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to put our own house in order, that we bring justice and peace (including domestic disarmament) to our own nation. We have always had the biggest influence on the world as an example, not through our military or political might. Remember the students on Tiananmen Square with their styrofoam version of the Statue of Liberty.

But in spite of our present beleaguered condition of internal neglect and disarray, we can do more than put our own house in order. We can provide leadership through example and persuasion, not coercion, in establishing a genuinely new world order. We cannot expect to end all violence or to create perfect justice. That is beyond our human capacity and it is arrogant to think otherwise. But it is certainly within our capacity to move much closer to peace and justice than we have done so far. As long as we remain locked in the paradigm of war, the logic that is so familiar to us that we hardly imagine there can be any other, we

will make little progress and could indeed slip backward into chaos, which threatens us in many parts of the world, not least in parts of the U.S.

So it is a time for conversion to a new way of thinking, a new logic, the logic of peace, the logic of the Kingdom. If we could make that conversion we could think the previously unthinkable and act in ways we have not done before. If we cannot change, if we have made the logic of war so much a part of our very selves that we can see no other possibility, then it is quite possible that our own system will collapse, just as the Soviet system collapsed, and we could drag a great deal of the world down with us. As Moses said to the children of Israel in his farewell address, "You have set before you life and death," words echoed by John Winthrop at the very beginning of the American experiment. Both of them urged us to choose life. It is not too late for us to make that choice. ■

AN APPEAL TO REASON

Mark W. Roche

Inconsistencies in the Abortion Debate

Emotions may blind us to the inconsistencies and absurd consequences of our positions on abortion. Precisely on an issue where emotions run high we need logical clarity. Each side of the abortion debate is capable of inconsistency, and we will look at both.

One inconsistency lies in the major media's claims to objectivity and fairness, which contradict their indirect, perhaps even unintentional, biases. Although the country's premiere newspapers and television networks seek to be impartial vehicles of the news, most of them

fail when it comes to abortion. In an analysis published in the *Los Angeles Times* (July 1-4, 1990), David Shaw discussed at length the media's manipulative use of language. This manipulation ranges from graphics focusing on women, rather than fetuses, to seemingly objective language that describes "harsh" "restrictions" on "women's reproductive rights," rather than "benevolent" "protection" of the "rights of unborn children" or simply "strict regulations." The media also tend to employ the preferred labels of only one party: "pro-choice" or "pro-reproductive rights" (rather than "proabortion") versus "antiabortion" (rather than "prolife"). Instead of weighing arguments, the media already manipulate language in such a way as to make the arguments seem superfluous.

Equally strange is the implicit media view that the Catholic Church should not advise

politicians or enforce discipline on them. Catholics are voluntary members of a church, receiving sacraments that are a privilege conferred by ecclesiastics whose role it is to nurture a particular world view and to discipline infractions. In earlier eras the Church's strong stances on political issues — bishops denying sacraments to slaveholders during the Civil War and to segregationists during the civil rights movement, or, more recently, supporting a nuclear freeze or protesting Reagan Administration economic policies — were heralded by the media.

Also of interest is the moral integrity of a politician who privately sees abortion as unethical but publicly condones it. The absurdity of the position is clear if we consider a parallel scenario: A politician claims to be anti-racist or anti-sexist, but, recognizing no consensus against racism or sexism, neither votes against nor defies racist or sexist laws. Could it be that the otherwise progressive politician fears that the biased media would only decry his anti-abortion stance?

Certain consequences of the abortion rights position may baffle even its advocates. Would all prochoice individuals condone the action of a person who becomes pregnant in order to develop hormones that enhance athletic performance and who plans after this instrumentalization to dispose of the fetus? If not, on what grounds would they protest? Such action is only an extreme illustration of what is presupposed when the fetus is viewed as integral to the woman's body. If we are convinced that the preborn child can be reduced to the body of the mother and that our bodies are private, we must also refrain from criticizing the pregnant woman who exhibits little or no inhibitions with regard to the use or abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. She is merely asserting her bodily rights.

In the context of the argument that the fetus is a woman's private property, we might also note the inconsistency of the socialist or progressive who vehemently asserts that property entails certain social and communal responsibilities, even as he adopts an abortion rights position. If privacy and property are ultimately subordinate to other overarching interests, then how does one justify the absolute veneration of privacy when it comes to abortion, especially when such acts have consequences for societal attitudes toward communal responsibility and the dignity of life? If the status of the preborn child is a woman's

private decision, what effect does this have on claims that men have certain child support and child rearing responsibilities or that society has an obligation to provide support services for the mother and child? Communitarian ideas are not easily compatible with abortion rights.

