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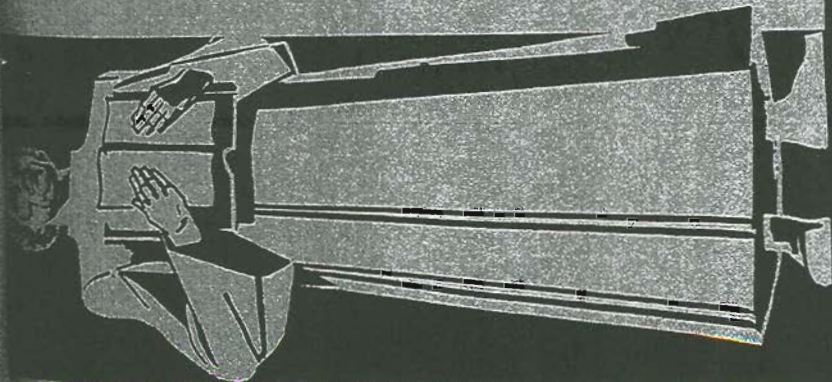
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# Abortion: A Moment For Conscientious Reflection

DAVID P. SCAER

One of the most embarrassing episodes for the church in our century was the almost near silence of the state related Protestant Church in Germany in the matter of the atrocities connected with the Hitler regime. Whether or not the church can be held accountable is an involved question. Only the glib and uninformed would immediately sit in judgment. It is not really accurate to say that the church sat on its hands while Hitler set aside basic human rights, i.e., the right to own property and the right to live. The Protestant Church in Germany is actually only an ecclesiastical administration which receives the support of the government and which supervises the congregations.

The Protestant Church in Germany would be comparable to a national system of libraries in our country where regular religious services are conducted. Put it like this, belonging to a church in Germany is like belonging to a library in our country. Since you are a citizen in either case, you are entitled to use church or library. Of course you pay for both. Christians (here the *una sancta ecclesia* is meant) did not send Jews to the ovens and neither did they wish it in any sense. Enough Christians, Protestant and Catholic, went to their martyrdom with the Jews because they defended and associated with them. Hitler received the blessing of the church administration, men who wore the robes of God but who cultivated the favor of the state. This was hardly the body of Christ. In spite of the alleged deficiencies of the concept of the visible and invisible church, what a relief to have such a doctrine when faced with these tragedies. The church, the body of Christ, does not conquer (the crusades), does not wage war (the popes of the Middle Ages), does not collect taxes (Peter's pence), does not vote (the United States),—the church believes in Jesus and shows this faith in good works. Regardless of our particular ecclesiology, the church administration's behavior in the Hitler era is embarrassing. Occasionally it can be used as a good sermon illustration. It is much easier to condemn the sins of the past than to recognize our own situation and to act with as much honesty.

My own conscience is troubled with the question of what should a Christian, yes, a Christian pastor, do in this matter of abortion today. Is there any parallel between the wholesale abortion in our country and the near extinction of Jews in the 1940's in Germany? Of course, your answer could be that you are not performing any abortions and that you have adopted a 'hands-off' policy. That's very nice; however, you know this is the same attitude that many church people adopted in Germany when the Jews were quietly trucked off to the camps at night. And today we condemn *those* church people. It could be said that embryos who (*which* should be used if they are only things) are aborted are sub-human. This is

of course the same argument that was used for the suppression and even murder of the Black population in our country for so many years and the Jewish population in Germany. Blacks and Jews were sub-human.

