

Why do people want to play God?

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By Daniel J. Bauer

There is nothing like a good old-fashioned bird-brained idea to spark not simply controversy, but a bit of contemplation as well.

In Indiana last week, a candidate for the United States Senate remarked that pregnancies caused by rape were “something God intended to happen.” Richard Mourdock, a Republican, said the words in the midst of a debate to explain his flat-out opposition to abortion.

Indiana Democratic Party Chair Dan Parker quickly issued a response in which he condemned the view. Parker described himself as a “pro-life Catholic,” termed rape “an extremely violent act,” and added, “mine is not a violent God” (CP 10-25-12 p. 3).

In the meantime, the Senate candidate has since fallen all over himself apologizing for himself. Rape is horribly nasty, he says, his words were taken out of context, and so on.

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney naturally disassociated himself from the brouhaha, if not from Mr. Mourdock. This gets complicated. Stay out of the aisle, return to your seat, and fasten your safety belt.

Do you remember the old country-western song, “Stand by Your Man”? Mr. Romney sort of parted ways with Senate candidate Mourdock and sort of did not. He elected to stand by his man.

Mr. Romney has appeared in TV advertisements in support of Richard Mourdock. Soon after Mourdock’s words, Romney had his spokeswoman say he disagreed with him, and so on. But, in an apparent effort to appeal to extremists in his party, he continued to sing the same old song. As I write these words, Romney is still standing by his man. He has not yanked the now presumably tainted ads.

Even if the presidential candidate sees the light and axes the ads before these words reach print, he’ll have already diddled around too long. In politics, four days of wishy-washy can be lethal. The stalling, the pussy-footing, the dithering show us something about the man we’ve seen before. He wants it both ways. Mr. Romney wants to seem reasonable to voters, particularly women, but he also wants the help of the far right fringe of his party. He lusts for

every vote he can garner, even the votes of people who proffer a theology that boggles the mind.

Pundits were quick to compare the Mourdock incident with the Todd Akin incident of last August when Akin, a Senate candidate from Missouri, made a donkey of himself, again in the context of the abortion debate. We recall his claim that nature protects a woman from getting pregnant in the case of a “legitimate rape.”

These gaffes are related. They both come out of the same bag. Both are rooted in a desire to play the role of God in passing moral judgment on a human being caught in perhaps the ugliest and most traumatic of human conditions, a pregnancy as a result of violence.

Why is it so difficult to discuss some issues without slashing with knives at the tender, sensitive skin of another human being? Particularly with the question of abortion, why is a measured, sensible conversation often difficult to achieve? I suspect one reason is moral arrogance, by which I mean an elephant-sized sense of pride, a compulsion to usurp the role of God in judging others.

Instead of pretending to be God and of imagining we can discern her will, why can’t we let people live their own lives and follow the conscience that speaks to them from within? I deeply believe that abortion under any circumstance is the taking of a life. At the same time, I cannot believe that God intends to create a life through an act of sexual violence.

From whence comes this insistence that we know with such utter clarity the intention or will of God? Some in my faith tradition may not be pleased with my view, but so be it.

I don’t understand this mad dash in the U.S. political arena to the most extreme of parameters, the very most distant borders, of the dialogue about the sanctity of human life. In addition, it sickens me to see others speculate so insensitively about the morality of persons trapped in such a hideous circumstance as rape. It saddens me to see people who call themselves Christians pretend to be The One Up Above. Let’s let God be God. She is far bigger and far wiser than any of us will ever be. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points:

1. This column focuses on the question of why people "play God" in passing moral judgment on women who become pregnant (accidentally) because of rape. Such a spiritually sensitive topic may seem out of place in a secular newspaper like The China Post. Do questions about God and morality belong in an ordinary newspaper?
2. Abortion is always a hot issue in American politics, but it seems quite quiet, even ignored in Taiwan. Why?
3. This column hints that human pride (sometimes "arrogance") pushes people to be nasty to other people. Have you ever suffered because someone else has acted in a proud or arrogant way toward you?

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