

INTERMEDIATE INTERVENTION, ABORTION AS AN INSTANCE OF - Elliott #2031

This is an open-letter reply to a 4p. single-spaced letter* to me from an intelligent, compassionate woman. Intelligence + compassion being God's inner-human intervention between here-and-now and ruin-damnation (for me, the supreme instance being Jesus), may the writer herewith consider God praised and herself thanked that she has and uses this the right combination, though she's absolutistically against abortion: "An evil means does not justify a good end."

16 Feb 86

Dear K...S.....,

Thank you for your heroic and energetic effort to convert me to your antiabortion position, all the more noble in that while you were typing your small children were scampering around and under you. Under that circumstance, I couldn't think as straight as you did. But I must reply that to me your thinking seems straight wrong. Now, in trying to convert you, I have the advantage that my grandchildren are not scampering around and under me: I am, necessarily, taking this advantage of you. But in trying to convert you to my position, I am not taking advantage of you. Rather I am only picking up the evangelistic option your trying to convert me has presented me with....You may not choose to reply; but in case you do, I've numbered my responses for ease of reference:

1. Today's CAPE COD TIMES has 3 whole pages (incl. a few ads) on tertiary threats to Cape Cod water-quality. You will admit that this is the #1 environmental issue where you and I live and that it is in alarming acceleration. Yesterday, in connection with her Hospice work, Loree my wife taught in a town whose water is undrinkable: Provincetown's drinking water comes from Truro. P'town is already what the whole of Long Island is, viz, a drinking-water desert. (As I write, I am about to take off for two foreign countries, and I face the drinking-water problem: are you aware that all the densely inhabited areas of earth have water of such low quality that Americans, who are among the most water-blessed humans in the world, have to beware and take care? The tonnage of human flesh with its bio- and techno-effluvia is fouling, deforesting, desertifying, and impoverishing the good earth God gave us as a world-garden to tend. Maybe you give a damn about all this, but no evidence in your letter that you do: your eyeballs are myopically glued to the human fetus, which is the secondary cause of all this horror (as human conception is the primary cause).
2. One way to describe you illogic is "fallacious intermediate intervention derivative from defective situation-definition." You define the situation as that "an evil means" is being used to "justify a good end" (though you leave the good end undefined), and for support you allude to a cocaine addict (Aldous Huxley) so spaced out (in the book you refer to, ENDS AND MEANS, and in other writings) that his ravings have about as much relevance as most of what I hear and read from anti-abortionists. Was A.H. a pacifist? No, but ~~that's~~ the logic of simple-minded "An evil means does not justify a good end." And are you a pacifist? Against killing in defense of family or self? Against capital punishment? Will you not grant that it's false and foul-play to pull this absolutistic bromide in special pleading against only abortion? Absolutistic bromides and slogans drive up the temperature of discourse to the point where the neocortex has all its circuits blown: instead of a humane dialog between feeling and thinking, people only rage, at the cost of rationality, civility, and humility. Instance the current issue of the Mass. Citizens For Life of Cape Cod Newsletter, in which the director names me in the context of "incredible," "callous, ridiculous" argumentation based on "selfishness and ignorance" and using "biblical babble," lashing out like "a trapped rat." Think of

*After I phoned her after an earlier, briefer letter from her.

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the hypocrisy of calling for respect for life and then treating me with such disrespect! I hope you, an intelligent and compassionate Christian, dissociate yourself openly from such nonsensical vilification and low-morality discourse. And I hope you realize that such ranting does disservice to democracy and makes our Lord Jesus ashamed to have such a rabble-rouser use his name.

