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The sacred is INVIOLATE, but where is it?
This is the numinous factor in debates about

# THE RIGHT TO DEATH

*"seamless-garment death"*

abortion?
passive infanticide of severely deficient neonates?
capital punishment (the death penalty)?
war?
passive euthanasia ("no heroic measures")?
suicide?
assisted suicide (by physician or other)?

Poor Bob Dole! What's to do? He fails to make the White House if he (1) fudges on the abortion plank in the Republican Platform or (2) comes out so clearly pro/con abortion that it convinces the public he's standing on principle. The country is split, about half considering choice sacred & the other half the unborn. Separation of church-as-institution & state, yes; but law enacts a people's sense of the sacred, & all law is "oppressive" where a people isn't of one mind on the location of the sacred (the numinous, what is to be uncalculatingly, unpragmatically, honored & not violated). In short, no possible separation of religion (as response to the numinous) & state (so, of course, no possible separation of religion & education).

1 My position on all this is clear but tremulous. "Let all be fully convinced in their own minds," says Paul of an adiaphoron (a disputed nonessential; Ro.14.5 NRSV; & when he wasn't sure he had the word from the Lord [Jesus], he said so). I'm **clear** because I'm fully convinced of "seamless-garment death" (as I said in conversation with Roman Catholic theologian Cath. LaCugna, in response to her teaching "seamless-garment life" as though it were the long-held RC position instead of [as it is] an absolutarian novelty in conflict with some previous RC doctrines, e.g. society's right to death in jurisprudence & in just-war theory).

But I am also **tremulous** about my locations of the sacred, because (1) the Faith (scripture, tradition, church history, the churches) variously locates the sacred, depending on circumstance in apologetics/polemics/catechetics (the floating, or portable, numinous, one might call it), & (2) so many authorities & personages I admire stand over against me on one or more of the seven disputed areas I've listed in this Thinksheet's title.

2 Of the seven disputed areas, the one I'm most tremulous about is **abortion**. Occasionally I relieve myself by imagining that I'm pro-life instead of (as I am) pro-death, i.e. pro-choice. And I say things that give away the store--like, in a recent meeting--"A male is always an individual, a female is an individual only when not pregnant [the pregnant being societies, not individuals]." Morally-socially-legally, the sanctions supporting the individual apply only ambiguously to the pregnant. The idea that women & men have equal rights is bio-social nonsense. Men & women have "a right to their own bodies," but do either have a right to the bodies of the unborn?

In this Thinksheet's intro, I said a people may be, as the American people now are, of two minds about numinous-factor issues. Now I've added this: So can a person. E.g., I, on abortion (but not on any of the other six issues, where my answer is "Yes").

3 The concentric **contexts** in which abortion should be viewed include (in Teilhardian terms) (1) the noosphere (whether the making of humanity was an unambiguously Good Idea (it wasn't, says Gn.6.7 NRSV: "I am sorry that I have made them"), & (2) the biosphere (which is steadily degraded by the offal of, & depleted by the rapacity of, our species). Pro-lifers have the narrowest focus in their location of the sacred, viz. in the unborn (zygote-embryo-fetus); my angle is the widest: I sacralize (i.e., locate the sacred in) the bio-support-system on which all species, including ours, depend. Humanity being the biosphere's only earthly enemy, & the unborn being the leading edge of humanity, I see the death of the unborn as relieving hostile pressures on "life" as the bio-support system, so "every abortionist is a worker together with God" (58-59, my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT). But in some contexts other than the humanity/environment confrontation, I locate the sacred in humanity, necessarily including the unborn--the position early Christian literature takes over against the surrounding paganism's lower valuing of

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humanity. And I honor, defend, sacralize the womb over against (1) genital indiscipline (premarital & extramarital intercourse, & marital rape) & (2) neopaganism's cavalier hyperindividualism ("I can do what I please with my own body")--an attitude which collapses sexuality into genitality, relativizes the male (as in Gloria Steinem's "A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle"), trivializes the child factor in marriage/divorce, lessens marriage as an attractive cohabitational option, increases sexual diseases, decreases sexual pleasure, &--a point strongly made in David Popenoe's just-released LIFE WITHOUT FATHER--threatens social health & order by setting loose on society millions of single males who'd otherwise be domesticated by wives & matured by children.

Does the above ¶ show that I can't make up my mind about abortion? No, it shows that I'm tremulously, hesitantly, qualifiedly pro-death, i.e. pro-abortion. Time, this new technological time of humanity's overburdening the biosphere, has made the "ancient good" of anti-abortion "uncouth," inappropriate. I honor the "ancient good" of Christian anti-abortion as precisely that, an ancient good--now needing nuancing, not flat rejection: abortion is tragic, many abortions are sinful--yet all abortions cut back on the flood of human flesh threatening the biosphere & are *in this limited sense* good....Another distinction: I'm pro-abortion but *not pro-choice*. "Pro-choice" supports a social sickness: "pro-abortion" supports the defense of the biosphere. No difference in action? Great difference in attitude & orientation. The Bible's sovereign God stands against the culture's imperial self, John Updike's "egotheism," a curse making Victorianism look good again (as in the Jane Austen revival [#2768, on her SENSE AND SENSIBILITY]): nostalgia for romance, mystery, the sense of the sacred in sexuality--as supportive of respect for the unborn.

4 Yesterday I said to Kenneth Woodward that when I get to thinking against my position on abortion, what always comes to mind is the one place, in his Foreword to my recent book, he disagrees with me: "He and I...part company on the morality of abortion....he is rather more pious toward the environment than I am."

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