

ABORTION "IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD"

A SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT U.S. DEBATE

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Eugene Kennedy's pregnant distinction between Culture 1 Catholics & Culture 2 Catholics provides me with a useful way of distinguishing the two cultures (Lord Snow's distinction, which EK seems to have adapted for his purpose, as here I've adapted EK's to mine). This agrees with certain social psychologists who are saying that the abortion debate's deeper & wider reality is a Grand Canyon divide in the American civilization toward the close of this millenium. This Thinksheet is an exploration of that **divide** through an examination of attitudes & postures vis-a-vis the abortion issue in the days immediately after the stupendously successful pro-choice March on Washington & in the days just prior to the Supreme Court's hearing of the Pres. Bush-supported Missouri challenge to Roe v. Wade.... On MacNeill-Lehrer last night, Stephen Hawking, Einstein's successor as supreme theoretical physicist, said he converts a problem to geometry so he can see it. Here's my geometry for this Thinksheet. All three levels are both personal & pastoral.

	Culture 1	Culture 2
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1. I am deeply concerned about this current clash of cultures on the abortion issue--especially within the churches, where I as a Christian & religion scholar have a special responsibility. I write this Thinksheet in the hope it may help the civility & efficiency of the upcoming Craigville Theological Colloquy VI, "Human Beginnings: Deciding about Life in the Presence of God." That colloquy--though well mixing laity, clergy, & religion scholars--is subject to so many dangers that we are being credited more with courage than with wisdom in the choice of topic (chosen not by Craigville but by the Colloquy Committee, made up of laity, clergy, & religion scholars).	<u>legal</u>	anti-choice	pro-choice
	<u>social</u>	naive	sophisticated
	<u>theological</u>	scribal	observational

2. This here letter in today's CCTimes presents, about as clearly as possible, the ecclesial problem: most of the members of our churches, even of the more liberal churches, are Culture 1 on abortion. They are 1l (ie, anti-choice) in believing that the pregnant should not be entirely, unlimitedly, free to decide to abort. They are 1s (naive) in being educationally less advantaged than those who have become more articulate in both senses (ie, able, in thought & speech, to distinguish & categorize). And they are 1t (ie, scribal) in having a piecemeal, proof-texting, literal approach to the Bible.

3. Where Culture 1 sees rights/wrongs, Culture 2 sees rights/restrictions. Both buttress their cases at the first level (ie, legal) with adductions from the other two levels. At the middle level, Culture 1 uses the archaeosocial sanction, "the decent opinion of mankind" historically (an argument history does not entirely support); Culture 2 counters with the fact that the current American opinion, decent or not, is that the abortion decision is better put in the hands of the pregnant than in the hands of the government. And at the ultimate (theological level), both invest their views with sacralty: Culture 2 considers abortion-deciding within the sacred sphere of the private, & Culture 1 counters with what you behold in the heading of today's letter.

4. This Thinksheet's title says I'm concerned here, as is the upcoming

Abortion rights are sacrilegious

The large number of women supporting the "right of choice for abortion" continues to amaze me. It would appear as though the reasons were just selfish ones. We know that the Catholic Church opposes abortion. We also know that Protestants are divided on the issue. I am not sure of the Jewish position on the subject, but I do know Jews have strong family traditions and that they believe in the Old Testament of the Bible.

Some years ago, I also thought that women's right of choice had a lot of merit to it, until I analyzed the problem in more detail and discussed it with other people. I came to a different opinion for several reasons, two of which are as follows:

First, we know that one of the Ten Commandments states: "Thou shall not kill." I have to believe that the fetus is alive and growing. Secondly, in reviewing Psalm 139 in the Bible, I realized that the information contained therein was even a more powerful reason for opposing abortion. Briefly, this chapter indicates that the Lord knew us before we were born, while we were in our mother's womb, and forever.

To kill a soul could have disastrous

consequences when one faces his maker in the judgment. For those who do not accept the Bible as the divine word of God, I might tell them that no one in the history of civilization has given us a better system of rules for living than those contained in the book.

If we all lived by the word of God, the world would be a much better place in which to enjoy life. For those who do not want children, there are still birth control measures available and adoption agencies exist for this purpose.

