

Pure and Undeclared Religion: A Practical Defense of a Pro-Life Position

By Katherine Hekel

The Body of Christ is losing the battle against abortion. Our ontological and utilitarian arguments are not enough to stand against the flood of choice-based arguments for abortion. With increasing technological and medical precision, our claims of psychological duress, medical injury, and inherent guilt will grow obsolete. When the fetus is no longer the focal point of the argument, pro-choice advocates begin to say, “Arguments are safe abstractions. But real people are quite different. They need compassion. It’s easy to love words and principles and slogans, but it’s costly to love real people” (Kreeft, 1983, p. 154). When compassion becomes both a pro-choice and a pro-life argument, actions are needed to validate pro-life truth claims. The Church must stand apart from society’s claims to autonomy and give people the choice to choose life.

When Christ instructed His twelve disciples for service he said, “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons; freely you received, freely give. Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff . . .” (Matthew 10:8-10a). Clearly, we will be able to take care of physical needs when our basic needs have been met. But in our postmodern, pluralistic society, the church ceases to be one body – rather, it is a collection of individual bodies, with much more than a tunic, sandals, and a staff. In reality, church members are independently wealthy and seem content to make “safe abstractions” rather than “raising the dead.” Church members passively look to a few Christian ethicists, physicians, and scientists to defend the sanctity of all human life. But our role can be so much greater than mere rhetorical argument. We must practically fight for the life of the fetus by working with the postmodern culture, joyfully paying a dear cost to make a difference.

Before we can work with our culture, it is important to understand the culture. Postmodernity elevates the individual over society. It idolizes autonomy, and this has huge ramifications in our position

against abortion. Pragmatic relativism reigns victorious in the public school and in politics, and society echoes the thoughts of William James: “Any idea that helps us to *deal*, whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings . . . that *fits*, in fact, that adapts our life to the reality’s whole setting, will agree sufficiently to meet the requirement. It will hold true of that reality” (Lawhead, 2003, p. 159). Abortion helps women *deal* with their unwanted pregnancies. Yes, it appears practical, and it upholds an individual’s claims to freedom. We are left with practical autonomy, and this is the very place where the Christian Church must begin to act. We must allow the woman to *deal* with her situation so that the sanctity of life becomes more than an idealized fairy land. *Dealing* with the situation will allow these women to flourish rather than just exist. Society acknowledges truth when there is an apparent relationship between belief and action. We know truth – let’s embrace it.

Where do we begin? Beauchamp has written about the disparity between America’s public ethics and its public problems. He suggests that people address this dichotomy from the idea of market-justice, as the foundation of all public health decisions. Market-justice emphasizes individual responsibility and respect for individual rights, downplaying collective action to the extent that the individual is solely responsible to avoid disease and injury. On this view, the individual, rather than the collective majority, has the right to make life and death decisions, but is often alone in her decision. Beauchamp does not directly refer to abortion, but he does emphasize that society needs to control the hazards, capitalize on prevention, participate in collective action, and share the burden (Beauchamp, 1976). Therefore, we must understand the economic, emotional, and practical factors that influence a woman’s choice.

In the fourth chapter of John, Christ gets to the root of a woman’s sin so that she can drink living water. He knew her needs and he knew her lifestyle. The two are unmistakably intertwined. In the same way, the church must know a woman’s needs and her lifestyle. Then the church must be willing to meet these needs. Modern society, on the other hand, effectually isolates her and demands that the only good choice is abortion.

When we only shout our views from the mountaintops and do little to proactively help women, we ourselves idolize autonomy. For most women, the choice of life appears difficult in the face of society's constraints upon their autonomy. Furthermore, prevention involves research, education and law making. The sanctity of life clearly has biological foundations, but we must recognize the sociological foundations as well. Finally, we must collectively act and share the burden of society. What are the practical implications of this profound idea?

Beauchamp has mentioned that Freedom trivializes the obligation to protect the common good, and allows for only half-hearted attempts to create controls and regulations for the common good (1976). The "stuff" of eternal significance is often left unspoken in order to protect the freedom of the individual, leaving him alone, and our good intentions are swept away with every gust of wind. Chuck Colson boldly proclaims that we must make Matthew 25 a part of life. This means feeding the hungry, welcoming a stranger, clothing the naked, helping the sick, and visiting the imprisoned (Colson and Vaughn, 1989).

Market-justice and its emphasis upon individual choice and responsibility will continue to prevail unless we pay the cost and make a difference from our own pocketbooks. Yet this will not arise from such a secular perspective. In the words of Beauchamp, "Confronting organizations, interests, ideologies and alliances that are national and even international in scope with such limited resources seems hopelessly sentimental" (Beauchamp, 1976, p. 11).

Indeed it *is* hopelessly sentimental. Our defense of truth must begin as in the first church. Luke writes, "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them . . . For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need" (Acts 4:32-33, 34-35).

This is the beginning. The cost of our defense is monetary and personal. Paul similarly writes, “For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability they gave of their own accord, begging us with much entreaty for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God” (2 Corinthians 8:3-5). Yet money is only the beginning. Our funds must manifest themselves in comfortable shelters, medical care, education, and friendship.

If every church put aside a sum of money to provide food, shelter, and emotional support for single, struggling mothers, the church would begin to practically defend her position on the sanctity of life. If the Body of Christ provided a haven for guilty, fearful mothers-to-be, parenting classes, friendship, or even a mere “cup of cold water,” we would only have just begun to be salt in this world. James says, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves . . . This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (1:22; 1:27).

Just a few hours ago, I learned of a young nineteen year old mother who chose to keep her baby. The father had abandoned her shortly after conception, and the mother was left alone to deal with the birth and death of a premature baby. This mother will probably be pregnant again. Will she choose life when it is painful? Will she have the support to persevere? In sharing the burdens of pregnant mothers, the church must collectively bear this burden in the world. If it does not, our empty words will fall on deaf ears.

References

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