3. A civil and democratic debate on abortion will examine the dissonant situation-definitions. You define the situation as 18 million murders legally committed since 1973 (Roe v. Wade): I define the situation as too low an abortion-level, world-wide, to protect the earth against the depredation of the biosphere (ie, as "murdering" the biosphere, our earth-mother, first creature of our Sky-Father). You and I locate the Holy in God, but we differ in our location of the sacred--you, in the fetus; I, in the biosphere, from which the sacredness of human life is derivative, we being divinely assigned to the stewardship of humanity-in-relationship-with-creation. Each of us considers the other's situation-definition defective, flawed if not outright wrong. The human condition includes the fact of variant perceptions, coigns of vantage, perceptions, viewpoints...and to damn one another for these differences leads straight to coercion (legal and/or physical), which is the death of dialog, conciliation, reconciliation, shalom, the Kingdom of God. I pray that you will realize that your stance is spiritually inferior to mine: I consider your position only wrong, but you consider my position evil, to be crushed by government force, viz, antiabortion legislation. In this sense, I see your position (as I said recently on C.C. television) immoral, unethical, antidemocratic, and dangerous to civil order. Religiously, as we are both Christians, our difference is nuanced; but politically we are 180° opposite each other. That is our human situation. It occurs often, but on the subject of abortion it is occurring at the highest-temperature, least-rational level. Perhaps you read the 30Jan86 CCT letter of mine on this: here it is.

4. You say "Rarely do people swing from prolife to prochoice." How, then, do you explain the groundswell that led to Roe v.

Wade? Dirty tactics are part of the explanation for current switching from prochoice to prolife--eg, colorpix of aborted fetuses. I am not sending you a colorpic of a dead, bloody woman murdered so that the fetus that was in her could be born live. The woman-killer MD who did the foul deed would not like being called a

woman-killer any more than MDs who perform legal abortions like being called "abortionists." But you are aware that official-traditional Roman Catholic doctrine is mother-killing (ie, kill the mother when necessary in order to save the "child"). When Loree and I were "having our babies," we made sure she didn't go to a mother-killing (ie, Catholic) hospital. Instead, we went to hospitals that had respect for human (instead of fetal) life. Is your gut-feeling about this that Catholic doctrine was wrong? If so, does it flit across your consciousness that your present version of antiabortion may also be wrong? You have proved your openness to conversion: you converted from prochoice to prolife. God grant you the openness to convert back from prolife to prochoice.

Issue requires rational dialogue

Because abortion is the highest-temperature issue in America today, it's the best issue to use for improving our skills at making democracy work and, therefore, our best opportunity for modeling democracy for the rest of the world. "Ballots or bullets" -- votes or violence -- warns us that there is no third option.

Today's letter (Jan. 24) against me ("Letter Wins Prize for its Stupidity") is a good opener toward reasoned discourse. I love conversations with folks who call me "stupid" and

"pagan" and accuse me of "the dumbest concept so far given for the pro-abortionists" and say the "rubbish" I teach is "a mockery to . . . God." I can be sure that conversation with such hotheads will not bore me, and it just might lower their temperature to the point where reasoned discourse becomes possible.

I believe in God, in democracy, in America, and in the possibility of public reasoned discourse and decision on abortion.

