

AGAPE CONDEMNS MURDER

Ro 13:9; Gn 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; Ex 20:13; James 4:1-2

I. SINCE IT'S GOOD TO BE—and to BE ALIVE

- A. All Nature declares, and Scripture (Gn 1:31) underscores, *being qua being* is good: the sheer goodness and beauty and wonder of existent beings
- B. “Good” defined: “Every art and every investigation, and similarly every action and pursuit, is considered to aim at some good. Hence the Good has been rightly defined as ‘that at which all things aim’” (Aristotle, *Ethics*, , i).
- C. Spheres of goodness:
 1. Inanimate beings—e.g. planet earth seen from space; grandeur of mountains & rivers & canyons; thus case for conservation
 2. Animate beings—animals impressive (instincts; powers)
 3. Human beings—highest of all earthly beings—thus, by nature, parents rejoice at babies’ births & accomplishments
 - a. Unique (*Imago Dei*) traits: reason; language; consciousness; conscience
 - b. N.B. Reductionistic Materialists’ influence—e.g. Darwinians & evolutionary psychology; Marxists & economic focus; Epicurean hedonists & Utilitarians & Behaviorists; Freudians
 - c. N.B. “Transhumanist” aspirations—change human nature with chemicals etc.

II. IT'S EVIL TO MURDER (NB: “evil” reverses “live”)

- A. Rightly defined: the deliberate, premeditated taking of an innocent person’s life; thus “manslaughter” & “cities of refuge” & capital punishment rightly emphasize distinctions (even justifications for) in life-taking
- B. Differentiating various forms of murder
 1. Suicide: self-murder (e.g. Saul, Judas) violates both Natural and Divine Law
 - a. Mounting numbers: remarkable in advanced, prosperous nations
 - b. Assorted explanations: depression, addictions, social decay
 - c. GKC assertopm re seriousness of self-destruction
 2. Homicide: murdering an innocent person (NB James 4:1-2)
 - a. Historical record (beginning with Cain) reveals endless killings
 - a. Incessant conflicts—James re human nature; Hamilton: “men are ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious” (*Federalist* #6)
 - b. Murders—e.g. Julius Caesar, JFK,
 - c. Serial murderers—Countess Erszebet Bathory kills 610 young girls, ca. 1600
 - b. Contemporary data:
 1. Urban violence—3400 in Chicago during past eight years; sharp increase in past two years—data in Heather Mac Donald’s *War Against Cops*
 2. Mass murders:
 - a. Domestic: e.g. Columbine killers Eric Harris & Dylan Cleborne
 - b. Islamic Jihadists: 911; Paris; Orlando
 3. Abortions (in U.S. alone) ca 60 million since 1973—Gosnell’s Philadelphia clinic
 4. Mercy Killings (“Eldercides”) increase; Nietzsche: “Die at the right time; thus teaches Zarathustra . . . Far too many live and hang much too long on their branches. May a storm come to shake all these rotten and worm-eaten ones from the tree.”
 3. Genocide: murdering an ethnic/religious/economic group
 - a. Unjust (aggressive) wars of conquest: historical record replete: Assyrians; Medes & Persians; Attila the Hun; Muslim conquests (ca 80 million in India, 250 million world-wide); Genghis Khan & Mongols killed ca. 40 million; French Revolutionaries & Napoleon;
 - b. Governmental liquidations, eliminating opponents, dissidents—camps, famines etc.
 1. 20th Century Communism: USSR; China; North Korea; Cuba; Vietnam; Cambodia—*Black Book of Communism* estimates 100 million
 2. National Socialist Holocaust in 1940s (mainly Jews, but many Christians)

KIDS WHO KILL

Mike Huckabee, in *Kids Who Kill: Confronting Our Culture of Violence* stresses that underlying it all is “the demoralization of America.” Samuel Johnson once said: “In political as well as natural disorders, the great error of those who commonly undertake either cure or preservation is that they rest in second causes, without extending their search to the remote and original sources of evil.” One of the “second” and unimportant causes is the role of guns in school shootings, for as Daniel Polsby, notes that “‘guns don’t increase national rates of crime and violence—but the continued proliferation of gun control laws almost certainly does’” (p. 143). The “original sources” responsible for youth violence include a growing “depersonalization” in contemporary culture. We’ve dehumanized targeted peoples and in the process desensitized ourselves to their deaths. Most obviously, a nation which aborts unborn children easily develops calluses to the killing of older children, for as school children early learn that Planned Parenthood clinics dispose of unwanted babies they lose their reverence for life.

