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The following handwritten notes from Margaret Ellen formed the basis for comments to School Sisters of Notre Dame in St. Louis, 1985. Excerpts relating to her reasons for signing the New York Times ad are given below.

“**The scene** is the political campaign of 1984. Arch. John O’Connor of NY and Arch. Bernard Law are, they would have us believe, speaking for all 53 M. U.S. Catholics.

After noon Mass daily, John O’Connor met reporters at the sacristy entrance and held a press conference. In effect he was saying that a conscientious Catholic could not vote for a pro-choice candidate. Geraldine Ferraro was in his roasting stones and so also was she the victim of Bernard Law who pontificated daily from his Boston Mansion.

### **What Ad Said**

So when the ad came to be signed I read it carefully.

Confusion in the Catholic Community on the subject of abortion prompted us to speak:

- Large number of theologians (suggest) that direct abortion, though tragic, can sometimes be a moral choice
- NORC – 89%
- Dissenters should not be punished for expressing opinions
- Recognized the legitimate authority of the Bishops and their right to teach
- Mistaken view that there is more than one legitimate teaching about abortion

I refused the first copy...

The second came and I signed, reluctantly because of its weakness, yet with open mind and free decision, I signed.

The ad ran Oct. 7 in the Sunday ed. of NYT.

### **My opinion re: Abortion**

Dec. 7<sup>th</sup> Maureen Murray (Provincial Leader) called me to say that Cris (Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes) ordered me to retract or be dismissed from SSND.

They accused me of “pertinacious scandal” to the faithful.

- About opinions of Catholics on abortion
- First I’m not in favor of abortion: Solomon’s Choice
- I doubt if even a woman having one likes to make that hard decision.
- 77% of adult Cath. polled by Gallup believe that in some instances, abortion could be a moral choice (rape, incest, post-partem depression, etc.)
- Wm. Shannon writing in the Boston Globe says “Scandal: “If the pope silences these brave women, it will be a scandal. Regardless of the other achievements of this papacy, it will be a stain on his record in the pages of history...”

## **2 Families**

However, I have two families – my own and 2<sup>nd</sup> SSND. I have been irreproachable in my loyalty to each. But it was the first family that influenced my decision in this indirect but unmistakable invitation. My family would approve of whatever choice I made. They are 1000% supportive. In the Agnes Mansour case, they urged me to leave. “Such mindless treachery could be practiced on anyone,” my sister Pat said. It was the memory of my parents, however, of their love for the Church/ for the traditions of faith which they cherished and passed on to us that I turned from that option.

## **Provincials**

When I first received the letter through Mary M. from CRIS I said, I’ll cooperate with our SSND leadership but if I must leave SSND, I would not go quietly. By this I meant I’d speak freely to the media about Cris. Never did I dream that something of a misunderstanding would arise through our Provincials. While in Ghana, M.M. asked them to reflect on options in case all our other negotiations failed.

## **Cris backed down**

Cris had backed down in two main ways: 1) The public retraction now be internal, i.e. to our leader, 2) The retraction was then given less steam by becoming a “clarification.”

## **Provincials**

So our provincials, acting on what limited info they had reached the advisory conclusion to move toward a “a warning of a formal warning.” We, the leaders and signers were at a meeting Dec. 18 – 21 at Convent Station...

## **MY RAGE**

I’m not complaining, just reporting. My letters were not prudent or gentle, but true. I’m sorry they weren’t but how else tell them of our corporate SSND shame and embarrassment. I apologize to Sr. M.M. here and now.

## **Miami**

The provincials and we (Ed.’s note: she and Jeannine G.) met Feb. 8 in Florida. It was a 2 hour meeting, explanations, clarifications. The next day, the provincials met all day with Richard McCormick, SJ, moral theologian to further probe the issue of women’s reproductive rights. Because McCormick requested it, we did stop on our way (to the airport) from the SSND Convent in West Miami where we stayed. I was surely impressed with him. This event catalyzed for me a growing admiration and love for M.M. (respected her, admired her, loved her). Yet I think it was this experience which was the hardest on me, harder than anything else in my SSND religious life...

Ed. Note: not sure if M.M. refers to Mary Margaret Johanning, General Superior or Maureen Murray, Provincial Superior.