

"A GREAT GULF FIXED"

For every mood Jesus has a parable. I am in great **distress** over the issues in this Thinksheet's first line, & I turn to L.16.26, KJV's only instance of "gulf." With rhetoric of absolute decisiveness, Jesus pictures as unchangeably fixed, set, the disparate destinies of the caring & the uncaring. (NB: The [NRSV] "chasm" is not be overread as formal-ontological; it's functional: Jesus says it's to prevent cross-overs either way across the [CEV] "deep ditch" [transliterally, the Gk. has "chasm" & the Lat. has "chaos"].) Jesus uses the eschatological sanction to support a generous spirit (over against the [Sadducee] hardness of heart from disbelief in "the [afterlife] judgment" (cp. Qur'an Surah 107.1-3: who "disbelieves in the Judgment...repels the orphan and does not encourage the feeding of the poor")....In this Thinksheet, I've used this parable's mood of distress, **sadness**, & **loss** as a metaphor for my mood vis-a-vis the current homosexuality-&-abortion crises within church & society. Let's take them in that order:

HOMOSEXUALITY as praxis-"lifestyle" (not as "orientation") out-of-the-closet & (to one degree or another) in-your-face & on-the-march is a new fact of our time. It's secular grounding is "We can't help it, we're born this way": it's sacred grounding is "God made us this way, & you're fighting against God if you refuse to accept that fact." The former assertion may be true in some cases: the latter need not follow even if the former is granted (In what sense did God make pedophiles, whose sexual preference for children society must abominate?).

The two groundings are pillars of clay on which pro-gay religion thinkers construct a temple of cards, "revisioning" Bible & tradition as required, exploiting the Christian lexicon (e.g., "covenant") for an antiChristian end, viz. the "full [egalitarian] acceptance" of the gay-lesbian-transgender lifestyles.

The gays have won their fight in the media & in public education & are winning in the courts. Being plainly antibiblical (a fact they cleverly conceal), they cannot win in most churches but have taken over some liberal-church headquarters (decidedly so in the case of my church, the UCC, our president even asking the clergy to read in their pulpits his pro-gay "open & affirming" proclamation). In the liberal churches in general, the splitting now occurring is the most serious since 1½ centuries ago many American churches (Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian) split over slavery.

The gulf is fixed, & widening. And it's not a split (as in Jesus' Dives/Lazarus parable) over caring: the issue is *how* to care.

ABORTION is an even wider gulf-chasm-ditch than homosexuality. A pregnant has within her a growth that may emerge as a separate human individual. Medically, the growth is called a zygote-then-embryo-then-fetus. Socioproleptically (i.e., speaking of something future as though a present social reality), the growth is called a baby or child even though the growth isn't really a baby or child until it becomes (1) a separate human individual (2) in a human society. To call the preborn growth a baby or child (1) bypasses the prolepsis & (2) is an instance of linguistic self-illusion. If the growth emerges dead by either form of abortion (i.e., miscarriage or induction), it is a corpse but not a baby or a child. (Our middle son Stephen John was a baby/child for a few minutes & then--because his lungs wouldn't fill with air--a corpse.)....Comments on the abortion gulf:

1 Socalled pro-life (read "anti-abortion") propagandists **politicize** "baby" by using it ontologically, without the common-speech understanding of the prolepsis. The unemerged growth must be a "baby" because that's what everybody (including some biblical instances) calls it. The statement rests on the same (il)logic as this: "God must exist, otherwise we wouldn't have the word 'God'."

2 If the pro-lifers get away with this **word-creep** (the word "baby" creeping into the womb which has not yet procreated), the jig is up for us pro-deathers, we've lost the game. ("Pro-deathers": supporters of abortion as a pregnant's right. The word "pro-death" reveals the political spin in the word "pro-life,"

which makes the opponents anti-life.) Use "baby"-in-uterus in the technical (not just the proleptical way we all use the phrase) & it's impossible to avoid a second **word-creep**: "murder," a sociolegal term, creeps into the womb right behind "baby": ergo, abortion is murder. That makes me pro-murder, which (given my personal history of action & speech) is nonsense.

3 The murder of "abortionists" proves that the "pro-life" linguistic fancy foot-work produces the **dangerous nonsense** of this neat logic (expressed by many murderers in this category of murder): (1) Abortion is murder. (2) So performers of abortion (pejoratively termed "abortionists") are murderers. (3) Every abortion-its murders many babies. (4) So if I kill an abortionist, I am preventing the murder of many babies. Brilliant as many pro-lifers are, I've never seen any one of them crack into this line of reasoning.

