

BIG SIBLING, GET OUT OF MY BEDROOM

By Rabbi Baruch Cohon

I could call you Uncle Sam, but that might be politically incorrect. I could call you Aunt Samantha, but then the initials wouldn't match the United States. And the United States is the subject. I won't even go the Orwellian route to call you Big Brother. Obviously a male monicker and therefore also incorrect. So I'll just call you Big Sibling.

You did a reasonably good job upholding the First Amendment. Up to a point. You didn't butt into religion for a long time. Then you began to have trouble leaving well enough alone. "Under G-d" became part of the Pledge of Allegiance. That was a while back. Still, no sectarian gospels got into the Congressional Record until fairly recently. Now we seem to hear about them all the time. Some political leaders assert loudly that this is a "Christian country."

Of course they have their equals and opposites. Those whose religion is anti-religion are fighting them tooth and nail. Sue the Boy Scouts because they mention the Deity in the Scouts' oath. But then, the Boy Scouts are politically incorrect anyway because they prefer scoutmasters who are straight.

Big Sibling, think about it. Isn't it about time to tell the pro- and anti-religionists that they have to take their disputes to a different venue? Not congressional legislation. Not the federal courts. Particularly not the Supreme Court.

The Psalms of David contain a sentence that I'd like to bring to your attention, Big Sibling. It says: "The heavens are the heavens of G-d, but the earth is given to the children of Adam." As human beings, we want you around, Big Sibling, because your job is to keep us from destroying each other. We also want you to butt out of places that don't concern you. Like our bedrooms.

Take abortion. (As Henny Youngman would say, *please*.) Is it the concern of government? Or of G-d? Where do your politicians get off debating what a woman may or may not do with her pregnancy? And where do you get off subsidizing her for delivering a baby, or for not delivering one?

More to the point: where do pressure groups, including Jewish organizations, get off proclaiming what viewpoint on abortion is acceptable in a Supreme Court justice?

When a pro-lifer attacks an abortion clinic, we are outraged. And in the days when a miserable rape victim had to seek a back-alley operation

with a coat hanger, was that an outrage too? What about terminating a pregnancy for convenience? Is that an outrage? Being a nation of many traditions, we don't answer these questions unanimously. That is our right.

It's time to end this hysterical destructive and sometimes murderous conflict, by taking it out of the courtroom and putting it back in the bedroom. Questions between a woman and her family, between a woman and her faith, between a woman and the father of her unborn child – these are not your concern, Big Sibling. Repeal those abortion laws, both pro and con. Get them off the books. It's time.

Do that, and you can select Supreme Court justices for their legal scholarship and personal wisdom, not for their political posture. Wouldn't that be a good idea?

Our Torah contains a list of permitted and prohibited sexual acts. Biblical society was theocratic. The penalties for violations of those prohibitions were imposed by the government and they were severe. Later, Jewish authorities had to find ways to mitigate them. Theocratic societies today, like many Muslim countries, inflict similar severe penalties.

The United States doesn't need to have that problem. Don't legislate morality and you won't have to punish immorality. "The earth is given to the children of Adam." And Eve.

Remember those words, Big Sibling. They speak for the country I love.