This is encouraged by another original source of the problem—“a pattern of disrespect” which has passed, like a conveyer belt of garbage, from adults to our youth culture. No longer fearful of teachers, students openly defy and even curse them. Profanity pervades the air of award-winning films and popular music as well as public school playgrounds. A Scottish diplomat, John Buchan, lauded, 50 years ago, “the common courtesy of Americans” which made them “invariably considerate, polite, respectful, and mannerly” (p. 51). They still upheld the standard of Patrick Henry: “The manners of a gentleman are an outgrowth of his due respect for the life and integrity of others; likewise a breach of courtesy is emblematic not so much of barbarism as of utter and complete self-absorption. A rude man is but a callous egotist” (p. 54). Jonathan Lasker, in *Profanity in America*, links verbal violence with more deadly acts. To verbally assault a person, especially when you are weaker or have less authority, may seem harmless. Words certainly shred no flesh, but they do open the door to more serious violence. Lasker says that profanity is “a hallmark of a frustrated society where ordinary people must give vent to their anger in inarticulate fashion. Historically, mass profanity has always been a harbinger of mass violence” (p. 55).

Encouraging all this is the much-maligned media—which is rightly maligned! Our alleged “entertainment” industry is, in fact, “conditioning kids to kill” (p. 83). Video games, especially alluring for boys, immerse them in violence. One study notes that teenage boys play video games 28 hours a week—“killing, maiming, and destroying—as well as punching, shooting, and stabbing” (p. 71). Bored with video games, they turn to TV, or the movies, or rap music. Incessantly their minds are awash in the most brutal kinds of violence. One study evaluated “the lyrics of the top twenty best-selling alternative rock, hip hop, and rap disks” and “found that 100 percent of the disks feature songs that celebrated illicit sex or drug abuse. Almost 89 percent openly portray suicide as a viable option. About 77 percent mock authority figures. Almost 61 percent profile violent acts, including murder, rape, and molestation. Nearly 42 percent advocate anarchy. And 28 percent denigrated traditional religion” (p. 81). Indeed: “in virtually every case of violent teen crime there is evidence of heavy involvement in—and even deliberate imitation of—depraved lyrics in music, violent films, brutal video games, or decadent television programming” (p. 83).

Adding to the problems our children face, their families frequently provide them neither security nor guidance. Patrick Henry, again, said it well: “For good or for ill, the estate of the family will most assuredly predetermine the estate of all of the rest of the culture” (p. 103). In a culture of divorce, children are casualties. Women’s liberation has impoverished women, often leaving them alone and unable to rightly rear children. One third of female-headed families live in poverty. Children sense a searing vacuum without a father at home. So they easily slide into delinquency. “More than 80 percent of all violent juvenile offenders are the products of broken homes. Nearly 70 percent live in single-parent households. As many as 90 percent have suffered some sort of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse” (p. 103).

Given this analysis, Huckabee calls parents and churches to restore what’s been lost in the U.S. “‘We are perpetually being told that what is wanted is a strong man who will do things,’ said G.K. Chesterton. ‘What is really wanted is a strong man who will undo things; and that will be the real test of strength’” (p. 141). Churches must recover a deep concern for personal integrity, character, moral standards. People of faith make strong families and strong families prevent violence.