A consequence of "choice" is the pregnant woman's power to choose what kind of baby should or should not come into the world. In some contexts this may mean discrimination against the potentially handicapped, although many prochoice advocates would otherwise speak of a moral duty to respect the rights of disabled persons. It may mean discrimination

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on the basis of gender, as is especially frequent in certain Asian cultures, where a disproportionately high number of female fetuses is aborted. The child who survives such a selective process is no longer an autonomous being with intrinsic value, but a means to satisfy social or parental choice.

If we accept the contested assertion that the various methods of abortion cause no pain to the fetus — whether cut to pieces by a sharp knife, torn to pieces by a suction machine, burned and poisoned by a saline solution, or subjected to extreme muscle contractions induced by prostaglandin — how do we argue against proposed eugenics legislation that would legalize not only feticide but the eradication of handicapped individuals and elderly persons — as long as it can be done painlessly? The right to prevent beings with disabilities from coming into the world may also imply the right to send such beings out of the world.

If choice has priority over life, if the baby is to serve our ends, what cogent arguments do we have against the person who, after approving the legitimacy of choice beyond the first trimester, ends up arguing for the freedom to do away with a child after birth — as fathers could do with their children according to Roman law? After all, the child restricts the parent's pursuit of private interests and is in any strict sense not "viable" — at least its viability depends on continued assistance, much as the fetus depends on the continued assistance of the womb. If we do not recognize the rights of the preborn child — even when its body is distinct from the mother in blood type or sex — why should we be compelled to recognize its rights after birth? Should we do so merely because its difference and dependence are more visible to the naked eye?

Consider in this context the position taken by Fichte in his *Foundations of Natural Rights*. According to him, only developed rational beings have rights. He therefore argued that because children are not yet developed rational beings, the state has no obligation to protect them, even if parents opt to take their children's lives. However monstrous this may seem, it follows consistently from Fichte's premise.

We can counter Fichte by arguing that children have rights as *potential* rational beings. Children of course do not have as many rights as adults, but some of their rights are absolute. The right to life stands higher than the right to

privacy or convenience, much as it stands higher than the right to property — and so it is unjust to deny food to a starving person. Extending this position, we can argue that a developing fetus as well as a fertilized egg is not simply a piece of flesh, but an essence or material entity that — like a child — is a potential rational being, and the state — which limits choice and imposes duties in many areas of human activity — should guarantee its rights. Only in an equal conflict may these legal rights be viewed as subordinate to those of a developed rational being. In other words, when a woman's life is endangered, abortion should be legal — even as the situation remains tragic.

"Choice" has not merely biological or preferential but also economic dimensions. Consider the person who reduces life to economic advantage — the motivation for abortion in this case being that at this stage of their lives the parents can't provide the child with all the economic advantages they would like. The parents note that they are aborting the child "in its own interests." The elevation of choice often brings with it its own ironies. Imagine the woman who so convincingly employs the economic/hedonistic argument for abortion that she ends up convincing her husband, who contributes substantially to her living expenses, that he has the moral right to abandon her — in the spirit of his own comfort and independence.

The person who claims that beings with merely the potential for life have no rights whatsoever may find that his arguments could also be used to justify the destruction of earth's ecosphere or the exhaustion of the state's finances and the vast accumulation of debt — insofar as the most serious repercussions of these problems are merely "potential" and will not be experienced for generations. It is especially ironic that the rhetoric of protest which surfaces in the prochoice position — affirmation of the rights of the disenfranchised — is not extended beyond the self to one of its most worthy and fragile objects: Our responsibilities toward future generations are ignored.

The claim that abortion is solely a "women's issue" is also problematic. If we agree that abortion rights should be addressed only by women and that men should not have a say in the matter because they have no experience of pregnancy, we could envisage some extraordinary parallel scenarios. Shouldn't motorcyclists alone decide the question of a mandatory

helmet law? Shouldn't the military be the only group to determine the justness of a war?

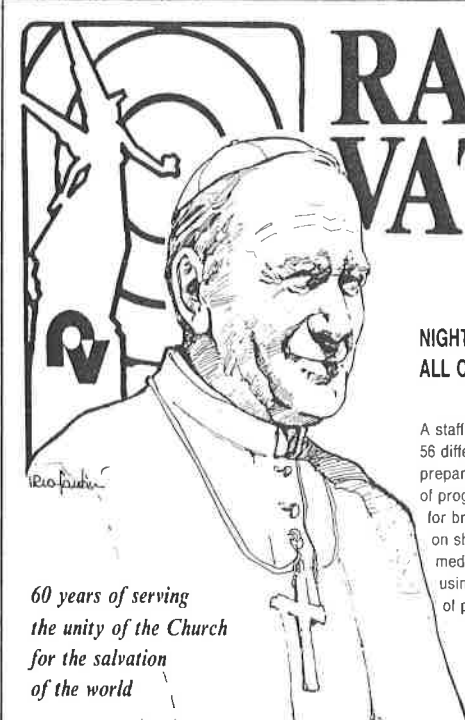
When evaluating other dependency relationships or conflicts of interest, feminists argue that the powerful should not wield power against the powerless with an eye only to self-interest. Why, then, doesn't the fetus qualify for consideration of this kind? The question whether abortion is private and thus a women's issue tends to override in our discussions the other relevant ethical question, namely, whether the fetus has any rights. If the fetus has rights, then the privacy question must be reopened: All acts of injustice are of interest to government, which has a duty to protect the weak and helpless.

