

Life NEWS

PROMOTING THE SANCTITY OF LIFE

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The Freedom to Love

KIMBERLEY PFEIFFER

'Reproductive choices' means that the fact that there is a tiny human being in utero is not as important as how we choose to honour that individual. The language of reproductive choices has not only changed the way we value the child in utero, it has affected how we respect children, parenthood, and family life more generally. This has happened as a result of damage done to how we understand the relationship between mother and child.

This dangerous rhetoric has infiltrated our culture. It is good to be aware of this because it is so easy to adopt these undertones in our speech. When we talk about choosing to have children and to become parents we must be careful not to find ourselves subconsciously reinforcing these faulty ideas.

There is a famous argument used to justify abortion from the 1970's by philosopher Judith Jarvis Thompson¹ that might help us to better understand this change. The analogy is that of the kidnapped woman and the beloved violinist, it goes like this:



"You wake up in the morning and find yourself back to back in bed with an unconscious violinist. A famous unconscious violinist. He has been found to have a fatal kidney ailment, and the Society of Music Lovers has canvassed all the available medical records and found that you alone have the right blood type to help. They have therefore kidnapped you, and last night the violinist's circulatory system was plugged into yours, so that your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from his blood as well as your own. The director of the hospital now tells you, "Look, we're sorry the Society of Music Lovers did this to you—we would never have permitted it if we had known. But still, they did it, and the violinist now is plugged into you. To

unplug you would be to kill him. But never mind, it's only for nine months. By then he will have recovered from his ailment, and can safely be unplugged from you.

Is it morally incumbent on you to accede to this situation? No doubt it would be very nice of you if you did, a great kindness. But do you have to accede to it? What if it were not nine months, but nine years? director of the hospital says, "Tough luck, I agree, but you've now got to stay in bed, with the violinist plugged into you, for the rest of your life. Because remember this. All persons have a right to life, and violinists are persons. Granted you have a right to decide what happens in and to your body, but a person's right to life outweighs your right to decide what happens in and to your body. So you cannot ever be unplugged from him." I imagine you would regard this as outrageous, which suggests that something really is wrong with that plausible-sounding argument' about the right to life of the unborn."

...continued on page 2

*This Issue**

2: EDITORIAL

4: SEEING WITH CHRIST

5: ON MERCY

5: IN PARLIAMENT

7: SNIPPETS

8: SUPPORT US



Editorial

KIMBERLEY PFEIFFER

Hi! We probably don't know each other so allow me to introduce myself. I am Kimberley - the new editor of Life News. I'm married with two young kids and am a member of the Lutheran Church of Australia. I thank Tom Pietsch for his service to Life News for the past five years and I hope it can continue to flourish in his wake.

I remember when I was at Uni abortion was an issue I simply didn't want to deal with. I was very happy to avoid the conversation with a shrug and say "each to her own". But then I spent time studying embryology and reproduction. I saw the Henkel drawings and I heard the embryo spoken of as a "ball of cells". Then I saw a 'path pot' of a real formaldehyde preserved tiny foetus in utero at about six weeks - I knew immediately I needed to deepen my understanding of the value of human life at every stage.

After my studies, I found myself with a job as a researcher at the Southern Cross Bioethics Institute, a legacy of Pastor Daniel Overduin who was instrumental in establishing Lutherans for Life. These



days I find myself immersed in family life and have recently begun graduate studies in Bioethics.

I look forward to working with Lutherans for Life. Christians care about life issues for good reason. Yet living in a broken world it is difficult to engage with people about the things that really matter. I hope Life News might continue serve as a resource to improve awareness about life issues. I pray that these articles will offer encouragement to those engaging in conversations with people around them on life's difficult topics and enhance our shared reverence for the dignity of human life.

Healing and life begins and ends in love. Love exists only in relationship. In relationship with Christ we receive forgiveness, grace and the Life that sustains us. In love we are given the grace to discover what it means to be made in the Image of God. Through our relationship with God we are strengthened and changed to better love and serve others in our relationships. – Enjoy!

...continued from page 1



Judith Jarvis Thompson illustrates that killing the unborn child is morally acceptable because every woman has the right to her own body and what happens in it - she likens it to unplugging

an unconscious violinist who has been artificially attached to a woman against her will.

It can be a very convincing analogy because most unexpected pregnancies do come with an element of surprise, and the baby, like the violinist requires the "use" of the woman's body for survival.

But the big question of course is whether kidnapping a woman against her will is the same as an unplanned pregnancy? And is the relationship the woman has with the violinist in this scenario the same as the child in utero?