POLITICALLY CORRECT DEATH

Years ago John Powell labeled abortion “the silent holocaust,” and it’s an issue which stands at the center of the “culture wars.” So it’s important to discern and champion the truth as cogently as possible and we’re fortunate to have one of the finest pro-life treatises available in *Politically Correct Death: Answering Arguments for Abortion Rights*. Its author, Francis J. Beckwith, a Baylor University professor, writes with a logician’s care, insisting (for example) an accurate phrase, “abortion rights,” replace the “pro-choice” euphemism. After a short chapter showing why moral relativism lacks rational merit—certain ethical principles must remain firm if any moral discourse is to be possible—Beckwith explains “why abortion on demand is legal in America.” He dissects important Supreme Court decisions (*Roe v. Wade* and *Webster v. Reproductive Services*), indicating why, as a result: “it is safe to say that in the first six months of pregnancy a woman can have an abortion for no reason, but in the last three months she can have it for any reason. This is abortion on demand” (p. 34).

To construct a case against abortion, Beckwith summarizes the most recent data concerning prenatal development, generally arguing, with Dr. Seuss, that “a person is a person, no matter how small.” At the moment of conception, a radically different organism comes into being. The “zygote,” a one-celled entity, cannot be called a “fertilized ovum,” because “both ovum and sperm, which are genetically each a part of its owner (mother and father, respectively), cease to exist at the moment of conception” (p. 42). It’s a living, growing organism with its own identity. The simple fact that a genetically Asian test-tube baby, conceived in a petri dish, would be clearly Asian at birth even if implanted and nurtured in the surrogate womb of a Swedish woman, shows that the “conceptus is *not* part of the woman’s body” (p. 43). In truth, few statements are more demonstrably wrong than the oft-quoted refrain that a “woman has a right to do whatever she wants with her own body.” Abortion does not excise “tissue” from a woman—it ends the life of an unborn child who resides in the womb.

If one refuses to assume that both human life and personhood begin with conception, it becomes difficult to establish exactly what moment or social context establishes such. Various abortion rights advocates, of course, have insisted the unborn may be “*human*, insofar as belonging to the species *homo sapiens*,” but “it is not a *person* and hence not *fully* human” (p. 91). Elusive definitions of “personhood,” given by both “evangelicals” such as Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and secularists such as Mary Anne Warren insist *persons* must share these traits: “consciousness,” “reasoning (the *developed* capacity to solve new and relatively complex problems),” “the capacity to communicate,” and “the presence of self-concepts, and self-awareness, either individual or racial, or both” (p. 106). Such definitions of “personhood,” of course, have such fuzzy edges that one could easily eliminate most of us, reasoning that only a select few pass the personhood test. The best test, the only scientifically certain test, Beckwith insists, is conception, the moment when a new being leaps into being.

Assured that the conceived child is, genetically, fully human, Beckwith turns to arguments espoused by abortion rights’ advocates. Arguments from “pity” or “tolerance” make sense only if you assume the “fetus” is non-human. Then there are folks who insist they “personally oppose” abortion but refuse to impose their convictions on others (never extending such tolerance, however to “racists” or religious “fundamentalists”). Beckwith points out the factual errors and logical inconsistencies of many of these arguments, but their basic flaw is the unproven assumption that the unborn child is somehow sub-human and lacking legal or moral standing.

The strength of this book is its analysis of such arguments. Beckwith does however end his treatise with a summation of his own pro-life stance:

1. The unborn entity, from the moment of conception, is fully human.
2. It is prima facie wrong to kill an entity that is fully human.
3. Almost every act of abortion is intended to kill the unborn, an entity that is fully human.
4. Therefore, almost every act of abortion is prima facie wrong” (p. 153).

I share the judgment of Patricia Wesley, M.D., a professor at Yale University: “Lucid, comprehensive, and eminently readable, this book is a devastating critique of the biological, philosophical, and moral justifications for abortion. Appealing to our reason, and to our bedrock American values of equality and justice, this book belongs in everyone’s library, and especially in the hands of anyone—politicians and journalists included—who has ever said, I’m personally opposed to abortion, but”

OPPOSING “MERCY KILLING”