WILLIS ELLIOTT
Craigville

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5. You say "Facts changed my mind. Raw, hard, ugly, terrifying facts. Facts about fetology." Yes yes, the horror pictures. When you were converted, the prochoice people were not stooping so low to make visual arguments. We could have sent you a horror picture of a woman leaning against an Ethiopian desert fence to "have a baby" in a camp in which 900 babies & children a day were dying: what do you have to say about desertification (so extensive in Haiti, eg, that no government can be stable)? You are a human being, capable of thinking a fact like desertification straight through to horror-feeling; you need not have your mind blown, distorted, by colorpix of dead human tissue (which is what an aborted fetus is, whatever other words you may choose to use to describe it). You have been conned, manipulated through your gut to reject a woman's freedom to decide vis-a-vis the fetus within her. Do you not see how morally ambiguous is your decision against freedom, a woman's freedom, including the freedom of millions of pregnant teeners? Would you have the pregnant wanting abortions corraled and put in legal stalls till they "drop," like cows? I am horrified at your low moral sense. I have worked among the poor, and I have seen conception-terror in human eyes. Have you? Should I send you some colorpix of those eyes, blocking out the rest of the face? No: I consider the battle of visual images a dirty, immoral battle; and I leave it to my opposition even though it sometimes results in the conversion of the likes of you. (If at this point in reading my letter you are feeling sorry for me, think more widely: we are feeling sorry for each other, and what does God want us to do with our mutual sorrow? My bothering to ask you this question proves my respect for your intelligence and your compassion.)
6. Life and death are mysteries converging in the mystery of God, whose love overwhelms the mystery in calling us to love as Jesus Christ loved. If Stephen John, our middle son, had lived, he would sometime have died and have been taken up into God as he was when he was born unable (because of an anesthesiologist's malpractice) to draw breath. His hands were shaped like mine, and I held his dead hands in my hands just before I performed the funeral rite for him. Was he human? What else? Was he a "human being" (legal sense)? Of course not: he had nothing that could be called (legally) "rights." No fetus, alive or dead, has. Since World War II, especially the Holocaust, we've been expanding the idea of "rights" to include wider and wider circles of the living--eg, Blacks, women, gays, animals, the fetus of humans, and now (what I'm pushing!) the biosphere (the environment as our life-support system). I'm "heavy" for legislation supporting environmental rights, ie, the rights of the environment as over against human beings (including fetuses). Since fetus and environment are, in this struggle, enemies, you and I--you for fetal rights, I for environmental rights--are enemies. Friends of Christ, friends in Christ, and on this issue enemies. Stephen John and you and I face, primarily and profoundly, God through the mystery of life and death. I hope you can not only see but also feel this wider context in which our difference is spiritually resolved.
7. Was our son Stephen John a "person"? Of course not: a "person" is a creature God brings to birth through two wombs, the womb physical and the womb social. The very notion of "person" is recent in history, esp. since the Enlightenment. You antiabortionists retrovert personhood into the fetus; why not follow your logic to the last step and declare the zygote a person? Think where we'd be if the law extended "rights" to the zygote! Think of the herculean medical efforts to save the unattached zygote! Argumentum ad absurdum is proper here, esp. since you antiabortionists make so much of "medical advances."
8. If you've a copy of the letter you sent me, you will see that I'm

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still responding to paragraph #1--with 15 paragraphs to go! But I must limit this open letter to 6 pp., so please forgive condensation from here on.

9. By "fallacious intermediate intervention" (my paragraph #2), I mean that instead of intervening with abortion to save the biosphere and safeguard the pregnant's freedom of choice (as I do), you intervene to save the fetus, which is the greatest threat to the environment and to the freedom of the pregnant, esp. of the teen pregnant. How do I see abortion as "intermediate intervention"? As intermediate between primary intervention, which is pregnancy prevention (ie, "conception control" by whatever means, moral or chemo-physical) and tertiary intervention, which is all the efforts to clean up the messes we make from the too-successful fertility of the human womb and the ensuing technological effects. Am I for "birth control" (ie, abortion: preventing conception is not "birth control" but "conception control")? Only when efforts at conception control fail, as they are now massively failing in our society (almost half the population being born bastards). My wife and I are virgins except to each other: we believe in, and have practiced, virginal marriage and marital faithfulness. Note that WE ARE AGAINST ABORTION (ie, secondary, intermediate intervention) in our life-style and pro-abortion only because of the massive failure of primary intervention, ie, conception control, in our and other societies. Most of you antiabortionists blur this distinction and so slur people of our position. You commit idolatry vis-a-vis the fetus and so slid into committing moral libel against fellow-Christians whose position is more biblical than yours. (For ½ century I have been primarily a Bible scholar; don't let people fool you into believing that if you "believe the Bible" you must be antiabortion! "Cognitive dissonance," which you mention, works both ways. There is no unagonizing solution to the moral and social sex-mess we are in, including the fact that the mass of human flesh is spreading like a monstrous cancer over the whole earth. And a few days ago in Bombay, which is crawling with human flesh, the Pope preached against conception control! Religion, which can be such good news, can also be such bad news.)....You say "You don't believe a word of what you're saying. You're too much of a family man to be a convincing abortion advocate," and "you do believe in the sanctity of fetal life." I know how you can be so impertinent and wrong about me: you project your own feelings into me as parent, then read them against me as though they were my feelings. Then you accuse me of not believing that "human life begins at conception": wrong again: please keep in mind that the present struggle is at the legal level: the zygote is "human life," but we who favor prochoice legislation oppose calling the fetus "a human being," for that would entitle it (to use an academic phrase) to "all the rights and privileges thereof." Human emotions, yours and mine and everybody's, roil around underneath this legal issue, but the legal issue turns on fine distinctions such as that between "human being" and "a human being." Unfair to accuse anybody of hairsplitting: all legal decisions, in linguistic precision, are street-language chargeable with hairsplitting. And you are ignorant or unkind in accusing me of being unfeeling in my conative logomachy, my semantic heuresis, my embattled struggle to find the right words for a public discourse in which my opponents are pressing for legal action against my position. Notice your self-contradiction: The whole tone of your letter is moral, not legal; but the aim of your movement is legal, viz, to deprive the pregnant of the right to decide not to come to term and to make illegal their access to medical means of terminating their pregnancy....You say "Sanctify the fetus." Blasphemy! Our Lord said "Hallowed (sanctified) be Thy Name" and nothing else....The Jas. Watson you try to use for your case favors withholding "a human being" till day 3: till then, the parent(s) may choose infanti-

