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<http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/05/child-abuse_who_owns_the_chilren.html>

**Child-Abuse: Who Owns the Children?**

*What should be done when parents rely on religion instead of medicine to heal sick children?*

Faith *or* medicine is a false either/or that needs the corrective of both-and. Medicine without faith is weaker than it can be, and faith without medicine is sometimes fatal.

The two cases "On Faith" has presented its panelists with should be factored into our responses to the question. I'll call them the age-13 case and the age-11 case.

AGE 13: Hauser has a 5% chance of surviving his disease without medicine (chemotherapy plus radiation), and a 90% chance of surviving with medicine. He and his parents refused medicine *on religious grounds*: they believe in Amerind "natural" medicine. Further, they believe that the chemo would be fatal. When the court transferred parental rights to the county family services, and ordered that the boy be taken to a pediatric oncologist for chemo, mother and son fled and have not yet been found. The father has relented, and publicly has asked his wife and child to return.

AGE 11: Neumann died, and her mother is up for second-degree murder for her daughter's untreated diabetes. As the girl rapidly declined, her mother's only action was to increase the frequency and fervor of her prayers for *divine healing* and (at last report) believes that her daughter will come back to life. In a Bible study group, the parents heard a fellow-member say, "If you have enough faith, the Lord can do anything." Group members "found Biblical phrases related to healing."

1.....Religion and medicine co-evolved and should be seen as *partners, not alternatives*. In primitive forms, both were intentional friends of humanity but also actual enemies of humanity. Simple-minded extremists came to believe that humanity would be better off without one or the other But we realists note the tragic consequences when medicine is given up (for examples, these two cases) and when religion is given up (for example, Marxian communism).

2.....Historically, parental rights were*inviolable*. How parents dealt with children was nobody's business - not the neighbors, certainly not the government. The age-11 case satisfies this point of view: there was no intervention of neighbors (though some of them thought of it) or police. The girl's death may or may not have been educational for the parents. The community should grieve with them, but the government should not punish them.

3....*.To whom do the children belong?* The biblical and traditional American answer: "To God. "Children are born from their mother's womb into the wombs of the family, the community (including the government), and the world. Their primary societal womb is the family: the parents have primary responsibility for their protection and physical-cultural-intellectual-spiritual nurture. Children, as they grow, have reciprocal responsibilities to these wombs, which have reciprocal rights over them and their parents. For example, while the family has the primary right and duty to educate the child, the community has the secondary right and duty to do so. Once - once - I skipped school; and that evening, the truant officer confronted me in my home in the presence of my parents. I did not have the right to skip school, and my parents did not have the right to let me grow up uneducated. (Since 1963, when government schools became non-religious, the number of private schools has been increasing - as has home schooling, though some parents are incapable of meeting the government standards for it.)

4.....Government has the right to force *education* on children, and should have the right to force *medicine* on them. Theoretically, parental religion or its absence should have no bearing on either governmental right.

5....But wait! Not so fast! Should a Taliban government have the right to *deny* education to girls, and contraception and abortion to women? All governments have religious assumptions which may conflict with the religion or irreligion of the citizens. The American solution (the First Amendment) is to protect religious and political institutions from interfering with each other, and the government from interfering with the religion or irreligion of the citizens. Parents, accordingly, have the right to bring up their children in whatever religion they choose, without governmental violation of that freedom. In this perspective, the court's action in both cases is un-American. I so loathe and fear government interference with religion that I can stomach (though with painful reluctance) a few dead children. I do not believe in "the infinite value of the individual," pre-born or born.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  MAY 23, 2009; 11:27 AM ET**

**Comments**

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(I'm sorry, yes, you may detect a note of anger and shortness, there, Reverend. I'm more down with spiritual healing than you can likely imagine. Forgive me if I don't think you're qualified to tell the government when my kid can have the mundane kind.)

**POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | MAY 28, 2009 6:47 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Well, Lepi, I don't know if I buy the idea you can either force a kid of thirteen to take chemo, or alernately suffer otherwise, in such an abstractly-and-moralisticly-presented scenario.

If people are resorting to absolutes, and in fact saying, 'First we do harm,' in hopes of cheating a Christian Death that is an object of fear, especially relying on a profiteering health system... then neither answer can be, blanketly, right, in that case.

Again, it's different from being rich enough to have insulin to deny your kid for the sake of religion and then pay big lawyers to allow you to watch suffer.

If it were \*my\* kid, I would go with the chemo and have good healers involved... \*if\* I could see it through. If it'd happened to a stepdaughter in \*my\* care, it wouldn't have been too unlike being on the res. No money, no insurance, no \*nothing\* that could do anything but poison her for a \*little\* while, pn the debt load accorded to folks like me, make her miserable, and have no profiteering doctor to go to.

As a Pagan, I'm very used to Christians in the media hastening to blame everything on an alternative practice, while making a 'controversy' out of rich people insane enough to deny kids insulin... They don't know what it's like when your daughter's sick with the \*measles,\* not covered, you're on disability, the spouse is scraping on a job with no family benefits, and you \*can't\* do much more than try to get her to an ER and ...well..

Yeah, you pray hard. But not cause you're not 'allowed' to do better.

Gods.

**POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | MAY 28, 2009 6:04 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Nice use of quotation marks around "natural" medicine there, Rev.

Chemo isn't the only effective treatment for cancer. Who's to say that the methods this family would prefer CAN'T work?
Chemo "cures" aren't necessarily permanent, and chemo often leaves the patient cancer-free (at least for a while, but tumors are known to recur after chemo has been discontinued once the patient is "cured"), but in a weakened, debilitated state, from which some patients never recover. That's where you get into quality of life versus quantity of years issues.
Thirteen is old enough to understand "This medicine can shrink your tumors, even though it's going to make you extremely ill in the process. This medicine could permanently damage your body or even kill you before it destroys the tumors. There are other medicines out there, but we don't know for sure how well they work or if they work at all. Without any medicine of any kind, the tumors will kill you." Knowing that, if the kid doesn't want chemo, he shouldn't be forced to take it. If he wants to try other forms of treatment, he should have that option. If he wants no treatment at all, he should have that option as well.

**POSTED BY: LEPIDOPTERYX | MAY 27, 2009 10:29 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Well, Reverend, I have to say I'm more sympathetic to the Native American case: denying a kid treatment for diabetes for religious vanity (believing God's going to provide a miracle even when that doesn't happen,) particularly when diabetes treatment is a pretty clear-cut case of providing immediate, reliable, and long-term relief from suffering...

Is a different matter from impoverishing the family to poison and irradiate your child in hopes it'll kill the cancer first.

Even leaving aside that I might well be working in some spiritual practices (Happen to know some good shamans that get results,) it seems to me that giving a suffering and dying child some insulin is a no-brainer.

The cancer thing, even if I were making the decision for myself, as someone who understands the science and more than a little about immune responses, the cancer question would take a \*lot\* of thinking. I'd certainly want to see the breakdown on just what data those odds came from.

Couldn't say, just offhand, which one I'd choose, for myself, I figure that means there's some room for disagreement.

Kids, though, belong to themselves. Not my place to say what God 'owns' them, we're just, and deeply, entrusted by Those Concerned with their care for a while. Sometimes as parents, sometimes as communities.

**POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | MAY 26, 2009 3:47 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

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