I would support a complete revision of adoption laws and procedures because I know that there are some Americans who have had to adopt children from foreign countries because of the difficulty in adopting children under the present system.

I would hope that every person would re-evaluate his position (if he is for choice) on the basis of the information I have presented. It is my opinion that church leaders have not been teaching their parishioners properly on the religious reasons for opposing abortion. To take a stand on such an important issue because it is the popular thing to do is sacrilegious in my judgment.

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Yarmouthport

Colloquy, with the third, the ultimate, the theological level, "the bottom line": how sits the abortion issue with God? Argument on this level is so tough that, to avoid the pain, we're tempted to argue only the levels of "the world" (including the media), the social & (the easiest level!) the legal. But theists must brave the pain & essay an argued response to the God-question, a response that is articulated on each-one's-own assumptional foundation. I'll let my **assumptions** as a Culture 2 Christian hang out:

(1) God has given me eyes to see both the world & the Book, to live both by **observation** and by **revelation**; & I'm against letting either swamp the other. Darwin let the former swamp the latter: since nature as a fact is cruel & God as a belief is kind, either God is not kind or God is not: CD never resolved that dilemma, always refused to call himself an atheist, & at some points in THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES, not just at the close of the 2nd ed., he makes theistic statements. Culture 1t commits the opposite intellectual crime: Galileo recants to the scribal Church, but privately reaffirms his observation: "But the earth DOES move ('si muove')!"

(2) I observe that--& I almost failed to resist the temptation to make this this Thinksheet's title--"The Great Abortionist Knows Every Zygote." Reread, please, the letter: "the Lord knew us before we were born." The letterwriter has generalized the psalmist outburst into "information" against abortion. But my greater problem with his interpretation is his inference that knowledge of this divine knowing should protect the fetus against human-intentional abortion, in spite of the observed fact that the divine knowing of every human individual in zygotic (unicellular) form does not protect billions of us from being aborted, without human intention, by the Great Abortionist: "misses" (miscarriages). If God is so profligate about us in utero, why should we be so abstemious? Should we not rather accept, as model for personal & population control, **the Great Abortionist**?

(3) I have no patience with devious quibbles about "when human life begins." You're all there, in potential, in your zygote: your zygote was you, you are your developed zygote. If your mama had used the French pill on you, it would have been you who died. Down with the **neomedievalism** that tries, despite the biocontinuum, to define some postconceptional point at which you became a human being, ie, you! Augustine opined that the soul enters the body somewhere between the 60th & the 80th day. Too bad that Roe v. Wade messed around with trimester biology: that should be stricken rather than the law overturned or otherwise modified.

(4) All abortions--both categories of miscarriage (with & without human accident), & all successful human interventions to kill human beings before birth--are instances of the death of **the innocent**. Antiabortionists use this fact for pathetic effect, as an emotinal support where reason has failed. It stands to reason, from observation, that God is not overworried about the innocence of the billions of "natural" abortees (misses). We have here not a theodic problem but an instance of the pathetic fallacy, the false attribution of a developed human quality to human preborns & birth-monsters (borns let die because of the decision that letting them live would be cruel).

(5) Our letterwriter extends "Thou shalt not murder" to zygotes-embryos-fetuses! Bad enough that it was previously extended to the military (by pacifists), to jurisprudence (by opponents of capital punishment), to medicine (by opponents of euthanasia & animal experimentation), & to animal husbandry (by vegetarians & other opponents of using killed animals). But Culture 1 does indeed want abortion to be given the legal word **murder**. God the Great Murderer? A confusion of categories, reading the legal into the social & the theological.

(6) The letter's ¶4 threatens the wrath of God. The afterlife **judgment** (in which I believe) will get you if you don't align yourself by the Bible's "rules for living." But that begs the question: though the Bible doesn't mention abortion, its "rules for living" are against it? Say I, we'll be judged by how we (mis)treated the good earth, whose only earthly enemy is hypertrophied humanity, the curse of the overactive penis & womb.

(7) The Bible subordinates nature religion to history religion, denying to the former the word **sacred**: nothing natural, including the human fetus is sacred; & it is idolatry to declare otherwise. God is holy, freedom & honor are sacred, the human zygote is neither.

(8) Not only permitting but promoting abortion helps offset the results of **the Fall**.