There are many good theological reasons for considering human embryos human beings. The term unborn children is more appropriate. They are children but unborn. In the New Testament, the same Greek word, *brepbos*, is used for an unborn and a born child. With the case of John the Baptist, he leaps for joy (Luke 1:44) and Timothy has known the Holy Scriptures since he was an infant (2 Timothy 3:14). Both leaping for joy and knowing the Scriptures are acts of faith, at least for these writers of the New Testament. Both of these pericopes have been disqualified so far as our arguments are concerned. Elizabeth could have misinterpreted the movement of the child in her womb. Then of course she could have made another mistake in calling Mary "the mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). If Elizabeth made a mistake about the faith of her own child, how could she have possibly known that Mary's child was God? If Luke 1 and 2 are legends written to magnify the birth of a man who became great in the eyes of the "Christian community," then why discuss anything? Probably the best argument for the humanity of unborn infants is the incarnation itself. From the moment of incarnation, God is already in the womb of Mary. But how is God there? Is He there as a spirit? Is He there attached just to some flesh and blood or whatever? Is God just kind of living within Mary's womb? The Holy Child within Mary is already the result of the incarnation. He is already the God-Man. He is fully God and fully man from the moment of His conception in Nazareth. Jesus did not become a man in Bethlehem. He became a man at Nazareth. This is what the church calls the annunciation. The *homo factus est*, the moment of genuflection in the mass, happened when the Son of God "entered" the womb of Mary, not when He was born. The words from the Johannine prologue, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," are found written over the church commemorating the annunciation in Nazareth. That is where they belong.

There are some who counter with the argument that the incarnation is such a mystery that it cannot be used for example or analogy, especially in the matter of abortion. The incarnation was an exceptional case, so the argument goes. God becoming man is exceptional; however, Jesus was a man in every sense as we are from the moment of His conception, except without sin. He was not even an exceptional fetus. If he was helpless as He lay in Bethlehem's stall, how much more helpless He must have been in His mother's womb. Still He was the God-Man. To use Luke's language for those who favor exegetical language and fear dogmatical terminology, He was both "The fruit of (Mary's womb)" and Elizabeth's "Lord." From the moment of conception, God was a man carrying the world's sin.

Some say that unborn children are undeveloped human beings and then are less than human beings. There is something **wrong** with this kind of argument. What is a total or full human being? Is

there any age where we are more human than others? Is it 24, 30, 34? As we get older and feeble in mind and body, do we become less than human? Do grave physical defects rob us of our rights to be identified as *homo sapiens*? Who is the philosopher, doctor, legal expert, sociologist, psychologist, who can really tell us with authority who is completely human? Is there any person without some kind of defect? Do height, size, weight, intelligence, hearing and seeing abilities determine humanity? Does the 'glob' become a human being simply by passing through the mother's birth canal? Is that the 'miracle' that makes a sub-human being into a full human being?

From a Biblical viewpoint, the child from the moment of his conception stands *coram-deo*, i.e., he stands before God in the condition of judgment. He is held accountable for Adam's sin and takes his place along side of his fellow human beings before God's tribunal. But he also is an object of God's grace. Whatever God in Jesus took to Himself He also redeemed. The embryonic period of the Son of God was not wasted time. In all periods of His life, Jesus was fulfilling the Law for us. Jesus redeemed us from our childhood sins with the same commitment as He does from sins of adulthood. Within the womb of Mary, He began the redemption of all who would go through that same period. Through no fault of their own, they had to bear Adam's sin and its consequences. Now through no effort of their own, God in Christ began their redemption by becoming Himself an unborn child.

At this point a discussion of unbaptized born and unborn infants could ensue, but this can be left till another time.

Whether the reader will be impressed by the arguments offered for the humanity of unborn infants is another question. Still these arguments are not so irrational or illogical to make them totally meaningless and worthless. For this writer, unborn infants are human beings and recognized by God as having His image and also as sinful, but still redeemed in Jesus. For the reader, the whole matter might still be an open question.

Now the writer wants to offer this valiant but feeble plea for these unborn children or embryos or whatever. Those who find that embryos are human beings, abortion is only permissible but still sinful when the life of the mother is in unavoidable danger. It is not good to take a life without just cause; but it is better, but not good to take one innocent life than two innocent lives. For those who are not sure what or who the embryo is, human or sub-human, would it not be better to avoid abortion? Is doubt a *carte blanche* for an action which is irreversible and which *might* involve the life of a human being? Let's deal with a concrete example. An unmarried girl might learn one or two or even three months into her pregnancy that she is going to have a child. Sometimes it can be hidden longer. Her burden is to bear that child another half-year. A decision to abort deprives another human being of an entire life time. It's a 'sacrifice' of several months from her life versus seventy years of another human being. Can there be any doubt in whose favor justice's balances weigh?