The heart of the problem lies in her assumption - that these relationships are the same. This assumption permits her to sever the inherent relationship

between the mother and child and replace it with a relationship between strangers.² By doing so it becomes possible to discount the natural responsibilities and obligations of the relationship and focus on the separate interests of the individuals involved. This permits the woman to choose to view herself as an individual with a right to bodily integrity and disregard her newly apparent identity as 'mother'. It doesn't take much to see how this thinking has pervaded our culture.

A close friend called me in tears some time ago to tell me that she had been pregnant but underwent an abortion. She was grieving that her baby would have been due around that time. She had been in a relationship with a guy she did not want to remain with and she could not picture how a baby would fit into her life. She took the RU486 pill prescribed by her doctor and ended her pregnancy alone at home. The strange thing is that she loves children and has always wanted to be a mother and she desperately still does - so why this disconnect?

...continued from page 2

Women willingly make this psychological “separation” when they believe that they have the freedom to choose whether or not to “connect” with their children. It helps women convince themselves that choosing to not to be pregnant is a real choice when in fact what is real is that they are ‘with child’.

This phenomenon can also be noticed when pregnant female family and friends feel the need to delay their ‘emotional bonding’ with their unborn child until after the Downs Syndrome scan, or ‘the 12 week mark’. Although holding off a pregnancy announcement is common among mothers who want to connect with their child in utero it must be remembered that by doing so also delays conversations that help to reinforce the unborn child’s humanity. To be certain, some women purposefully delay this connection out of fear of miscarriage. But even then, surely it is better to grieve the loss of a real human being rather than pretend the relationship never existed?

There is another strange thing which I’ve observed as a result of this psychological wedge between mother and child, which is a great irony. This is that the increased freedom to choose to abort an unborn child actually leads to less freedom for women choosing to carry through with a pregnancy, even a planned pregnancy.

You see what seems to have happened is that the burden of proof now falls on any woman who chooses not to walk away, when in actual fact she has simply honoured her natural bodily integrity shared with child in utero. As Gilbert Meilaender writes “this is what happens when we cease to think of a child as the ‘fruit of the womb’ and think instead of the mother/foetus connection as a chosen, willed one”.³

The argument goes like this. If the woman “chooses”, she must be in control, she must have a plan, and not just for the pregnancy, but to be prepared for the child’s entire future. This thought is incredibly overwhelming for any new parent. Our philosopher friend knew this, she writes, “maybe nine months, but it could be nine years, or longer still?”, maybe for the rest of your life?”

As a mother of young children, I know this pressure. The sentiment seems to be that since I ‘chose’ to have children, I should know how we are going to cope and afford every possible consequence brought by that decision. This is impossible to do.

So what is real freedom to choose? What are the limits of our freedom? Well, firstly we are called to exercise our freedom in responsible ways by enjoying our God given freedom and but also recognising our finitude.⁴ We must agree that we have freedom to make choices and the freedom to bring up our children our own unique way but our freedom only extends or transcends beyond our nature when it is used for God and not to be gods. In our example and in our culture freedom is being interpreted as the freedom to be gods, to overpower another, to take a life. This freedom is one that is contrary to our human condition. We are not God. We are not the Creator. When we recognise our relationship with God, then we can transcend because we enjoy freedoms that enhance our humanity.⁵

‘When we recognise our relationship with God, then we can transcend because we enjoy freedoms that enhance our humanity.’

As Christians we need not fall into the trap of dividing mother and child and thinking of our smallest human beings as intruding violinists. We know that ‘children are a heritage (a gift) from the Lord’ (Psalm 127). We see in Mary and her Son, Jesus our Lord, the model of this union. Mary receives her Son in faith and Jesus honours his mother. The ancient crowds knew this bond - that’s why they called Mary blessed because Jesus had nursed at her breast. It is the Divine love which flows into the world in Jesus that blesses the ordinary union between mother and child. This is finally what distinguishes the true mother and child bond from the person and the intruding violinist - it is love. Love freely given because it has been freely received.

Reassure all expecting parents that with God’s help, they have the freedom to rest in the commitment to love children unconditionally, as our Lord has loved us. Help expecting mothers to see through the destructive rhetoric of reproductive choices and remind them that there is joy to be realised in the unique and beautiful bond that begins at the moment of conception.