Contradictions and absurdities are also visible among abortion opponents. Consider the prolife zealot who bases his position not on reason but exclusively on religious faith. Insofar as he feels no need to give a nonreligious justification for his views, dialogue is blocked. To argue for a prolife stance from a religious perspective alone is to place oneself on the

same *formal* level as the racial bigot, for whom reason and empirical evidence count for naught. Tradition and faith can be extraordinarily positive and worthy forces, but when divorced from other important categories such as reason or sympathy, they have too often legitimated untruth and injustice.

Religious attacks on abortion frequently coincide, especially among Catholics, with criticism of contraception — as if they were a single issue. It is absurd and strategically unwise for the loyal Catholic to equate these issues.

A problem also arises with the antiabortion leader who is motivated by sexism, the patriarch who feels that stopping abortion will help bring women back into their properly subordinate roles. While advocating the rights of all beings, born and unborn, he simultaneously sees the rights of one sex as inferior to those of the other. As long as women are treated as subordinate, they will seek not only justice but symbols of their autonomy; the rhetoric of abortion rights serves that end. In this sense the sexist is not only unjust, his



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position is self-defeating. Similar in its asymmetry is the contradiction between exhibiting utmost concern for the well-being of the fetus and dispensing information at abortion clinics in such a way as to terrorize and intimidate pregnant women rather than offer them caring alternatives.

Likewise self-contradictory and self-defeating is the tactic by which one carries around the results of an abortion and tries to give it to politicians and other influential persons. The fetus is instrumentalized, the means of delivering the message override the message, and prochoice adherents are once again free to dismiss abortion opponents as extremists and fanatics.

Inconsistencies likewise arise with those who are obsessed with the abortion question to the point of showing negligible concern for poverty, sex education, adoption, access to prenatal care, treatment programs for pregnant drug addicts, and universal health insurance. It is inconsistent for anyone to oppose abortion and simultaneously ignore the need for substantial social assistance, including laws for parental leave, child support laws, subsidized daycare, and state-funded financial assistance for poor mothers. Only by supporting such programs does one consistently uphold the dignity of human life. If abortion opponents ask mothers to sacrifice by bringing a child into the world, they must be willing to sacrifice too — even to the point of paying higher taxes for such programs.

Finally, an inconsistency arises with proliferators who are advocates of the death penalty. We have no shortage of politicians who advocate contradictory positions on these issues, not least former President Bush, who said he was against abortion but for the death penalty. One might want to defend this apparent inconsistency by countering that abortion is the taking of an innocent life, whereas capital punishment is the taking of a (presumably) non-innocent life. However, unless the criminal's life immediately endangers the life of another, what principle would allow us to take that person's life? If the principle is retribution, we fall back into a primitive and pre-Christian idea of justice, with all its consequences, and we would be overlooking the fact that capital punishment is administered to a disproportionately high number of the socially or economically disadvantaged. If we support the death penalty because it may deter others, how do we argue against those who want to

really clean up the streets and so seek to introduce capital punishment for all criminals? If our argument is that the qualities of the criminal are such that he is undeserving of life, then we indirectly support the very principle of selectivity we see in abortion, forced sterilization, and euthanasia. Either human life, at its best and weakest, is sacred, or it is not. Different but not less contradictory is the antiabortion activist who resorts to life-threatening violence in his efforts to close down abortion clinics. The "prolife" crowd is just as capable of inconsistency as are abortion apologists.

If we can show that the inconsistencies in the abortion rights position render it philosophically untenable, we may be more successful in defending the rights of preborn children than if we crusade with simplistic slogans or emotional pleas. If the inconsistencies among abortion opponents can be overcome, the prolife position will be less vulnerable intellectually and more fully supportive of the dignity of human life. Finally, a critique of both sides may deflate our individual overconfidence and give us the grace to recognize whatever common ground may yet be found in this polarizing debate. ■

Guest Column

A Protestant Consideration of Icons

For the last century and a half, Western culture has become oriented around the photographic image. So much are photographs part of our lives that we scarcely give them a second thought. From where you and I are now sitting we are probably within arm's length of a photograph of some sort — perhaps on the front page of a newspaper or the cover of a magazine. Even the bound collections of paintings by Edward Hopper or Georgia O'Keefe lying on the coffee table contain *photographic* reproductions of their art.

It is the rare person nowadays who does