There are other arguments! There's the one that states that a child with a grave defect should not come into the world. What are

'grave defects'? Blindness, deafness, lack of coordination, very low or very high (!) intelligence, shortness or height, anyone who does not approximate what our time considers average? Will legislatures and judges determine what is a grave defect? If people with 'grave defects' should not come into the world, why should people with 'grave defects' be permitted to stay?

Some argue that 'unwanted children' should not come into the world. The worth of a human being is not determined by whether someone or anyone wants him. God wants him—that's good enough. Many unwanted and unloved people have gone on to greatness both in the world and church.

Wherever the church in America endorses abortion or permits it to go without protest, she might be putting herself in the same position that the Protestant Church of Germany put herself in the early 1940's. Even the thought of "might be putting herself in the same position" should cause a moment of great hesitancy. The Protestant Church of Germany is, as was said above, an ecclesiastical administration, an ecclesiastical arm of the state. The state church has the function of blessing the state—no questions asked! In the United States, the church does not receive her nourishment from the state. (Thank God for Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms!) The Nazis in the 1940's did their dirty work with threats of bayonets, imprisonment, torture, and hideous death. No one is forcing the church to hop on the abortion band wagon. She is going willingly and too often is directing the lead horses. Not to act for the neighbor for his benefit because of fear of personal harm is one thing; but to contribute deliberately and voluntarily to his harm is quite another thing.

What an unusual sight for churches in the name of God to pass resolutions endorsing abortions. There are some that say that the church should speak on social issues, but if this is speaking on social issues than it would be better for the church to be an accomplice by her silence in the case of Nazi Germany than to be an accomplice through direct and voluntary action as in the case of abortion in our country. There are levels of sin and guilt on earth.

Finally this writer comes to the problem of his own conscience. Please let the reader give him at least the credit for having thought through the matter for a number of years and that he has not been ignorant of argumentation from all sides. He, like many others, admires Dietrich Bonhoeffer for standing up to Hitler. Still this writer sits at his typewriter with much less courage, knowing that each day an undetermined number of unborn children, hundreds, thousands, who knows, are being deprived of the right to live. They are totally without defense. There are few spirited writers and orators coming to their aid. Even the protests of the Catholic Church, which during the Irish-Italian ghetto period of our nation raised a hue and cry on all kinds of issues, has been strangely quiet. It might be strange to be in league with the Catholic Church, especially since the Protestant churches have always questioned the church's right to political recognition or power. Still any method, principled or unprincipled, must be used to stop the tragedies.

Within a few years, December 28 will again fall on a Sunday. That's Holy Innocents' Day for the liturgical churches. The Epistle is Revelation 15:1-5 and the Gospel is Matthew 2:13-18. Ministers can preach about that wicked King Herod and how he slew the innocent children of Bethlehem. The center theme of the sermon can be how the innocent suffer through no fault of their own. But can ministers preach against the sins of wicked old King Herod and forget about what might be happening in the local hospitals?

For those who are concerned about the topic there is no reason why Holy Innocents' Day cannot be used for applying God's Word to the matter. It can be a day of mourning not for the victims of Bethlehem or Dachau, but for those in our own country. In some way there should be a call to action. Christian doctors and nurses might state quite emphatically they will not perform an abortion or have anything to do with one, except in the case mentioned above. Pastors and all members of the congregations might present their conscientious concerns to those who are employed in hospitals or who are members of hospital boards. In some cases members might be elected to hospital boards who publicly oppose abortion. Where possible Christians might boycott doctors and hospitals who perform abortions or who make referrals to those who do. Hospital employees, especially nurses, might be instructed to baptize children who have been aborted and in whom there is a trace of life. That is not the time to ask for the parents' consent. Such actions might only be candles in the wind, but sometimes little candles have started large fires. Some day we will be held accountable to God. In this matter I would rather stand guilty for having done too much to halt it, than too little or nothing to stop it.