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THE STAND
ABORTION
STEM CELL RESEARCH

The dialogue, if you can call it that, over abortion and birth, killing and living, pro choice and pro life gets so strident, so partisan, so ugly. Take Barbra Streisand for example (you can have her). She is shrill, screams her point of view, becomes incensed when anybody disagrees with her and accuses every antagonist of being a bigot and antifeminist. No dialogue regarding these critical issues is possible. Two serious issues are at stake. There is, first, the principle, the right of every woman to the privacy of her body, to make decisions she deems right for herself and to protect those freedoms and rights according to her conscience and her view of life. But there is, on the other hand, another set of rights when it comes to pregnancy, the right of the unborn. When a human being comes into being, whenever that is, when there exists a baby and not a mere fetus, that unborn human being has rights and privileges which create duties and responsibilities on the part of others. The sad thing in this never-ending argumentation is that those pro choice do have some respect and feeling for the unborn. After all, they are some of the most aggressive champions of the rights of those very same unborn when they are born. Those who are pro life also have considerable feelings and respect for the rights of a woman as a human being to make intelligent, rational and moral decisions for her life. Those sentiments in the minority are the foundation, the only basis for dialogue. All other verbiage is polarized polemics. So we are left with a position on the one hand where a baby-fetus can be murdered even while partially born and on the other, no rights or privileges whatsoever when the reproductive system goes to work. What a sad commentary on one of the most divisive issues in America, indeed the world today.

Then there is stem cell research. Living, organic tissue, living cells, embryonic, the core-essence of a human being are on the battlefield, the one side arguing all such are fair prey for research and experimentation, and the other arguing that at the core, elementary human life exists and is therefore sacrosanct, not subject to research. Again, the sides are polarized. It is all or nothing. There is no debate, no middle ground, no careful and rational consideration of the point of view of the other. Take Christopher Reeve. A victim of a tragic horse-riding accident which paralyzed him from head to toe. Reeve has been an outspoken advocate of stem cell research, hoping and believing that such research might lead to a cure for certain neurological conditions among others. Reeve, former actor and Superman, is a powerful spokesperson, selfishly involved for his own sake, but genuinely interested in the process for the benefit of others. Reeve however has no tolerance for other point of view, believing that no moralist has the right to prevent science from exploring this uncharted but potentially fertile field. Reeve claims, as others do, that such research might very well lead to a cure for Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's, Multiple Sclerosis and even Cancer among others. Those prospects are alluring, but at what price to human dignity and humanity? Again, no dialogue but only polarized, opposite positions leading to vehement argumentation and vitriol. Stem cell or abortion, both are at the core life versus death, living versus killing, hands off versus no holds barred. The underlying principle seems the same.

Whatever is right, the point is that there simply is no dialogue in America. There is no rational, sensible, sane and calm discussion of the issues. The one side is right and the other is wrong. End of discussion, if you can call it that. Tempers flare, righteous indignation occurs and the sides go farther apart. That prompts pro-lifers to protest, picket and even kill abortion doctors. That prompts scientists to experiment with stem cell research on their own terms even if illegal. The war of words turns in the war of deeds, often illegal conduct. What a sad state of affairs. No dialogue, no discussion, no appreciation of the other, and the other's point of view.

The next time you have the opportunity to discuss any issue, whether abortion or stem cell research, perhaps you should listen carefully to the other point of view, carefully and respectfully. When it is time for yours, you can demand the very same respect and listening in return. When all issues, all points of view are carefully presented, who knows what might happen. The combatants, turned amicable and respectful, might actually come to the right conclusions.