

Sarah Epstein's Comments

on "Abortion & the Morality Wars: Taking the Moral Offensive"

-- an essay by Diana Alstad & Joel Kramer

After careful reading of Diana Alstad and Joel Kramer's position paper on abortion, I am convinced we should now reassess how we meet the opposition's moral attacks and promote our position with no apology. I've shared these ideas with a number of my family planning friends, and uniformly they are enthusiastic about this new approach. If, as our opponents claim, they are morally right, then we are painted as morally wrong. That is an intolerable position. I agree with Diana and Joel that *we* are morally right because abortion not only protects women, it gives them the ability to act in the best interest of society, their families, themselves, and their physical and mental health. It assures that wanted children are born.

Those of us who have been in the trenches battling to keep abortion legal are discouraged because we are losing ground and in truth, ground down by the opposition's constant legal maneuvers, while worrying about attacking religious views, and trying to compromise with an uncompromising opponent. *It is time to turn the tables and reassert our true leadership as we did to achieve Roe v. Wade by being positive and unapologetic.* We should start to speak as the morally correct group and just declare that abortion is indeed a moral answer for today's world, its serious problems, and its women. Taking the moral high ground will bring new hope for the stalwarts. If done properly, it can appeal to the middle-of-the road advocates who do not want to be labeled immoral. Politicians can feel more supported and justified in joining the majority of American citizens who believe abortion should be legal and should be left to the free choice of an individual.

Many feel the moral worldview today is ecological sustainability, which means world population in balance with nature. Abortion should be as acceptable and moral a choice for a woman as any other form of birth control. No apologies should be necessary. Those who have had abortions in the past should feel vindicated and proud of their decision. Diana and Joel's essay goes into much more detail than I have expressed with cogent arguments and examples. I hope these ideas will be explored and used vigorously in 1998, the 25th year of Roe v. Wade.

Politically it has been said that we must keep abortion legal, safe and *rare*; but we know it is not rare. And given the lack of adequate family planning, contraceptive technology, and enlightened education worldwide, abortion will not become less needed in the foreseeable future. By agreeing to use "rare", our movement implies abortion is wrong or even an immoral act, instead of being the only available absolute guarantee that a woman can make the morally correct choice of not bringing an unwanted child into this world. Thus we have given away our moral high ground by accident. Language is so important in our presentations.

Abortion is like the issue of slavery in the last century. Emotions were pushed to the limit, escalating to war as both sides felt their view was the moral way. Approaching the 21st century, we need to push ahead in freeing enslaved women *emotionally* as well as legally, and give them the conviction and sanction that abortion is a moral right they are free to exercise. Women should feel good about having chosen to do so. If it is the appropriate answer for them, abortion should be as acceptable and uncontested as the issue of not owning another human being (a slave) is today. I look forward in 1998 to moving to the high moral ground with this bold new approach and hope you feel the same. After so many years in national and international family planning, I see this as a giant step forward!

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