forthcoming.
- Society, at public expense, would provide, during pregnancy, the appropriate health services to mother and future child if other help were not available.

Once a child is born, society would hold the position that the mother should either provide for the child from thereon or put the child up for adoption. Minor temporary assistance could also be offered to the mother or to the new parents.

How would this system be enforced? There would be some not overly harsh penalties for the mother if she insisted on an abortion that was not excused by the three special circumstances. Perhaps some community service on her part would be an appropriate atonement for the sad events. Society would be very clear in its disapproval of the terminated pregnancy.

I realize that an unwanted pregnancy can be extremely distressing to the woman involved even when the exceptional conditions mentioned above are not present. Also, we don't want to drive her to an unsafe abortion. Society has to handle this situation with compassion by keeping safe abortions available while at the same time making it very definitely known that completion of the pregnancy is its strong preference. Parents, teachers, counselors, and doctors would all convey this message. We must move away from treating potential life or any life too lightly.

I would like society to discuss and then implement the compromise I have outlined. There should be a sincere effort on the part of everyone to make it work. If this approach to life were adopted, then it would need to be taught as our current ethical stance. The education of the public, and especially of the young, is absolutely crucial. These compromise terms would take their place among the country's standards of conduct.

After eighteen years of this compromise, people could decide whether we have reached a better society than the one we've had for some time now. I am hoping we'll all feel better about our handling of life and human concerns. Do you agree that this compromise would be a step forward?

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