1. Judith Jarvis Thompson (1970) “A defense of abortion,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*: 47-66.
2. Greg Koukl (2013) “Unstringing the Violinist” on Stand for Reason blog, <http://www.str.org/articles/unstringing-the-violinist#.Ux7vQ3nF9Zg>
3. Gilbert Meilaender “The Blessing of Children”, *The New Atlantis* (2012), 92-98
4. Gilbert Meilaender “Abortion and the Meaning of Parenthood” from “Things that Count” (Wilmington:Delaware:1999), 111-120
5. Ibid.

Seeing with Christ:

The Christian's Conscience in Post-Modern Culture

PASTOR STEPHEN PIETSCH

People use the word 'conscience' today in many different ways, attaching quite different meanings to it. Many see it simply as one's 'own moral code', 'sense of right and wrong' or 'inner ethical compass'. The conscience is often tied up with **knowing** the difference between good and bad.

The biblical view of the conscience, however, is tied up with **seeing**; not abstract disconnected seeing – mere fleeting images and pictures which float past us or perhaps linger a little – but the kind of seeing which gives true insight – helps us see clearly what is real, good, true and beautiful, and what is false, bad and destructive. This kind of 'seeing' deeply forms and guides our thinking, values, feeling and will, in one direction or another. More than that, the biblical teaching about the conscience is not, as our culture believes, all about how we, as individuals, may see things, but about seeing in community. The word 'conscience' literally means "seeing with".¹ 'Seeing with' whom? Well, this is the question.

A good image to describe the way our conscience works is to picture it as a mirror. It reflects the insights, beliefs and values of that which is placed before it. When our conscience is turned toward one or other influence, then it will reflect what is there.²

1. SEEING WITH THE CULTURE

When the mirror is turned toward our post-modern culture, the reality there is that the arbitrary nature of all moral and spiritual values confronts the conscience with confusion, disorder and dysfunction. Moral and ethical teachings and codes, of every stripe, abound.

What is so confusing for Christians is that most of these conflicting value-systems are altruistic and seem to have human wellbeing at heart. In the face of Christian ethical teaching, they ask: why should there be any limits placed on bio-technologies or on peoples' personal wishes regarding the end of life, when it is so clear that such limits will cause suffering or sadness? Faced with such questions, many Christians find their consciences in conflict. Does God wish couples to feel bereft of the children they cannot have? Does God desire the terminally ill to suffer long and painful deaths? Then again there are those who take a different road, seeking to extend the dignity and sanctity accorded human life to other or all living things. Is this not also loving and good? How can

these 'good' values be reconciled with one another, let alone with biblical moral teaching? There are so many voices and such a range of moral agenda, all competing and conflicting with one another.

When the conscience is turned toward our culture and reflects what is there, it is faced with this moral chaos, a 'dis-integrated' moral tangle, lacking wholeness or order. Sociologist Dan Blazer observes that the effect of this for many is spiritual and moral despair.³ The conscience, in the face of such disorder, nervously oscillates between denial of guilt and self-condemnation. Especially for conscientious persons who have tried to engage and listen to the many voices, disorientation, depression and anxiety may close in.⁴

Alternatively the conscience may simply become 'punch-drunk' and desensitised. Like a ship's captain who has lost his compass, the conscience no longer knows north from south, good from evil. Paul describes in Romans in 1:21 and Ephesians 4:18-19 how those whose minds become so darkened are dehumanised. He speaks of the conscience being 'polluted' and 'corrupted'. He uses the powerful image of human skin 'seared with a hot iron' to describe the conscience that has accepted false and bad teaching (1 Timothy 4:2). When we 'see with' our culture, we see everything – and nothing.⁵

2. SEEING WITH OURSELVES

Behind this spiritual and ethical disorder is the exaltation of the **individual conscience** over all other external norms or moral codes – 'seeing with' oneself. As I hinted earlier, this really runs counter to the working of the conscience, which functions by 'seeing with' others.

When the conscience is turned inward to the self, the result is usually not confusion but false and delusional certainty. We hear this today especially when people make the claim 'my conscience is clear' as though their own moral take on their actions were above any other authority. The person makes their conscience a 'closed court' where they themselves act as prosecutor, advocate, witness and judge. The trial happens behind the closed doors of the mind – no other witnesses admissible! This psychological understanding of the 'sovereign conscience' is one in which the conscience is frequently tied together with self-esteem: if I feel

...continued on page 6

On Mercy...