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cide. Yes, the same Dr. Watson who got the Nobel Prize as co-discoverer of DNA. (I hope it gives you pause that the only extrabiblical authorities you adduce, viz, A.Huxley and J.Watson, can be so easily turned against your position.) Now, don't get hung up on the language! If Dr. Watson's advice becomes legal, "infanticide" (which is illegal) will have to be redefined as the killing of an infant any time after the second day. Legal language takes the shape, curvature, trajectory of whatever the society legally defines as intelligent and compassionate. As for the elasticity of a term like "infanticide," you may have bumped into the scholastic argument that any form of conception control involving mechanical or chemical means is infanticide in the sense that the spermatic intention is frustrated, all such means being "spermicide," ie, sperm-murdering, whether active (by chemical killing) or passive (by frustrating the sperm's intention to join with the ovum). I mention this to indicate that efforts at terminological precision have always gone on, will always go on, in "moral theology" and "Christian ethics" as well as in jurisprudence. No way to escape this "hairsplitting" no matter how nutty it may seem to the laity in theology and in law. (One way to picture this is as a wheel with the issue as the hub and the categories as the radii. Eg, "infanticide" must consider the active/passive category: can an unwanted neonate be "put to sleep" any time before the third day, or only be permitted to die without intervention to cause death?)....If you are becoming impatient at all this "hairsplitting," think about why I'm doing it: to demonstrate the vast COMPLEXITY of these issues which you antiabortionists (mis)represent as open-and-shut, black-and-white SIMPLE. Brainwashing yourselves to this delusion of simplicity, you work up high dudgeon against your opponents as though we were dimwitted, insensitive, immoral monsters (a projection of your own self-induced blindness and arrogance).

10. Like so many before you, you bathe in fetological and neonatological data as if I were unaware of current medical research. Yes, I had read the NEWSWEEK article you refer me to, but what is the pertinence of any of this to the legal battle we're involved in? As we approach the viability of a zygote in vitro, "abortion" and some other terms will need redefining. (Some, as you know, are calling "murder" the deliberate laboratory death of a laboratory zygote on the ground that a zygote is individual, unique--which of course it is, along with the zygotes of all other, nonhuman, beings--and therefore (?) "an individual human being"--which expression pushes us over the edge and into the fields of "rights" and thus laws.) Further, the power to clone shows every human cell having zygotic potential. What compulsive scrupulosity and jesuiticality all this can lead us into! And none of it has any bearing on the issues of (1) the pregnant's freedom of choice and of (2) human womb-control (ie, shutting down, by various means, including abortion, on the flow of human flesh spilling out onto the fragile, irreplaceable biosphere, that thin layer of earth-water-air that is, as far as we now know, unique in the universe). As for "viability," it is now so hazy a concept that, for that and other reasons, it should not appear in law (which means that Roe v. Wade needs revising--but not repealing).

