

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

CTQ

January 1977
Volume 41, Number 1

Cornerstone of Religious Liberty.....	Eugene F. Klug 3
The Problems of Inerrancy and Historicity in Connection with Genesis 1-3.....	David P. Scaer 21
Luther's Impact on Modern Views of Man.....	Lewis W. Spitz 26
Killing with Kindness.....	K. Marquart 44
Theological Observer.....	50
Homiletical Studies.....	53
Book Reviews.....	84

Killing with Kindness

K. MARQUART

A Review of Eldon Weisheit, *Should I Have An Abortion?* (Concordia Publishing House, 1976, 101 pages) and *Abortion? Resources For Pastoral Counseling* (Concordia Publishing House, 1976, 173 pages).

Compassion is absolutely central to the practice of Christianity. Cruel, legalistic moralism ill befits a servant of the Good Shepherd—least of all a Lutheran pastor. He is, after all, the administrator not of justice and death, nor of social crusades, but of mercy and divine, eternal life. This evangelical compassion is clearly the approach which Pastor Weisheit intended should shape his whole treatment of the abortion question. His pastoral practice has made him deeply aware of the agonies of individuals actually faced with the problem. But the pastor, above all, dare not be dominated by mere feeling. We must not lose our pastoral heads over our pastoral hearts. Mere fleshly sentiment helps no one.

Weisheit is aware of, even disturbed by this tension. He states in the preface to the longer book—which incorporates the text of the shorter one plus added materials for counselors—that during his year of research away from “frontline counseling” he became “much more antiabortion.” Unfortunately this sobering impact of a more objective look at the nature of abortion was not allowed to prevail at the crucial points of the discussion. Indeed, the author seems so exclusively preoccupied with the woman’s distress, and therefore so determined to treat abortion as an open question, that he can no longer deal objectively with the basic facts.

For example, Weisheit repeatedly sets up spurious alternatives, which create the illusion of a responsible middle ground between the two “extremes.” It is simply a fiction to suggest that the choice is between “no abortion for any reason” and “any abortion for no reason” (p. 70). To discredit the pro-life movement by identifying it, as Weisheit does here, with the first of these alternatives, is irresponsible. The whole point is that, unlike the abortionists, the pro-lifers distinguish sharply between serious grounds for considering abortion (to save another human life) and frivolous ones (avoidance of embarrassment, inconvenience, etc.). The Human Life Amendment proposed by the National Right to Life organization after a year of painstaking legal work explicitly provides “that nothing in this article shall prohibit a law permitting only those medical procedures required to prevent the death of the mother.”

Rendering “no abortion except to prevent the mother’s death” as “no abortion for any reason” indicates either gross negligence in reading or else propagandistic intent. Something similar occurs on page 171. Among the books suggested for further reading Weisheit lists the *Handbook on Abortion* by Dr. and Mrs. J. C. Willke. But then he describes this excellent book as a “hard-hitting, emotional . . . attack against abortion under any circumstances.” Actually the book is very factual and much less emotional than Weisheit’s. And it reprints with full endorsement the Human Life Amendment, including the provision for abortion to save the mother’s life! Yet Weisheit sees it as “an extreme position” and says that “the book should not be given to a person who has had or who is considering an abortion”! No such warning is issued against any of the other books listed, the majority of which defend looser views.

The whole sixth chapter, dealing with the divine will, is a disaster. After some preliminaries suggesting that no one can claim to know God’s mind on the subject, we read: “The Bible does not say, ‘Thou shalt not commit abortion’ . . . Some want to make the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ also read, ‘Thou shalt not have an abortion’ ” (p. 68). (One can hear Hitler cavilling: “It does not say, ‘Thou shalt not gas Jews’ ”!) Yet on the same page Weisheit admits quite correctly: “God does speak of life in the womb as being a person”! How then can one honestly avoid the conclusion that abortion is killing? Left without a clear word from God, Weisheit is reduced to waffling vaguely about “love” in the manner of the situationists. And what serious ethic could possibly be built on a concept like “God’s advice” (p. 71)? Here the thunder of the Law has been muted into a pitiful psychiatric whimper.

