131

<http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/11/moral_concerns_are_common_religious_concerns_are_particular.html>

**Moral concerns are common; religious concerns are particular**

*U.S. Catholic bishops are defending their direct involvement in congressional deliberations over health-care reform, saying that church leaders have a duty to raise moral concerns on any issue, including  
abortion rights and health care for the poor. Do you agree? What role should religious leaders have -- or not have -- in government policymaking?*

1.....The first question calls for a running start, but the second does not: individually and collectively, the people have the right to lobby. This right is subsidiary to "equal rights before the law": no individual or group has more right to lobby than any other individual or group. Further, with the exception of government employees (by election or appointment), the franchise is, in addition to lobbying, the public's only "role...in government policymaking."

2.....The first question, however, fragments into sub-questions:

2.1.....Do "church leaders have a duty to raise moral concerns....?" Yes, in three spheres: their own members, the general society, and government. Secular forces would like to see religion confined to the private sphere, but Christianity teaches that churches should care - as God does - about all of human life.

2.2.....Are moral concerns separable from religious concerns? I say yes, it's implicit in our American "separation of church and state." MORAL concerns are about how people and their institutions behave, what they do. The moral dimension of life is "*common*" in three senses: (1) all human behavior is included; (2) no human behavior is treated as special; and (3) for both freedom and order, law must regulate human behavior ("with liberty and justice for all"). On the other hand, RELIGIOUS concerns are*particular,* common only within each religion or church, though various religions/churches may combine for a common cause, to present a united front on a particular issue.

2.3.....Are moral concerns separable from religious concerns? Not *essentially*, says the Roman Catholic doctrine of "natural law."  
*Functionally*, yes: the Catholic bishops claim that abortion can be argued against purely on a "natural law" moral basis (as atheist Sam Harris defends morals as purely natural). But when I argue pro-choice on the basis of natural law, my Catholic friends reveal, by their absolute rejection of abortion, that their conviction rests on the refusal to separate natural law from what they believe is God's law.

3.....A truly human society accommodates both "STATE" (the necessary structures of the *moral* instinct, with its common liberties/constraints/concern) and "CHURCH" (the structures of the *religious* instinct, with its particular liberties/constraints/concerns). In an imprecise manner, our Declaration of Independence recognizes, in its phrase "nature and nature's God," both realities.  
And Darwin recognized both in facing his 1859 "The Origin of Species" title-page with a quotation from father-of-science Francis Bacon, including this: we should be "well studied in the book of God's word" (the Bible) and "in the book of God's works" (nature).

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  NOVEMBER 18, 2009; 1:31 PM ET**

**Comments**

**Please report offensive comments below.**

Danielinthelionsden:

It is not (scientifically) disputed that the embryo is a distinct, unique, individual member of the human species.

What IS debated is what moral status that member of the human family should be afforded. Almost everyone falls on one of two sides in this debate: (1)those who think that "human rights" including the right not to be killed, come from the mere fact of our humanity, and (2)those who believe that there are some members of the human species that that have "human rights" and some that don't.

No Christian can ignore the well-being and health of the mother. The Catholic Church is the largest single provider of health care in this coutry, and runs hundreds of crisis pregnancy centers. One can hardly accuse them of institutional insensetivity to the plight of mothers.

It seems to me that in the name of compassion you forget (or deny) that all the extenuating circumstance and angst of the mother does not justify taking an innocent life. If child-birth and rearing are difficult and traumatic, isn't being aborted more so?

**POSTED BY: STEPHENWHITE81 | NOVEMBER 24, 2009 5:20 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20stephenwhite81%20%20|%20%20Moral%20concerns%20are%20common;%20religious%20concerns%20are%20particular%20%20|%20%204782708&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4782708%26blog_id=618)

Don't pro-life people make sweeping generalizations about "when does life begin" and comparing a multi-celled embryo to a fully formed human being? And don't they let these generalizations over-ride all medical and psychological aspects of pregnancy and birth, with all the infinite multitude of difficulites and complications which might arise, and which might require medical intervention? Don't they seek to establish a moral ground on which they stand, with God's blessing, and aren't they basically seeking to prove to God how good they are for these simple beliefs?

And don't pro-choice people think more about the individual difficulites for indivdual women who are pregnant and who must give birth? And don't they worry and wonder about how all of these unforeen contingencies might play out for individuals in a world where all abortion is forbidden? Don't they worry more than the pro-life people about the young woman who would die in a non-medical setting, seeking an illegal abortion, if abortion were not legal?

**POSTED BY: DANIELINTHELIONSDEN | NOVEMBER 23, 2009 12:58 AM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20DanielintheLionsDen%20%20|%20%20Moral%20concerns%20are%20common;%20religious%20concerns%20are%20particular%20%20|%20%204782415&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4782415%26blog_id=618)

Rev. Elliott is attempting to create a distinction that would level the playing field between the dominant religious organization in the US and the world an his rather minuscule ball club. I don't find his logic convincing.

**POSTED BY: ROSSACPA | NOVEMBER 21, 2009 12:51 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20rossacpa%20%20|%20%20Moral%20concerns%20are%20common;%20religious%20concerns%20are%20particular%20%20|%20%204782224&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4782224%26blog_id=618)

But which church?

hariaum

**POSTED BY: NAVIN1 | NOVEMBER 18, 2009 5:13 PM**[**REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**](mailto:blogs@washingtonpost.com?subject=On%20Faith%20Panelists%20Blog%20%20|%20%20Navin1%20%20|%20%20Moral%20concerns%20are%20common;%20religious%20concerns%20are%20particular%20%20|%20%204781444&body=%0D%0D%0D%0D%0D================%0D?__mode=view%26_type=comment%26id=4781444%26blog_id=618)

The comments to this entry are closed.