4 The Pope has bought into the "pro-life" political slogan-&-rhetoric, which ill-fits Catholic tradition but well fits his PhD thesis & his research thereon. Studies of various personalisms & existentialisms, + his own experience living under anti-life totalitarianisms, intensified his Christian sense of the human being as precious in the eyes of God (a truth Jesus in parables made much of). His resultant fully rounded doctrine of the person (trinitarianly supported) provides the philosophical foundation for the "seamless garment" metaphor & the principle of the "consistent ethic of life," extending even to the novel notion (in Roman Catholic teaching!) of opposition to the death penalty.* (Flipping the "pro-life" political slogan, our area RC bishop is campaigning against the current effort, in the Mass. legislature, to restore capital punishment: he's calling c.p. "anti-life.")...To be a "good" Catholic, the devotee is expected to check out what the particular current Pope believes (including his novelities concealed as discoveries-recoveries within the vast body of the Tradition), & believe that, equating that with the gospel, as...

5 ...in the case of R.J.Neuhaus, who says the present Pope's "Gospel of Life...is, quite simply, the Gospel" (p69 FT 2.99). While this equivalence does not amount to blasphemous idolatry of a recently crafted doctrine, it does amount to **fanaticism**: it's "beyond dispute that Catholics who reject" "the truth about human dignity as taught [I add, "currently"] by the Church" "cannot claim to be faithful Catholics." Neuhaus absolutizes anti-abortion & implicitly anathematizes "pro-abortion [Catholic] politicians," who thus "violate the foundational truth of the right to life" & thus excommunicate themselves....This anti-abortion fanaticism mars the otherwise well-tempered & fair journal Neuhaus fathered, but I must confess a secondary satisfaction with the fanaticism as discrediting anti-abortion (as, in a grosser way, murderers of abortion-providers discredit it). I can smile while my opponents on anything scream their give-no-ground ("beyond dispute"), take-no-prisoners rhetoric. With no effort on my part, their excess puts me on the high ground of reason & fairness....When humble-open certitude rots down into arrogant-closed certainty, we can expect right/wrong dogmatism such as Neuhaus shows in a statement vis-a-vis Jews & abortion (p82 FT 1.99): "Most Jews, as more thoughtful Jews regularly lament, are emphatically on the wrong side of the abortion divide." That puts the Jews I best know & respect in the less thoughtful category!

6 "The Future of the End of Democracy," J.Budziszewski's lead article in the 3.99 issue of FIRST THINGS, mounts a well-articulated defense of FT's 11.96 symposium titled "The End of Democracy"?--a radical, doomsday screed against the U.S. Supreme Court's alleged usurpation of legislative powers (esp. vis-a-vis the Court's 1992 *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*). The symposium's suggestion that revolution may be necessary is based on the belief that the S.C. has authorized murder of one class of citizens (the unborn as [JB] "an unprotected class of persons") & (slippery slope) may soon let lethal violence loose on some other classes, e.g. those vulnerable to "euthanasia and assisted suicide."....JB argues not *for* the fetus-as-person premise but *from* the fetus-as-person (alleged!) fact. Here we have, in the anti-abortion linguistic bag of tricks, a third **word-creep**. I'm glad that "person" spread to include woman, who's not a person in the old matrimonial phrase "man & wife" (& is in a 1904 letter of Rilke, who speaks of "womanly person"). But to call the growth within a pregnant a person is a semantic trick & a legal monstrosity.

* Serious, because the authority to define = the power to persuade = the majesty to control.

Readers, I apologize for asking you to stay with me for a second sheet, but JB's article is too rich & irritating for me to devote only a few lines to. A thoughtful brother in Christ, he usually writes things that set me to praising God. And even when I deeply disagree with him, as I must on "abortion" (which here I put in quotes to indicate the whole semantic "pro-life" field), I honor him by wrestling as honestly as I can manage (given my convictions-opinions-biases) with what he has to say. So a few more comments arising from his 1.99 (pp15-21) FT article:

p15

"The United States is in a constitutional crisis" because of the SC's (Supreme Court's) failure to exercise on itself due legal restraint, esp. beginning with *Roe v. Wade* (1973). What crisis? I agree with "RvW" & its 1992 use as precedent & hold that Borkian "original intent" is the place to begin, not end, jurisprudential decision-making. (But of course on some issues, when original intent is arrived at or approximated, I want to yell "Stop right there!")

....In the 1992 decision, "the Court unilaterally established...the religion of radical selfism." While the Founders "pledged themselves to the laws of nature and of nature's God," the Court now grants the citizen a "right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." JB reads this as a hunting license on "unborn children" "because each person decides for himself which rules have 'meaning' and who counts as 'human'." The SC had the option of deciding for us all "which rules have 'meaning' and who counts as 'human'?" Would JB have preferred that? Certainly not! I agree with JB that "selfism" (i.e., radical individual autonomy, fitting Luther's definition of sin as "incurvature" on the self) now functions as a religion for millions of Americans (& I add, is the stiffest competition for the biblical [Jewish & Christian] religions of obedience). But there's no wording of the 1992 SC decision that JB would be happy with: he's enraged by the decision itself, for it confirms (as precedent) "RvW" instead of contradicting it. Furthermore, the establishment clause of the First Amendment refers (original intent!) not to religious points of view or movements but to religious *institutions*, "churches" (in the wide sense the USG, e.g. the IRS, is now using the word). That clause is confined to forbidding the Federal government to give any church a leg up on the other churches. JB may be using "establishd" in a loose, rhetorical way; but in so soberly reasoned an article, he should use language more contextually.