But it is in the next chapter that the book’s perversity becomes fully apparent. If an abortionist had set out deliberately to confuse the issues, he could not have done much better than Weisheit’s chapter seven. Everything here is in the service of the predetermined conclusion that abortion must remain an open question. “Is the fetus another state of human life similar to the categories baby, child, adolescent, and adult? Or is it a term for perhuman existence, such as male sperm or female egg?” asks Weisheit. But then comes the incredible reply: “There are no simple answers to such questions”! There follow all sorts of red herrings and half-truths designed to insure that by hook or by crook the question shall remain open. If indeed, on Weisheit’s own admission, “God does speak of life in the womb as being a person,” one would have thought that the issue was settled, finally and categorically. Instead, God’s attitude is fleetingly acknowledged and then blithely ignored. Perhaps it was too “theological” to be intruded into a medical chapter. But then at least the known

scientific facts should have been objectively stated and honestly faced.

It is simply not true that medically speaking, there are a number of points in human development that could be regarded as the beginning of life" (p. 77). Particularly since the discovery of DNA there is no excuse for any equivocation on the point that biologically speaking, the fetus is from conception a distinct and unique human life in its own right. Modern knowledge here corrects primitive folklore about "quickenings" or about each sperm containing a miniature boy, etc., as well as Darwinian superstitions about "prehuman" stages of development. Weisheit introduces such notions, refutes each of them, also the irrelevant criterion of "viability," but then still treats them as though they were genuine medical grounds for doubting that the foetus is a human being! To inflict such wilful confusions on possibly ill-informed and certainly emotionally distressed women considering abortions borders on the cynical. In view of Weisheit's glib assumption that the foetus is not a psychological person (p. 79), it is instructive to note that the distinguished Professor A. W. Liley of the University of Auckland's Postgraduate School of Obstetrics and Gynaecology has explicitly described "The Foetus as a Personality" in a fascinating article under that title in the *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* (1972;6:p. 99).

We have a right to expect more candour and greater perception from Christian counselors than from secular pro-abortionists. Yet in these very respects Weisheit's book contrasts unfavourably with an editorial in the pro-abortion *Journal* of the California State Medical Association (Sept., 1970):

Since the old ethic has not yet been fully displaced, it has been necessary to separate the idea of abortion from the idea of killing which continues to be socially abhorrent. The result has been a curious avoidance of the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception, and is continuous, whether intra- or extra-uterine, until death. The very considerable semantic gymnastics which are required to rationalise abortion as anything but taking a human life would be ludicrous if they were not often put forth under socially impeccable auspices. It is suggested that this schizophrenic sort of subterfuge is necessary because, while a new ethic is being accepted, the old one has not yet been rejected.

Pro-abortion propagandists rely on the sort of confusions fostered by Weisheit's book. They fear and resent—and with good reason!—photographic documentation which cuts through the soothing verbiage to confront people with the startling realities of abortion. For when the average person sees a tiny but perfectly

recognisable human being, he will no longer be able to think of it as a shapeless blob or as impersonal "cells" (cf. Weisheit, p. 75). Not surprisingly Weisheit shares the abortionists' disdain of "full-colour pictures" (p. 171), suggests that open-heart surgery would be equally upsetting to watch, and declares: "The gory details are not valid reasons to be opposed to abortion" (p. 16). But unlike a severed finger or an excised appendix the sight of babies and parts of babies in disposal bags outrages not our aesthetic sensibilities, but our deepest moral sense. We find the wanton killing of helpless humans abhorrent not because our nerves are failing, but precisely because our conscience is functioning. The only alternative is the cool, scientific objectivity of those terrible Nazi "doctors."

At Nuremberg the legal implications were still clear. Hence Nazi defendants were convicted by American judges on the charge that "protection of the law was denied to unborn children." This attitude has been self-evident in America ever since the enactment, over a hundred years ago, of abortion law reform, which was spearheaded by the American Medical Association and reflected the growing scientific understanding of human reproduction. This too is the background against which the Fourteenth Amendment must be understood. Yet in 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court formally withdrew the protection of the law from the unborn ("legal personhood does not exist prenatally"). As a result of this relapse into pagan barbarity (Roman law saw the foetus simply as a part of the mother's "viscera"), we now have a topsy-turvy legal system in which it is "unconstitutional" to protect unborn innocents by law from summary execution, while gangsters and murderers are guaranteed "due process." The secular humanism which justifies and motivates this horror is precisely the same sort of "scientific" inhumanity which in the case of Nazi Germany we profess to abhor.

