

Abortion has clear outlines of religious conflict

By Tom Ribe

Few issues in American history have torn at the fabric of the American Constitution and

Commentary

civility as the debate over a person's right to abortion and reproductive freedom. From the outset, America has struggled to be tolerant and diverse, with some success. And to date, America has avoided merging religion and government in any open or official way.

The ever-escalating debate over the propriety of abortion has the clear outlines of a religious conflict. The outcome of this conflict may change the conduct and plurality of American society for a long time. Will America continue to be tolerant of diverse religious views? Will we continue to believe in the will of the majority as the driving force in our democracy? Will we have privacy to conduct our private affairs free of intrusion from a state religion?

Decisions regarding sex, to have or not to have children, whether religious or not, are all questions asked in the most private havens of our lives. The Supreme Court's affirmation of an individual's right to control her own reproductive process

in the Roe v. Wade decisions was based on the fundamental Constitutional premise that privacy is an unalienable right. The anti-abortion movement challenges the long-accepted premise that each of us has a right to live our life according to our own religion and faith without treading on the rights and religions of others.

We need only go to the doorways of the clinics that provide women's health care in Eugene and elsewhere in America to understand that the right to privacy in our country is threatened. Clinics are places where our most personal health matters are dealt with in confidence. When these matters pertain to our sex lives they cross yet another deeper threshold of privacy and decency.

The religious right, on the stage of America's streets, daily engages in a privacy defying drama that society would probably never tolerate if it were carried out by other types of extremists. Yet the religious right today will harass and confront women and couples who are dealing with the most private of private affairs on the steps of clinics. They will insult and defy strangers. They will sometimes physically invade strangers and use intrusive and indecent language while taking an unsolicited interest in other's private affairs.

Just as it would be presumptuous and un-American to condemn the religious convictions that lead people to oppose abortion, it is likewise self-righteous and intolerant for religious people to vilify the convictions of those who feel otherwise. I honor and respect the views and faith of those who oppose abortion. In return I would ask them to respect the faith and conviction of those who favor personal choice and privacy in American life. Do moderate Christians or non-Christians challenge the religious right on the conduct of their private family affairs?

The insistence of a vocal minority that their religious conviction should form the basis for a wide-range of public policy matters in our diverse society presents a new dilemma for American government. Policy matters usually are arrived at by political consensus and with the considered opinion of experts. But the limited version of the anti-abortion campaign promises an escalating fallout of other social problems if it prevails.

While anti-abortionists are unquestionably sincere in their concern for human fetuses, they haven't convincingly identified themselves with re-

lated public debates surrounding other stages of the human life cycle. Absent from the anti-abortion campaign is an effort to help prevent unplanned pregnancy with contraceptives or other means that would help render the whole debate moot. Anti-abortionists per-se are conspicuously absent from public exchanges on overpopulation, parental leave, day care, prenatal care, inner-city poverty, national health insurance policy, education, and environmental matters; all issues that will be widely affected from any change in national abortion policy.

When federal funding is denied for abortions, the poor and minorities are burdened most. Yet do we see the religious right in the inner city assisting minority women who often face pregnancy with minimal income and without a partner?

Time spent raising unplanned children is time neither mothers or responsible partners can use developing their talents and increasing their contribution to American society. Denying reproductive choice to the poor only strengthens walls holding them and their children in a poverty cycle while a deluge of other expensive social ills result from

spiraling poverty and despair.

Given the narrowness of its scope, one can conclude that the "pro-life" movement is, knowingly or not, a conservative revolt against feminism and the changed role of women in contemporary society. But sentimentality about a past social and economic setting does not provide a sound basis for policy decisions. And forcing religious convictions on society through the courts or legislatures will not eliminate the diversity of religious views in America.

The anti-abortionists might inspire less conflict if they reaffirm their commitment to the American Constitution, and advance their convictions in a manner that inspired respect and recognized the diversity and needs of other Americans. Politicians and judges must weigh the Constitutional consequences of guiding public policy with minority religious convictions, no matter how familiar the religion, insistent the minority, or intimidating their tactics.

Tom Ribe is an interdisciplinary graduate student studying law and environmental policy.

Letters

Civilization

"Rugby ... the sport about being a man" (ODE, Jan. 25). I'd like to rephrase this and say, "MEN'S Rugby ... the sport about being a man."

Women's Rugby is a sport with little or no recognition in the United States. The article on rugby in the Emerald did nothing to change this fact; instead it ignored the women's team completely. One year ago a women's team was started here, and I don't believe we're out on the field to prove our "man-ness." We are not macho-lunatic-drunk players, but athletes involved in a game that requires dedication, spirit, teamwork and endurance.

And yes, there is a party after

every game. The drunken bliss we submerge ourselves into after such pain-filled afternoons is, like the game, not all it appears to be. The two teams sit down together with beverages of all kinds, as well as dinner, sing songs, and part as friends. So, perhaps it is a little civilization, not insanity, that holds us together.

Lisa Clark
Women's Rugby

Congratulations

I, Jason Keuter, would like to congratulate myself for my neglect of the environment and my total lack of concern about how my behavior affects others.

Jason Keuter
Student

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