...."the natural law against killing." That would be news to Darwin, who abandoned theism because of his close & extensive observation of the natural law *for* killing. You can't win an argument in which you were not the one to put "natural law" on the table: the phrase is so elastic that its user will so define it as to cause you to lose. (What fun the author of ALICE IN WONDERLAND had with this feature of language!) With their Puritan/Enlightenment differences, the Founders could not agree on God's laws unless such laws were addenda to, or at least in sync with, "the laws of nature" (ironically, now a phrase unused in science; in 1776, it was up-to-speed science). Not that "natural law" is now an empty bag; it's a full bag, chock-full of traditions & of wind. Not that it's useless. It's useful (1) in-house, as e.g. among RCs, & (2) when defined for the occasion. What's sad is to see RCs using the phrase publicly as though the sememe were simple & clear to the public in "the public square" & in private conversations among the citizenry.

p16

"The government of the United States of America no longer governs by the consent of the people." True & false. In establishing a republic, the Founders rejected direct ("consent of the people") democracy. The Senate was designed as a mode of consent by the states, not (directly) by the people (& the original plan was to have the senators selected by the state legislatures, to deliver them from the need to get themselves elected by the people). The SC, structurally, is independent of the consent of the people. Some folks are so unhappy with "Washington" that they think we'd be better off wrecking everything & starting over with "consent

of the people" direct democracy. JB isn't that wild, but the whole sourness of FT on the subject gives the willies to the likes of Peter Berger, Wm. Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, Gertrude Himmelfarb, & the editors of NATIONAL REVIEW."laws which violate the moral law are null and void and must in conscience be disobeyed." Here "the moral law" is a specific for the general "natural law" & is subject to the same vagueness. Ironically, this principle lands us in JB's hated "radical selfism," unless JB believes there's some authority that can lay on the populace the meaning of "natural law" (an imposition familiar wherever governments have not separated "church & state"). I feel my Romanophobia surfacing: historically, Rome has tried to control morals politically-legally. Catholic authorities cannot convince the suspicious American public that pressing by "natural law" for laws against abortion is not religious: Romans define natural law as religious. So the more that Catholic officials decry abortion, the more the electorate will support "choice." I am comforted by that self-cancellation.

....JB is to be congratulated for detailing "the hurricane of criticism" FT faced for its symposium. Space forbids my yielding to the temptation to comment on it all.

p17f

Peter Berger: "It is only with great difficulty that I can entertain the idea that abortion is 'an icon of absolute evil'...."....Stanley Hauerwas: "The problem isn't the courts. The problem is the American people!....They *want* assisted suicide! They believe in autonomy!"....Samuel Francis: "The laws to which the symposiasts object are permissive, not compulsive, and how one might 'resist' such permissive laws is never clear."....Gertrude Himmelfarb: "morality and religion" do not "necessarily lead to such apocalyptic political conclusions" as the symposiasts presume."abortion and euthanasia are bad...in the way that stuffing Jews into gas chambers was bad." My comment:

19

"we must disobey" laws that "are unjust because they hinder our relationship to God," not necessarily laws that "are unjust because they hinder our life in this world" (Thos. Aquinas' distinction). But "the culture of death [sic] cannot be sustained by permissive laws alone." Being pro-choice (with abortion hopefully "rare & legal"), I'm anti-life & for the culture of death (a silly statement exposing the political spin JB & others put on "pro-life" & "the culture of death").

20

"commands of God such as 'Do not murder'." (1) Since that commandment did not apply to the death penalty, how can the pro-lifers be so sure it can be applied to abortion? (2) The Decalog has primary commands concerning God & parents (including the sabbath) & secondary commands concerning human relationships: how come Christian pro-lifers take the secondary no-murder command (as questionably applied to abortion) with such bloody seriousness & pay no attention to the primary sabbatarian command? Seems to me hylophilistic (myopic attention to the material growth inside the pregnant) more than theophilistic (concern to express love for God).

...."The greatest obstacle to intelligent discussion about morality and religion in the public square is not a difference in principles, but a muddle in logic." For "logic," substitute "language."

21

"the duty to protect innocent human life is known to every human being. The abortionist says it can't be, because it isn't known to him. What do we say?....we say, 'You are lying....On this point, we know what you know better than you know what you know.'" Such verbal violence comports well with the murder of abortionists, who thus are not only baby-killers but also liars.