Weisheit, in his sentimental "know-nothingism," sees none of this. In language reminiscent of the worst liberationist claptrap, he speaks of the "right" to kill the unborn as "the freedom that many have struggled for all women to have" (p. 21). Caricaturing the public debate about abortion, Weisheit announces loftily: "I hope that neither side 'wins'" (p. 70)—as if there could be middle ground between affirmation and denial of the legal personhood of the unborn! If even a trained counselor can be as confused about abortion as Weisheit evidently is, how can the individual woman be expected to reach a responsible decision? If respect for life is the cornerstone of civilised law, then the taking of human life cannot be left to the whim of private individuals—least of all to those whose self-interest is most directly involved. We are all only too prone to self-deception, particularly under strong emotional pressure. How many tormented women, desperate for a way out,

will find in Weisheit's "compassionate" blurring of moral, medical, and legal absolutes sufficient justification for abortion?

The sad fact is that the controlling ideas of the Weisheit books simply do not represent Christian ethics. Nowhere is there a real sense of horror of abortion as killing, such as has from the beginning characterised the Christian view of life. As Bishop Per Lonning comments on Isaiah 13:18: "What is remarkable in this statement is that the atrocity against the unborn is regarded as even more serious than that perpetrated against the mother. To deny the human being even the right to be born is regarded as the height of barbarity." Such was the respect for the sanctity of unborn life at the time of Christ that entering a Gentile house was considered as defiling one with the seven-day uncleanness contracted by touching a corpse, for the reason that Gentiles practised abortion, and threw their aborted babies into the drains (Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar*, II, p. 832)! The late Dr. H. Sasse has pointed out that "we may assume that murder in the ordinary sense of the word did not occur in the Christian Church. In almost all cases where we hear of murder, abortion is meant" (*The Lutheran*, Australia, 7 Sept. 1970). This is especially convincing when the deadly sin of murder is named together with that of fornication (cf. Rev. 9:21). And the practice of inducing abortions by means of poisons (denounced in the Oath of Hippocrates) must fall under the condemnations of "pharmakeia" (Gal. 5:20).

Weisheit's abortion ethic springs from different sources. He speaks of giving "moral and spiritual guidance" (p. 111). But there is no authoritative word from God on the subject. From this *proton pseudos* it follows that the point is to present to the individual a potpourri of "some say this and some say that" in the hope that a responsible selection will be made: "Theological statements need to be applied in practical language so the counselee can understand why some people object to abortion and others approve" (p.111)! Indeed, "she should realise that some will criticise her for having an abortion, others will criticise her for having a baby." Are both criticisms equally valid? "Help her find what she wants to do," the counselor is told. He should also be prepared with the "objective facts"—including addresses, "cost," and "method" of available abortion services! This is a shocking reminder of Dr. and Mrs. Willke's claim that "almost all 'Clergy Counselling Service' groups and, with few exceptions, also most Planned Parenthood agencies are truly abortion referral groups" (p. 191). Some of them even profiteer financially from this death business; one Planned Parenthood Clergy Counselling group made \$300,000 annually from 12,000 "patients" at "\$25.00 a throw"!

That many clergy in secularised denominations cannot distinguish between compassion and permissiveness is not surprising. Their outlook is simply that of the "psychiatric ideology" (Szasz), which has so deeply infected the "counselling" movement. As the inimitable Malcolm Muggeridge has put it: "Nietzsche, no Liberal, announced that God was dead; the same Deity's Liberal ministrants today seek to confute Nietzsche by stuffing an empty skin with Freudian entrails." The same destructive ideology is in large measure responsible for that deadly cancer which Solzhenitsyn sees gnawing at the vitals of our civilisation: the pragmatic habit of treating the distinction between good and evil as a matter of indifference.

The basic facts of life and death, as regards the unborn, are really crystal clear. And they would never be in controversy were it not for a blinding obsession with sexual "liberation." Reason, science, morality, religion, law—all must yield before the squeals and grunts of the Gadarene stampede: "I'll have my fun, and to hell with anything that gets in the way!" This neo-paganism is, no doubt, as hateful to Pastor Weisheit as it is to this reviewer. The tragedy is that he has become the unwitting victim of perspectives and premises utterly at variance with Christian truth. His priorities have become subtly secularised. Thus, he can be emphatic about the evil of "sexual maladjustment" (pp. 35-44), but not about the evil of abortion. He concludes: "I have tried not to demand or plead in this book. But I would do either if it would discourage you from a medically unsafe abortion" (p. 95). Again, unsanitary surgical procedures are worth warning against; the application of "meat processing" techniques (McLuhan) to the unborn is not! Already the book has been commended as "open-ended" in the *Lutheran Women's Quarterly* (Fall, 1976, p. 24). Unsuspecting Christian women naturally trust that no deadly poison will be dispensed through church-related publications. The "open-ended" Weisheit books constitute in the deepest, biblical sense of that word, a *skandalon*. Good Lord, deliver us!