11. I like your "Protect Mother Earth Kit," suggesting taking an environment course and supporting the peace movement (though we might differ on what the latter means) and guarding against unwanted pregnancies by the "natural family planning" form of contraception. But it's elitist, not touching (1) extramarital pregnancies, now ca. 60% among Blacks, 40% among Hispanics, and 20% among whites; or (2) the fairly high intelligence and very high self-discipline involved in making NFP work; or (3) pluralism, the plain fact that NFP fits well only a fraction of current American lifestyles. By pushing hard, you might shut down the

American babyflow 1% over the next decade: do you not see that this is barely scratching the surface of the societal and environmental issues now being addressed by abortion? But your "Kit" is a good try, bright and breezy and creative, and it shows that your elitist heart is prohuman even though your mind is too distant from the societal and environmental realities to be of much use.

12. May I refer you, too, to a NEWSWEEK piece (16Dec85, p.9) by a philosopher of law at a Catholic university, Fordham. Here's Chas. Kelbley's argument, which I agree with: (1) There can be no objective answer as to whether the fetus is a "person" and at some moment is endowed with a "soul"; (2) "An impartial examination of both views" on abortion "leaves one in a state of moral puzzlement about the proper course of social policy"; (3) So, being thus unable to decide as a people that abortion is wrong, "how can we justify making it illegal"? (4) Since this is "destined to remain a permanently unsettled issue," it's a point at which we should "draw the line between legitimate public power and private belief." "When philosophers, theologians and scientists cannot agree, then it should be resolved in favor of freedom, not in favor of prohibition." And that is precisely how Roe v. Wade did resolve the issue. Reagan, who rules by image rather than substance, is manipulating the issue in the direction of prohibition; and I think it probable that we'll have another insane whirl at another prohibition, this one far more cruel and chaotizing than the one against alcohol.
13. I'm astonished at how easily you conclude against abortion on the ground that "Christ was a fetus" and "never in a million trillion years would Christ be in favor of abortion." You seem to have bought some precarious metaphysical inferences from the former obvious fact, and an equally precarious hermeneutical conclusion (argumentum e silentio) from the fact that our records of Jesus nowhere have him facing abortion. From your insupportable certainties you say "Tell me that Christ would be proabortion, sign your name to it, and mail it to me...." How could I tell you that? If I did, I'd be exhibiting the equal and opposite ignorant arrogance from yours. We do know that he was for responsible living before God and against promiscuity and prostitution; and I think, am of the opinion, that he would be (indeed, now is!) of my opinion on the abortion issue--which is not different from saying that I, as a committed Christian and Christian theologian, am doing my best to discover and teach our Lord's good news under the circumstances of our private and public life today. Again you use the dominical sanction for your opinion by saying "Christ challenges us to make a better society for the unwed mother, the unwanted child." My view is that Christ challenges us to make a better society by reducing the number of unwed mothers and unwanted children by increasing both inner and outer constraints against promiscuity and by increasing abortions. Merely decreasing abortions, which is the legal aim of your movement, would make the society worse. (Have you studied the Moynahan and Moyers reports, and did you hear the President's report last night?) As for compassion toward children, Ferraro turned prochoice when prosecuting child-abuse cases (70Oct85 NW 74): "You can force a person to have a child, but you can't make the person love that child." Have a thoughtful look, too, at this statistic from the UN 1983 World Fertility Survey: Over 400 million Third World women did not want their most recent child and hope they have no more. My compassion dictates that they be provided with the means for both contraception and abortion, to lessen the agony and groaning of the Third World, both human and environmental....Reagan is said to have been convinced by that fraudulent film "The Silent Scream." If you doubt its fraudulence, ask for info from NOW, 1401 NY Av., Wash. DC 20005-2102.