
An aborted vision

Mr. Bush, if you want to change minds, speak to the heart

WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON ABORTION?" SINCE she already knew his answer, Barbara Walters' voice echoed tones of both pity and glee. Gov. George W. Bush was about to be exposed as an enemy of "choice."

"I'm pro-life," Gov. Bush answered. Then silence.

Ms. Walters allowed the conversation to hang for a few uncomfortable seconds. Mr. Bush gazed at her with a disarming, friendly confidence, reassuring her and millions of viewers that he had no more to say on this divisive issue. While he wanted the votes of pro-lifers and agreed in some vague way with that high moral vision, he voiced no particular agenda to pursue against abortion.

In that moment of silence, the champion of compassionate conservatism blew it. Not only did he fail to inspire the confidence of pro-lifers, but worse, he failed to attract support from Americans who dislike abortion but still defend it because they want to protect and help women going through the biggest crisis of their lives.

Rather than downplay the abortion issue, Mr. Bush could have used Ms. Walters' question as an opportunity to demonstrate his sincere concern and compassion for women. Consider, for example, how any portion of the following answer would have broadened Mr. Bush's base of support among pro-lifers, moderate voters, and even women who have had abortions.

"I'm pro-life and I'm also pro-woman. I understand the pressures that drive women to undergo abortions, often in violation of their own moral and maternal beliefs. In many cases, women are being pressured into unwanted abortion by boyfriends, parents, social workers, or doctors. This is a grave injustice to women. We need to support programs that help women avoid unwanted, unnecessary, and dangerous abortions.

"We also need to address the emotional pain and grief of women and men who have lost a child to abortion. Blame and finger-pointing are simply wrong. What is needed is an attitude of understanding and charity. Faced with tough enough circumstances, perhaps any of us would cave in to the pressure to abort, even if we knew it was the wrong thing to do. I'm not going to throw stones at people who have made this tragic mistake. Instead, we should support the many new private ministries that provide post-abortion counseling and healing.

"Eleven years ago, Surgeon General C. Everett Koop recommended a major government-funded study to investigate definitively abortion complications. This study was blocked by the Democratically controlled Congress. I think it's time we finally funded such a study to find out how big this problem is.

"I am also deeply disturbed by the fact that many politicians, like Vice President Gore, seem to be more interested in protecting the abortion industry than they are in protecting women. Many Democrats have consistently opposed laws that would ensure the right of women to be fully informed about all abortion's potential risks. They have opposed laws that would ensure that parents know when a 20-year-old man is taking their 14-year-old daughter out of state to undergo a potentially dangerous abortion. And they have also opposed laws that would make it easier to hold abortionists liable for the injuries they inflict on women. Can't they at least agree to protect women?

"I believe God has intertwined the welfare of women and their children. If we help one, we help them both. On the other hand, if we hurt one, we hurt both. That's why abortion hurts women—emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Hurting a

woman's child hurts her.

"Why not strive to help both her and her child? That's what problem pregnancy centers are doing around the country: befriending women and giving them the support, encouragement, and resources that make it easier to bring an unplanned baby into the world and to experience the joy of that new life.

"Under my administration, we will constantly endeavor to help both women and their children. We will not sacrifice either. Instead of seeking federal funding for abortion, I will support funding for alternatives to abortion, including adoption. I will support research on abortion complications. And I will support programs that promote post-abortion healing."

Wow! What a breath of fresh air! If George W. Bush had filled that pregnant moment of silence with such an answer, listeners would have been convinced of both his compassion for women and his commitment to unborn children.

"I'm pro-life," without elaboration is simply a label, a half-formed, aborted vision statement. On the other hand, by articulating a message that is faithfully both pro-life and pro-woman, Mr. Bush could communicate a vision that could unite much of an America that has been divided for far too long on an issue far too important to neglect.

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