CHELSEA PIETSCH

"The act of showing mercy requires a relationship between subject and object, or giver and receiver, but not any relationship will do. Mercy requires love. Philosopher Peter Kreeft distinguishes kindness from love, where kindness is interested in the reduction of suffering as opposed to love, which wills the higher good of another in the toughest situations. According to Kreeft's distinction we can show kindness to somebody by putting an end to their suffering, yet to love someone means we need to get our hands dirty and enter their humanity."

"The best examples of mercy reveal stories of human connection, self-sacrifice and love. What we have seen in recent years is the hi-jacking of the term "mercy" to mean things that, although motivated by good intention, lack the personal and relational aspects that true mercy requires. What is often lost when euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide is employed as a means of mercy is the human connection that reveals our innate dignity. True mercy is about responding to people who call out from the depths of illness, depression and isolation and showing them the love which our common humanity demands."



*Excerpts from "What Is Mercy? Reflections on the True Nature of Mercy in the Context of Euthanasia
Originally published in Issues, no. 86 March 2009 <http://issues.control.com.au>*

Bills and Decisions in Parliament

DR ROB POLLNITZ



EUTHANASIA SUPPORTERS CONTINUE TO PUSH THEIR CASE IN AUSTRALIA

The ACT Greens have sought to reopen the euthanasia debate, with Minister for Ageing Shane Rattenbury describing Canberra's inability to make laws on euthanasia as an affront to democracy. A forum on end-of-life issues has been planned for March. (The federal "Andrews Law" prevents the territories from making laws to allow lethal doses). (Canberra Times, 28th February 2014)

Independent MP Bob Such has revised his so-called Ending Life with Dignity Bill yet again, and assuming he is re-elected when SA votes on the 15th March, it is expected he will seek to table the bill this year. Similar repeat efforts can be expected in the other states. Movers such as Bob Such seek to reassure us that their bill has firm safeguards that will restrict lethal doses to say the terminally ill. It was refreshing to see Scottish MP Margo MacDonald, when tabling her revised bill to allow assisted suicide in Holyrood, admit that it was a first step. "Ms MacDonald has also indicated future plans, asserting that if the bill is passed .. there may be opportunity for further developments in the law that would offer hope to other categories of people seeking assistance to die." The most common bill before any parliament is an Amendment Bill, which can extend the reach of law far beyond the intention of those who passed the original Act. Both reason and experience tell us that meddling with our law on homicide will endanger the weak and vulnerable, as is happening in Belgium. (various sources - follow noeuthanasia.org.au and epcc.ca for updates)

SA ADVANCE CARE DIRECTIVES ACT 2013 TO BE APPLIED MID-2014

While earlier advance care directives will remain valid, SA Health plans a major public education program to encourage people to inform family and carers as to what level of care they wish to receive when impaired, including at the end of life. Their website states - "(the directives) are intended to ensure a person's preferences and life goals are honoured during times of temporary or permanent impaired decision-making capacity, including at the end of life." What level of intensive care do you want if you remain unaware after a major head injury or stroke? Do you want PEG tube feeding long-term if you are in a persistent unconscious state? After your death do you wish to donate your organs? These are issues worth discussing with family or a close friend to ensure your wishes are followed. (health.sa.gov.au)



okay in myself about what I have done, then I **am** okay.⁶ 'Bad feelings' like guilt and shame are then to be distrusted and rejected.⁷

The individual's 'conscience-bound position' is 'played as the trump card' in moral debates. There is a demand that others respect and approve of 'my beliefs'. Celebrities, politicians, industry leaders and sports-stars caught in immorality or questioned about their ethics often prop on their back legs and claim 'I have been true to my conscience'.

This stance may often be made to seem quite spiritual-even Christian! The self-seeing conscience may have room for God's 'imprint somewhere on the mirror' but ultimately only as part of its own MTD (moralistic therapeutic Deism).⁸ God is kept out of the moral and ethical realm, but is kept on as a personal butler, and when necessary, a therapist.

Some hold this view of the conscience up as a high and even noble ideal, speaking of their conscience as a most prized possession - a kind of 'inner temple' of the soul and the source of their integrity. The problem is that this kind of integrity is that it is **not integrated** with anyone or anything but self, and is guided finally by nothing except self-interest.⁹

3. SEEING WITH CHRIST

The biblical view of a good or healthy conscience is 'the mirror is turned toward Christ' and his word.

In contrast to the two alternatives we have mentioned so far, which were characterised by disorder and delusion, the conscience turned toward Christ experiences order, clarity and freedom. The chaos of competing ethical models is replaced by order, God's natural order (Romans 1:20) and his moral law (the ten commandments). Through these, God has revealed reality and its structure, in which all things are ordered under his creating and preserving hand. When 'the mirror' is reflecting God's work, things become clear; you can see what is good and evil.

