

Free speech, yes! Inaccurate deceptive speech, no!
"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

OCCASON: The Joe Lieberman phenom.

1 When during yesterday's Conversation with the Preacher (after Craigville public worship) somebody mentioned Lieberman, simultaneously almost everybody said something positive. (Good chance, I think, that we pro-semites will outvote the antisemites.) Yes, a phenom....

2&, for me, a delicious irony on several fronts:

(1) Joe the **Jew** is out-God-talking the Christians on the political right.

(2) Joe the **Senator** had the wisdom & courage "to know the one from the other" vis-a-vis Clinton, a bad man (in genital control) & a good president (in political skills & achievements). Of the Senate Democrats, he was the 1st to speak out against "Lewinsky" (the whole event, including cover-up lying); & he voted against both impeachment counts. This realistic split-action refreshingly distinguished him from both the pragmatic immoralists (who opposed impeachment on the ground that Clinton's part in "Lewinsky" was not all that bad) & the idealist moralists (who shouted to get Clinton out of the White House no matter how good a president he had proven to be.)

All we Americans would like to have a good person / good president, & at least some of us know that's improbable. Pray for the improbable, but what do otherwise? Would you prefer a good person / bad (ineffective) president (e.g., Carter) or a bad person / good (effective) president (e.g., Clinton)?

Further, let's be more realistic about "good." Which is more important, personal or social ethics? Some of the former residents of the White House have been righteous men with small hearts for the poor, in contrast to Clinton's great heart.

One good thing about "Lewinsky" has been the stimulus to public conversation on morals/ethics. Everybody has morals of some sort, but only those have ethics of any sort who think sequentially about morals. And everybody is face to face with the laws from time to time, but few think about jurisprudence (the law-making-& enforcing process) except when personally or politically involved with lawyers & the courts. "Lewinsky" media-saturated the nation in jurisprudence & was more educational even than the Simpson case.

And the schools? When recently I asked a superintendent of schools what is her biggest problem, without hesitance she said "That most of the children come to school with little sense of right & wrong, some with none." We can't teach jurisprudence if we don't teach ethics, & we can't teach ethics if we don't teach morals. "Lewinsky" & other scandals should help the schools be less timid about teaching morals. Again, the laws insist on a particular constellation of morals; the courts send to prison those who have unknowingly, as well as those who have knowingly, violated that constellation. That constellation is--pick your term--Caucasian or Western or Judeo-Christian. That constellation is what the citizenry intends tax-supported schools to propagate. Since it opposes that propagation, "multiculturalism" (the equality of cultures & religions) should be ruled out of our public schools.

(3) Joe the **citizen** is for optimal government interference with personal freedom--which sometimes means minimal, & often non-interference. For him, in the last category is abortion, which government should keep hands off of: he's **pro-choice**. The delicious irony? He confounds the absolutists who lock God into anti-abortion--who say that God is **pro-life** & the pro-choicers are (therefore!) anti-God no matter what they say.

Those absolutists, especially the highly intelligent ones who appear in FIRST THINGS, worry me. Like all absolutists, they believe there's nothing to discuss, no dialog, no debate; there's only light & darkness, those who know & those who are ignorant, needing to be re-educated & (if rigidly rejecting the truth) outvoted.

3 The slogans, which function both as battleflags & as smears, need **contexting** if the quality of conversations on abortion is to improve. Basic to the contexting

is the distinction between religious *preaching* & political *pressuring*, both activities being essential to our democracy. Observe that either can be + or -: one can preach or pressure for something or against something.

The normal linguistic usage, in noun-formation, is "pro-" when the preaching or pressuring is for something & "anti-" when against. This usage is violated, & discourse confused, when either prefix is switch-applied, as when those who are pressuring for laws against freedom to abort say not (as accuracy & honesty requires) that they are "anti-" but that they are "pro-," "pro-life"--though they are quite specifically-intentionally **anti-choice**.

The God-talking Lieberman is, thank God, correct in his language on abortion: he is "pro-choice," against the government's imposing itself between pregnant & their physicians. This Thinksheet's title says yes to "pro-life" as an accurate description of positive preaching, but no to anti-abortion concealing by the deceptive use of "pro-life" the political aim to eliminate a pregnant's freedom to choose & to punish her & her aborter if she exercises her present freedom to choose abortion.

4 Most of the pro-life--i.e., anti-choice--political pushers try to ground their case in so-called **natural law**, as do the so-called "creation scientists" their case. But neither, though avoiding traditionally religious words, has been able to conceal the religious rootage under & the religious impulse within their cause: without the support of the biblical God, "nature" does not provide sufficient data to make their argumentation plausible.

In yesterday's CCTimes, another pro-choice Jew (David E. Fisher) expresses gratitude "for all the responses to my July 17 parable on abortion....the argument in every single one of the anti-abortion letters was ultimately based on the writer's religion. The whole point of my parable was that we should beware of codifying into law the religious views of some of us....Once you allow religious views to be put into law, where do you stop?" The parable is mentioned in my printed letter, the only one supporting his July 17 letter. (I began my letter with this ¶, dropped by the editor for the 7.24.00 edition: "As a Christian and an American citizen, I want to pay tribute to clear-thinking, highly moral Jews who speak up for sanity and health in our society.")

5 What's in () in my letter's 1st § is *my* comment: unlike Lieberman, an Orthodox Jew, Fisher thinks "freedom," the élan of the American way of life, is sustainable without the continual nourishing of its religious roots: at least his letter was secular-Jewish. But all Jews sense, from their religion's birth-story of slavery in Egypt & divine deliverance into the Promised Land, that freedom is precious, fragile, & in

'Religious rhetoric' can threaten freedom

In his "abortion parable," David E. Fisher rightly says that "religious rhetoric" can threaten freedom (even though it's the basis of our freedom in this "one nation under God," whose citizens are "endowed by their Creator" with rights).

In his analogy to abortion, we should indeed be outraged by Gandhi's letting his wife die rather than violate his religious taboo against antibiotics.

Mr. Fisher's conviction -- and mine -- is that nobody's "religious rhetoric" should be enshrined in law so as to impose a proscriptive taboo between doctor and patient. Legal sanctions should not cripple freedom of choice.

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need of perpetual vigilance. But the use of the divine sanction to protect fetal life (as "a gift of God") is as anti-freedom as the former use of the divine sanction to protect a monarch's right to rule ("the divine right of kings"). (Most conceptions end in "natural" abortion: if they were "gifts of God," why the massive die-off? The expression "gift of God" should not be used to support biolatry, the worship of organisms.)

6 Fighting over the preborn **divides** religious communities & **diverts** attention from what Scripture enjoins us to do. In my devotional reading in the Greek NT this morning, I came across Heb.10.24, which I'll translate here thus: "Let's pay attention to (notice, observe, study) one another with a view to spurring one another to express love and do good." (The Vulgate has "consideremus" for my "pay attention to," & "provocationem" for my "spurring.") Absolutists & ideologues, with their "never" & "always," are of another spirit from, a spirit alien to, this injunction. I admit it: I am afraid of them, the fundamentalists, whatever their religion or claims to be nonreligious or antireligious.