



# QUOTH THE MAVEN

BY BEVERLY KING POLLOCK

## Madam President Tribute

This is the season for gals who make the salad and strudel circuit; the year-end meetings, luncheons and banquets of women's organizations.

In the past two weeks I have heard 279 committees thanked, 37 last annual meeting minutes dispensed with, and 14 microphones fail. Also 703 changes in by-laws, 22 soloists, 19 skirts and eight flower arrangers.

I rubbed elbows with gals who worked "above and beyond the call of duty" -- with whom it was "a privilege" and "a way of life." And everybody was very "gracious." We also smiled a lot.

There was chicken salad, tuna salad, jello by the mold. (This does not include the touches of corn and schmaltz.) And what desserts! (Everybody swore they were starting on a diet next Monday.) The worst part is you're never hungry afterwards, and to cook dinner for your starving brood is an imposition.

I particularly enjoy installation services. With the red roses and the candle light. And the tears. The president cries, the members cry, I cry. (Mostly because of chain smokers sitting on both sides of me.)

Only the outgoing president's family doesn't cry. Because now they won't have to eat hot dogs and baked beans more than once a week.

It is understandable that only certain qualified people are eligible to become officers. Before being elected to the position of Dignitary (which implies sitting at the head table afterwards), each nominee is carefully screened. She is asked vital questions like:

Do you own a hat?

Will your children mind if you use your own phone?

Does your husband fuss if he doesn't see you three days at a time?

The gift for the outgoing president starts up the tears all over again. But then you have a chance to talk some more to the girls at your table you haven't seen all year.

You have to move quickly to catch up on all the news. Also you are morally obligated to offer advice, particularly if their children are younger than yours.

It's no easy job to get to an end of the year meeting. A special carpool has to be arranged. And the gal who drives is saddled with cleaning out her car beforehand.

You may ask: why go back every year through the same process?

Because the people involved are not always the same. How else could we show a small measure of appreciation to the women who enable us to help effectively Jews at home and abroad -- particularly Israel.

But there is one thing to beware. In the glow of the year-end meeting, you may find yourself in such a good mood that you accidentally volunteer to serve on a committee. And before you know it --- you may be the next president!

## Jewish Abortion View

By RABBI DAVID M. FELDMAN

When called upon recently to testify in a court case challenging the constitutionality of the state's abortion law, I was asked two questions. The answers momentarily disconcerted the attorney who had brought me there to help his case.

"Do you believe that our state's abortion law interferes with your freedom of religion; that is, with your freedom to practice your religious beliefs as a rabbi?"

"It all depends," I rejoined, "whether abortion is murder or not. If it's murder, then freedom of religion doesn't enter the matter. Let's suppose, for example, that the ancient Canaanites who, the Bible tells us, used to sacrifice their children to the fires of Moloch, were suddenly to reappear in America. Would we allow them to practice child sacrifice under the protection of 'freedom of religion'? Obviously not. 'Freedom of religion' does not permit us to murder.

"If, however, abortion is declared not to be murder, then we can talk about freedom of religion, and then my answer to your first question would be 'yes.' The state law does interfere with my ministry as a rabbi, in that those situations which Jewish law does regard as warrants for abortion would not qualify for such under the state law. Take, for example, the case of a mother who has been told that this pregnancy would dilute the milk with which she nurses her infant. Rulings in the 18th and 20th centuries have permitted abortion for such reasons -- clearly not allowable under a system which speaks in terms of the mother's life alone."

Reassured, the attorney pressed on. "Would you say that the abortion statutes as they now stand are a violation of women's rights, an encroachment upon their privacy, upon their right to decide themselves what they shall do with their bodies?" Again my initial response was "No." "But," he protested, "there, too, you led me to believe that your answer would be 'yes'."

"It all depends," I repeated. "Could a woman put to death a two-year-old child, merely because she is in the privacy of her room, or because she is dealing exclusively with the fruit of her own body? Again obviously not. By the same token, only after we have determined that abortion is not murder, that foeticide is not homicide, can we begin to discuss the question of women's rights."

The Jewish legal tradition has ruled that abortion is indeed wrong: it is a thwarting of potential life, but it is not murder. Even the rabbis most rigorously opposed to abortion, such as the present Chief Rabbi of Israel, cannot claim that abortion is a capital matter, for in rabbinic legislation the conceptus is not a human "person" until the moment of birth.

On the other hand, abortion is more than murder in the classic Christian view, where the doctrine of Original Sin plays a part. If, as St. Fulgentius declared in the 6th century, even the foetus in the womb is tainted with Original Sin, which must be cleansed by baptism -- the waters of baptism representing the blood on the cross -- it follows that, in the classic Christian position, abortion is worse than murder. When the foetus is not carried to term, its unbaptized state relegates it to perdition, which is death in this world and in the next. It follows, therefore, that carrying it to term even at the expense of our mother's life, means that both mother and child can thereby be saved from death in the next world.

In Judaism, concern with the soul of the conceptus is irrelevant, since the soul enters in purity, without any taint of original sin; hence, also the widespread discussion about the exact time of entry is irrelevant. If the soul is pure, it does not matter that it has already entered the conceptus, for it is dispatched to heaven in a state of purity. A soul, being spiritual, is neither enlargeable nor reducible with the growth of the embryo. The only question is an earthly one: whether a life has been taken, whether murder in this world has occurred, and this question the rabbis had answered in the negative.

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