Whereas abortion takes innocent life at its beginning, “mercy killing”—or “active euthanasia”—takes life at its end. The same arguments advanced to legalize abortion are advanced to legalize euthanasia. Derek Humphrey, one of the most public and vigorous advocates of the “right to die,” explained: “The doors began to open for me and my ideas once a wonderful thing happened—*Roe v. Wade*.” Truth to tell, there’s a congruence between the pro-abortion slogan, “every child a wanted child,” and a mercy killing quip, “every granny a wanted granny” (in Gairdner, *War Family* 475). This view was evident when Richard Lamm, former democratic governor of Colorado, urged “senior citizens” to exit and allow younger people to take over. Indeed, they have “a duty to die and get out of the way.” Non-productive, retired folks are “wasting resources that the other society, our kids, need to build a reasonable life.” More crassly, he actually compared elderly people to dying leaves on trees—valuable only as “humas for other plants to grow up” (in Gairdner, *War Family*, 486). One of America’s most influential legal philosophers, Ronald Dworkin, blessed both abortion, “which means killing a human embryo, and euthanasia, which means killing a person out of kindness.”

Victors in World War II, the Allies conducted a “war crimes trial” in Nuremberg, calling to account Nazis guilty of genocide and atrocities. An expert witness at the trials was a noted American physician, Leo Alexander, later wrote an article arguing “that the horrors of the Third Reich were made possible by a single idea: the belief that some lives are not worth living,” what the Nazis called *Lebensunwertes Leben*. Early on, they simply urged killing the terminally sick and severely handicapped, folks who could make no contribution to society. Medical school graduates in the 1930s, rather than affirming the centuries-old Hippocratic Oath, promised instead to promote the public welfare. When the Nazis imposed their rule on Holland, they demanded the medical doctors follow German examples and kill certain undesirables. Rather than cooperate, the Dutch doctors turned in their medical licenses! One hundred of them were then sent to concentration camps. What Dutch doctors refused to do under Nazi orders, however, they now do of their own volition! *Medicide* is now openly practiced in Holland, and numbers of infirm persons are being killed without their consent, yearly killing perhaps as many as 25,000 people per year. Ten per cent of Holland’s “seniors” live in fear of being killed by their doctors! Many now carry cards notifying hospital personnel that they don’t want to be killed without their consent! Chuck Colson noted: “Seventy-five percent of the time a Dutch doctor acts to hasten a patient’s death, he acts without the patient’s permission. By some estimates, more than five thousand Dutch patients are killed each year by their doctors. In other words, physician-assisted suicide has turned into involuntary euthanasia—or, as it is called in more traditional societies, murder.”

And many Americans now embrace the Dutch model. Approving abortion, they easily approve killing the terminally ill. Oregon, through a state initiative, legalized “physician-assisted suicide,” providing a pattern others may soon follow. Repudiated is the Hippocratic Oath, which physicians once recited at the beginning of their careers. When it was promulgated, the Oath ran counter to the culture of the ancient world, condemning such things as abortion, suicide, and euthanasia. Hippocrates insisted that physicians should always seek to heal, never to harm. Departing from this ancient standard, today’s medical doctors often espouse an ethic remarkably akin to that found in an influential essay published in 1920, *Releasing Persons from Lives Devoid of Value* which justified killing the mentally ill, crippled children, senile elders. In time they even urged doing away with WWI veterans who had lost legs and could not defend the Reich! By 1939 orders had been issued to eliminate chronically ill patients—more than five years in a hospital qualified one for lethal termination. By following the “situation ethics” of Joseph Fletcher, today’s physicians have been taught moral relativism. One may be a “human being” but no longer a “person” and non-persons no right to life. Personhood has become, in many philosophical and legal circles, a social construct, not a metaphysical reality.

N. Scott Peck’s *Denial of the Soul: Spiritual and Medical Perspectives on Euthanasia and Mortality* builds a strong case against both suicide and mercy killing. Of all the bioethical quandaries we face, he thinks active euthanasia may be the most “critical” (p. 1). And this is because it more clearly divides us concerning “the existence or nonexistence of the human soul” (p. 3). Eating away at the innards of our society is *Secularism*, the faith of the modernist. Unlike folks “with a sacred consciousness” who find their center in God and His “Sacred Order,” secularists champion the “right to die.” deeply hunger for autonomy. But, if we have a God-given soul, destined for eternity, dying should be a final, priceless learning experience.