

Beirut has about one unsuccessful armistice per month, and has now (16Jan86) exploded again, armies seemingly running in all directions. An image of our current American abortion war. My main aim in this thinksheet is to describe the armies and what each is fighting for/against. This reflection arises from the responses--phonecalls, letters to me, published letters against me--to my "Fetus is not a human being" (CCT 14Jan86): here it is....Some legal and prelegal aspects of the war I deal with in #2023....Some soldiers are, betimes, in more than one army. Custom, law, taboo, emotion, concept (religious-theological, metaphysical, anthropological, ethico-moral) all jumble together to make the abortion war our most complex social-political issue--much more so than the Federal deficit and Federal tax reform or even foreign policy and armaments negotiations. And this war, civil in the sense that it's radically divided the populace, is "uncivil" in attitudes and rhetoric. ...My goals? (1) To use the occasion of the war for my own inner growth, spiritual-intellectual-moral; (2) To stimulate others' thinking, esp. clergy I have to do with; and (3) To cool the conflict (after heating it up!), helping citizens over the hump of vituperative language and actual violence (eg, the bombing of abortion clinics). In wider context, I hope to be helpful toward spinoff values from the conflict: a fortiori, if we can learn to handle this issue civilly, with an eye to both order and freedom, we may have acquired some transferable skills for dealing with other social-political problems at local and larger levels. (By "local levels," I mean to include congregational snarls, which are the devil's finest achievements as they are, in most cases, played out.)

1. The GIFT-OF-GOD army. My heart goes out to these soldiers, for I agree with them that "life" is a gift of God: indeed, the gift-of-God attitude (in Hebrew, "todah") is thoroughly biblical. But the underside of what the universe does to us is the gifts of the devil, in which category I put every unwanted fetus. Because this army considers the fetus sacred (= "gift of God"), its soldiers are enraged when I point out that under the doctrine of creation, every mosquito egg is equally a gift of God. One phoner insisted that all mosquito eggs are curses from God, a plague from the cursing of the earth (Genesis) rather than from a cursing of the Egyptians (Exodus). The phoner who was this rough on mosquitoes phoned, three hours later, to apologize. Not for badmouthing mosquitoes, but for badmouthing me. Said I, "I have no doubt that your second phonecall is Christian, and a cooling-off model for all of our dealing with the abortion issue." Thank God for mosquitoes, sort of.

2. The "THE-BIBLE-SAYS"-ers. None of my respondents, in any of the three modes, caught my irony in being literalistic (in my last paragraph) about God's "breath" as essential to our being human. Here I commit two literalisms: (1) Gn.2.7, a mythic narrative statement I take as metaphysically descriptive; and (2) The interpretation of God's "life-giving breath" as free air (vs. oxygen either through the cord or through a mask). My mock literal-

Fetus is not a human being

The director of Massachusetts Citizens for Life, Cape Cod (letter Jan. 9) has his priorities upside down.

"Priority" means what's "before." Before the fetus are the parents; before the parents is the community of humanity in all concentric circles (the wider bio-family, the local community, the larger communities of area, nation, world); and before humanity is the decreasingly-good earth.

What's good for God's good earth has priority of "us" all the way from the latest fertilized ovum to the total mass of humanity which is exponentially worse news to the earth and therefore also to itself.

My position, and that of the United States, is provide abortions to all who

want them. Society is as sure to tighten the baby faucet as it is now tightening down on other forces of environmental pollution. What seems to me profoundly immoral is the proposal that we use the law to loosen up even more on the baby faucet, the "pro-life" position.

And I become irate, as a professional Christian thinker, when my religion is used to support that immorality. The Bible says we are made in the image of God and by the breath of God. I'm against infanticide, the killing of breathing infants, that is, of human beings. But the fetus is not a human being, it doesn't breathe air.

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ism enraged a number of literalists, shocking them into realizing (with or without my help) their own literalism--eg, on "Thou shalt not kill." Phoning such folks who have letters to the editor against me provides me with opportunity to listen/teach. Fascinating conversations; I've helped some over the hump into the use of their God-given reason. (Yes, their reason is God-given, whether or not any of their fetuses were.)

3. The army of the SELF-RIGHTEOUS ARROGANT. Pro-lifers (a positive cover for anti-abortionists) in general believe that their opponents are immoral and unChristian. They are unaccustomed to be called immoral themselves, as my letter calls them. A phoner I praised for spirituality and intelligence ("I thank God for you") said "I could feel my face reddening with anger as I realized your letter was accusing ME of immorality!" She argued that the weight of history was with her, and I counterargued that "New occasions teach new duties," a hymn by a contemporary of Lincoln, who said the arrangements of the past "are inadequate to the tasks of the present." Historically, humanity has looked on the environment as exploitable enemy: now we must see that humanity is a polluting and wasting enemy of the environment, without which truly human life is unsustainable. This (my "2nd Copernican shift") is a new idea to most of those I talk with on the abortion issue, so thank God for the abortion war for giving me opportunity for thus reeducating, reorienting the public. (No megalomania here: here and there I convert one, and maybe I'll convert a handful by an upcoming tube show. "By deeds of love and mercy, the heavenly Kingdom comes." I can expect little support from Christians: most of them are stuck in the past, the past's values and taboos....which leads to my next army:

4. The army of the ARCHAIZERS: "The St. James Bible was good enough for Paul and Silas and it's good enough for me." They confuse quoting with thinking, as did (the Gospels say) some of Jesus' opponents. Were Christians of the past wrong? No, I say: they WEREN'T wrong, but they ARE (under the new bio-circumstances) wrong.

