"Ethics, too, are nothing but reverence for life. This is what gives me the fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, promoting, and enhancing life, and that destroying, injuring, and limiting life are evil."

—Albert Schweitzer

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'Potential Persons' and 'After-birth Abortion'

The latest abomination to come down the medical-ethics pike is the February 23, 2012, publication of "After-birth abortion: why should the baby live?" in the Journal of Medical Ethics. This article is written by two ethicists, Alberto Guibilini and Francesca Minerva, both of whom are now working in Melbourne, Australia—he, at Monash University, and she, at the University of Melbourne. Both have ties to Oxford University in Great Britain.

The abstract of their article runs as follows:

Abortion is largely accepted even for reasons that do not have anything to do with the fetus' health. By showing that (1) both fetuses and newborns do not have the same moral status as actual persons, (2) the fact that both are potential persons is morally irrelevant and (3) adoption is not always in the best interest of actual people, the authors argue that what we call ‘after-birth
abortion' (killing a newborn) should be permissible in all the cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled.

Yes, they actually wrote that in a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal. These two ethicists—who do not deserve the title—advocate infanticide on the same level that abortion is "largely accepted." They generally conclude that the same arguments that can be marshaled in support of killing a fetus in the womb can be applied just as well to killing a child who has recently left the womb. Without apology, they argue that since, in their way of thinking, fetuses and newborns are only "potential people" and not actual ones, "the interests of actual people (parents, family, society) to pursue their own well-being" override any rights the fetuses and newborns allegedly have.

They go on to say that adoption is not a valid alternative to infanticide because "the interests of the actual people involved matter." Thus, for example, since the birthmother may suffer "serious psychological problems due to the inability to elaborate [her] loss and to cope with [her] grief" in giving her baby up, her interest trumps the newborn's right to life. Does that make any sense at all? To them, it does because they do not believe that the newborn is a person capable of having interests. In their minds, the newborn is sub-human, to borrow a term from eugenics, for in calling them "potential persons," they are assigning them not-quite-human status.

We might think that their logic is horribly convoluted, but it is actually quite "sound" in the sense that they are not guilty of employing any readily apparent logical tricks. They are simply following accepted definitions and practices to their "logical" conclusions. What is wrong—indeed, terribly evil—are the foundation and suppositions of their philosophy. Since the original beliefs and assumptions are false, all of their subsequent conclusions take them further from the truth, though they may be ably reasoned using the accepted rules of argument.

As Jesus Christ admonishes us in Matthew 7:24-27—His parable of building on the rock—our beliefs must be solidly built on a true and immovable foundation. The thinking of Guibilini and Minerva is akin to the "foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was
its fall" (Matthew 7:26-27). In this case, the house is liberal Western society, and under beliefs like "after-birth abortion," it will come crashing down in utter ruin.

A reading of the article brings out that the authors ignore the foundational question of the sanctity of life. They make no argument regarding the salient question, "When does life begin?" It is apparent that they have already resolved and accepted the position that embryos, fetuses, and newborns do not have a right to continued life unless "actual persons" grant it to them. "God is in none of [their] thoughts" (Psalm 10:4). Having rejected God's very existence, and thus His revealed instructions for abundant living, they have set themselves—human beings—up as the highest authority, arbiters of life and death. With such power, they can decide by their own values and reasoning processes how and when any biological entity becomes a person deserving of a future existence.

What a brave new world men and women have created for themselves in their desire to live without God!

The sixth commandment, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13), covers this transgression quite adequately once we accept that the newborn child is certainly a living human being—and has been for many months. While the Bible contains no direct statement that life begins at conception, many passages show that God is involved in people's lives before they are born (see Psalm 139:13-16; 51:5; Isaiah 49:5; Jeremiah 1:4-5) and that the fetus is aware and responsive to God (Luke 1:41, 44). God even commands life for life if a fetus is miscarried after a fight (Exodus 21:22-24). The weight of biblical evidence falls on the side of life and full humanity for fetuses and newborns.

Actually, this brave new world of abortion and infanticide on demand is simply the modern equivalent of ancient pagan practices like the abhorrent idolatry of the Canaanites in Old Testament times. Pagans would sacrifice their children to their gods to "ensure" that the living would have better lives. They would make a child "pass through the fire to Molech" (an act obviously forbidden by God; Leviticus 18:21) to supplicate the god to give them fertile fields, victory in battle, or some other blessing. Ironically, these ancient people held the life of a child as more dear than today's uber-selfish
individuals do, as the latter most often abort babies merely for their own convenience.

Concerning this horrible sin, God says of the people of Judah in Jeremiah 32:35, "And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin." As punishment, Jerusalem was "delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence" (Jeremiah 32:36). When such practices become commonplace, the society is ripe for destruction, as God intimates in Genesis 15:16 and Leviticus 18:24-29; 20:22-23.

There is nothing ethical about "potential persons" and "after-birth abortion." They are the products of the twisted thinking of human beings tuned in to the broadcasts of a hateful Satan the Devil (Ephesians 2:2-3). He wants to destroy human life. Hundreds of millions of abortions are not enough to sate his appetite, so he has deceived people into taking the next step toward annihilation, infanticide. Could there be any better reason to increase our prayers to God to send His Son soon?

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Conscience (Part 3)
by John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

Like a frog incrementally boiling to death, many members of the Worldwide Church of God have gradually adjusted their consciences to practice abominations that formerly they would have abhorred. "Missing the mark" or "going out of the way" constitutes additional definitions of sin, indicating that law keeping alone doesn't equate to righteousness. Lawful behavior with a wrong attitude, motivated by pride, displaying lack of sensitivity to others or lack of wisdom, also constitutes sin. Conscience must be exercised and developed by doing things the way God would.
From the Archives: Featured Article

The Sixth Commandment
by John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

The sixth commandment, forbidding murder, is rare among the Ten Commandments in that a clear and short line can be drawn between its commission and its horrible consequences. Yet, as John Ritenbaugh shows, some people—even nominal Christians—find ways to justify killing their fellow human beings, as well as themselves.

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