

# ABORTION REVISITED FOR A PEDIATRICIAN

A well-seasoned, middle-middle-aged, highly successful, evangelical-Christian pediatrician has asked me to comment on his manuscript titled "Abortion: A Pediatrician's Search." As a revisitation of the issue, this Thinksheet is only a modest update, as my position has modulated only slightly since the 1995 Beermans publication of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT, whose index has seven references to the subject. (I have reason to believe that this physician has read the book, so I ask him only to reread the seven references in preparation for reading this Thinksheet.)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

1 Congratulations on your serious wrestling, with the help of Scripture & scholars, with a question for which **no** religiously, morally, or politically definitive answer is in sight. There now: in one sentence I have (1) praised you & (2) stated my basic operational position on this issue.

2 My hermeneutics requires me to ask, of any literature, (1) what's here? & (2) what that should be isn't here? What's here, in your paper, is a careful dealing with a wide range of facts & factors--though your 13-item bibliography has only 1 pro-choice item. What's not here is society, the biosphere, & (except for one reference on p5) the anguish & despair of the unwilling pregnant. But more on these later.

3 In a class today, a WWII veteran said he's convinced that on the issue we were discussing, God wants him to remain confused & undecided. Worth thinking about, isn't it? What warrant do we Christians have for believing that God wants us, on every issue, to be decisively yes/no? None I can think of. But I do know that our sinful, assertive egos forever nudge us to take positions we can announce with a loud voice.

The abortion issue does not silence me, but I cannot address it with as loud a voice as I did in 1995. The mystery of good/evil is too deep for debaters' points. Too deep for religion, certainly too deep for government: my second solid conviction on abortion is that government should **stay out** of our bedrooms & hospitals & reproductive clinics.

4 If a hot-button issue had the angels on only one side, the issue would not be hot-button. Whichever side you take on abortion, the hottest issue, you are on a side of the angels (with the particular set of religious, ethical, political, & humane values & virtues pertaining to that side & tempting you to self-righteous indignation & intolerance of the other side, including its angels). If you agree with me that the issue is this complex, however, you can manage humility. But if it seems simple to you, your side being simply right, you are nevertheless under the commandment to love your neighbor, even (on this issue, or any other) your enemy neighbor.

You are aware that some pro-life proponents, violating love, spew out hot hate--& some even hot bullets--against "abortionists," "baby-killers," "murder factories," etc.

5 Would your paper feed such fanaticism? No more than some of the frightening pro-life stuff I read in the eminent Christian-intellectual periodical, FIRST THINGS: never a good word conceded to us of the pro-choice persuasion. In al-Qaeda's hundred pro-Islamist (not Islamic: "Islamist" is fanatic fundamentalist Islam) schools, never a good word for "the West," with the USA as "the great Satan." Frightening. Indeed, since Sept.11, terrifying--terrorizing. Churchill defined a fanatic as "one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject." The most effective enemies of the pro-life position are its fanatic promoters, whose antics you abominate even more than I do (for their ironic effect is to add weight to my side of the political balance)....From here on, I'll comment on your paper page-by-page (in a way that it'll be unnecessary for my other readers to read your paper).

6 Your focus is moralistic (considering abortion only as right/wrong) & myopic (narrowly attending to the destiny of humanly-endangered preborns). You berue

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the 32.5 abortions in the USA since R.v.W.(1973). I hold you in honor for the undoubted hundreds of preborns that, through decades of pediatric service, you have saved from death. But that properly & honorably narrow professional focus is, it seems to me, an occupational liability vis-a-vis the abortion issue.

As you do, I denounce "abortion on demand" when taken to sanction irresponsible sexual behavior, denigrating a high gift of God & glossing over a major failure & tragedy in life. That extreme is the polar opposite of "no abortion," an impossibility in fact &, jurisprudentially, a horror to contemplate. I'm in the "rare & legal" mid-position. By invalidating all states' laws limiting/forbidding abortion, R.v.W. properly got government (almost entirely) out of bedroom/hospital/reproductive clinic: that's the negative meaning of "legal." Pro-life politics wants to put government back (indeed, increase government's presence) into the birth-control business (literally, controlling-promoting birth by blocking abortion). That coercive intervention by the state seems to me religiously, ethically, politically, & societally WRONG.

7 Take "societally." You medics have been such successful death-enemies that earth's population is approaching 3x what it was when I was born. Already, 40% of humanity does not have access to water you & I would consider potable. And if it'd been left to you, there'd be 32.5 million more (unwanted by their mothers!) Americans born these past 28 years. Yes, some of the forced-birth mothers would have come to love their offspring (as you know far better than I). But what of the millions who would have been abused, neglected, even (many) murdered?

8 Since your paper's focus is on the individual, I must not unfairly press upon you what you didn't include--viz., society & the planet's life-support system, the biosphere. But if the pro-life people can smuggle the word "murder" out of the courtroom into bedroom/hospital/reproductive clinic, cannot I smuggle it into society & biosphere? Do not unwanted births murder hopes & the good earth, now for the first time threatened with bio-crash through the hypertrophy of one of its species?

9 "The sanctity of life" is an invalid argument. As inviolable, the sacred is untouchable. Pediatrics violates the sanctity of life by intervening variously in the conception-gestation-parturition process. Nor is the "image of God" a valid argument against abortion: pro-life debaters use it as nothing more than a synonym for "the sanctity of life," an unbiblical concept: only God is holy, & our species is no more sacred than any other, or even inanimates. Indeed, the biblical desecralization of nature (including us) is what opened up the possibility of Western science/medicine (the Bible, conjoint with ancient Greek naturalism).

10 I fear the unhistorical, overneat, moralistic division into "Christians" (including you as pro-life) & "humanists" (including me, since I'm pro-choice?). Unhistorical: the traditional Jewish position is not pro-life (meaning fetal life) but Gn.2.7: human life begins when the newborn breathes. While we Christians have a few anti-abortion quotes from our ancients, Christian practice has varied, the RCC not banning abortion until the 19th century. The present RCC/Evangelical effort to present abortion as a goodguys/badguys issue is sinfully dividing the body of Christ, in which we Christians are found all along the +/- continuum on the abortion issue.

11 Will persons who're against hunting, but wouldn't "impose their opinion on" others, end up as hunters? That seems to be your logic against pro-life folk who're against anti-abortion legislation. The politicization of the abortion issue occurred when some citizens became convinced they should, by legislative coercion, impose their opinion on the entire populace. Do you really agree with the coercers? As a biblical scholar, I'm especially irked at the coercers' effort to coopt Scripture for their anti-choice cause.

12 Can you really believe that hardship cases--traumatic, therapeutic, genetic, social-economic--should be legally deprived of access to abortion?....Your paper is worth more comment, but I must limit this Thinksheet to one sheet.