5. The SCIENTIFIC army, who imagine that increasing knowledge/skill vis-a-vis fetus and neonate affect positively their antiabortion cause. Pseudoscientific propaganda, eg, "The Silent Scream," plays into their ignorant hands. As in Agatha Christie mysteries, the missing piece is the one that counts; and here the missing piece is the fact that fact and value, "science" and "preciousness," are in different dimensions, so no direct extrapolations or inferences are valid.

6. The ANTI-SEMANTICIST army, who scream "a plague on all your words and hair-splittings!" After complaining about my "technical definitions," one published letter against mine goes on to its own technical definition, viz, that conception to birth is "just another stage in our physical growing process" no stage of which is "subject to eradication." The logic of this position is what I may call "zygote rights," which logically would lead to legal efforts to "save" the billions of zygotes now being flushed down toilets.

7. The BIG-PICTURISTS, including me. "The big picture," life-wise on this plant, is life's support-system, the biosphere, which has the "precious priority." People who, using the pathetic fallacy to the hilt, send me color pix of abortions titled "Every life is precious" should stare also at color pix of a new desert in the Sahel and a new-dead section of the Black Forest and other ecological horrors. The greatest source of polluting and wasting of the earth is the human womb, and abortions are an important factor in decreasing this flow of human flesh--the last-ditch cut-off short of infanticide (the passive or ac-

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tive killing of neonates, newborns), which is murder. Of course what so-called pro-lifers are trying to achieve is the legal definition of the fetus as a human being so as to move the murder charge back in time from the cord-independent infant, ie, a human being, to the cord-dependent fetus, so as to coerce the pregnant into "having their babies." This is a rights trade-off: the pregnant lose the right they now have to have an abortion, so the fetus can have the right to life. I am horrified more by the thought of this trade-off, this coercion of women with its inevitable consequence in millions of illegal and inferior abortions, than I am by the color pix of aborted fetuses. All this comes under "the big picture" of the human treatment of human beings, and that's in the even bigger picture of the biosphere / human womb confrontation. (LEXICAL NOTE: The fetus is human, not--eg--canine or feline, but not "a human being" cord-independent of another human being. Pro-lifers are greatly impressed with the difference between the human fetus and the fetus of every other animal, but not at all impressed by the difference between one bio-reality, viz, girl/woman-with-fetus-attached, and two bio-realities each getting air on its own. The case of Siamese twins is not parallel: each gets air on its own.)

8. The SANCTITY-OF-LIFE-ers, a nontheistic army that makes alliances with the gift-of-God army. (All gift-of-God-ers are also sanctity-of-life-ers, but the reverse is not true.) (Albert Schweitzer's "reverence for life" is a special case of theistic-vitalistic mysticism. Norman Cousins noted, and pointed out to AS, that AS refused to swat a mosquito on his arm: that's too wide a "sanctity of life" for the pro-lifers!) True, the 1948 World Medical Organization Declaration of Geneva has "I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of conception"; but our pro-abortion case is strengthened by the fact that organizations using the Declaration today drop "from the time of conception" (eg, U. of Pittsburgh): in light of recent responsible consciousness-raising on the biosphere, it would be immoral to continue that prepositional phrase....By "the sanctity of life," pro-lifers usu. mean that the individual, incl. the individual fetus, is sacred--and then, against "secular humanism," claim that the Bible supports their position! But in the Bible, the sacred is a term relative not to human life, certainly not to an (Enlightenment, "humanistic") "individual," but to God the Holy One--a radically different ballgame. These pro-lifers eisegete their humanistic sacredness of "the individual" into the Bible so as to complain against "secular humanists," who in their turn are making the sacred claim for the pregnant girl/woman! A merrygoround of confusion. Another aspect of Enlightenment / Age of Reason influence on the sanctity-of-life-ers: "individual" and "person" are assimilated into each other (as, in 1799, Schleiermacher: Individualität = Persönlichkeit--eg, p.361, ON RELIGION, Jn.Knox/69). NOW look at the lexical lineup we have to mess with: fetus, human, human being, a human being, individual, person. When they all collapse into "person," we have the genetic fallacy in reverse: whatever can be said of the last term should be said of the first term; ergo, the fetus is "a person"! Throw in some more terms: baby, infant--every possible term, for pro-lifers, is sucked up into "person," so I'm left favoring killing "persons"! Not just cognitive dissonance; also the need for cognitive reeducation. And for expanding the sanctity of life to include its context, viz, the sanctity of the life SOURCE, viz, the biosphere, whose source is God, who is dishonored and disobeyed and betrayed when by pollution and irreversible waste we violate the life source. More and more, under eco-pressures, we'll be moving from "sanctity of life" to "quality of life" vis-a-vis our life source--ie, quality of biosphere. I hope the move is fast enough to stop the mad rush toward the illegalization of abortion.