Moreover, when the conscience is turned toward Christ and his words, it experiences the law and the gospel. The law does its work by clearly showing the reality of a person's life, convicting the conscience of sin. It unmasks our good works and self-manufactured integrity as filthy rags. It is this divine law which sets a consistent standard of love for God and the neighbour, not the individual conscience's deluded

pride in its own works, nor its self-condemnation born of neurotic guilt and shame. The conscience acts, therefore, an 'inner umpire' rather than an inner law-maker or judge.

The Gospel in turn comforts and cleanses the conscience by showing God's forgiveness in Christ (Hebrews 9:14). There is no need for delusional self-justifications. Christ's external objective word of grace 'shines on' the conscience from outside. The conscience, therefore, is not itself the sun but reflects the sunshine of God's mercy, forgiveness and peace.

A good conscience comes from faith (Hebrews 10:21; 1 Tim 1:19), as a gift, by the Holy Spirit, first of all in baptism (1 Peter 3:21-22) and then each time that baptismal gift is renewed through God's absolution in word and sacrament.

Just as a mirror is not the source of the sun's light, so we do not **possess** a good conscience, as if it were some kind of 'moral triple A rating'. We need to receive it as a gift on an ongoing basis, as we do in the daily dying and rising of faith.

Likewise personal Integrity is not achieved. Grace becomes the source of our integrity - we are **integrated**, put together into a functional whole by law and gospel, restored by Christ's forgiveness. It is out of this experience of God's regenerative work that we are able to 'see with Christ' and so act and think ethically with integrity and a good conscience.

1. **Syn-eidesis** (the Greek word for conscience in the New Testament) means 'seeing with' in the sense of 'seeing what others see' - in other words seeing reality clearly.
2. John Kleinig, 'Holding the Mystery of the Faith with a Clear Conscience' (Paper given at Doxology **Insight in Faith** Conference, Springfield, Illinois, October 2013) pages 4-9.
3. Dan Blazer, **The Age of Melancholy: Major Depression and its Social Origins** (New York: Routledge, 2005) page 135 ff.
4. Ibid.
5. Kleinig, page 8.
6. Clearly the 'self-seeing' conscience may not always be a benign judge. Sometimes, in the grip of deep remorse, shame, depression or despair, the conscience may be harsher, more punitive and ungracious than any external judge, leading to self-hatred and despair.
7. Kleinig, page 9.
8. **Moralistic therapeutic deism** is a term that was first introduced in the book **Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers** (2005) by sociologists, Christian Smith and Linda Lundquist Denton.
9. This conscience turned towards the self is essentially what St Augustine and Luther describe as the key dynamic of human sin. Human beings are **incurvatis in se** - turned in on self.

Snippets

DR ROB POLLNITZ

Belgium passes law to allow lethal doses for children

On the 13th February 2014 the Belgian Parliament allowed euthanasia for children of any age provided they have a "capacity of discernment". The regulations require that the child must have a major illness that within the foreseeable future will result in death. Supporters contend that very ill children are already being euthanised and it is better for the practice to be regulated. A group of 160 Belgian paediatricians write that the law is unnecessary since "palliative care teams for children are perfectly capable of achieving pain relief, both in hospital and at home". The new law also allows lethal doses for people with dementia.

Euthanasia has been legal in Belgium since 2002, and from the beginning there have been concerns about "bracket creep", with acceptable reasons for euthanasia continuing to grow. There are reliable reports of lethal doses for depression and anorexia and for people who are simply tired of life. The claim of "psychological suffering" is ever expanding. In 2012 Belgium recorded 1,432 cases of euthanasia, a 25 per cent increase from 2011. A study reported in the Canadian Medical Association Journal in 2010 found that 32 per cent of assisted deaths in the Flanders region of Belgium occurred without request. Up to 47 per cent of such deaths are not being reported. Nurses are providing lethal doses, although the law insists on a doctor. After 11 years and about 6,000 cases, no doctor has ever been reported to the police. (various sources)

Warning sought for RU-486 due to increased complications

Family First in SA are seeking a mandatory warning for women using the abortion drug

RU-486 because of a higher rate of complications. The 2011 report above showed that 1095 women used RU-486 that year, with 36 (3.3 per cent) reporting complications, mostly retained products with the risk of infection. In contrast, only 0.5 per cent of women having abortions by vacuum aspiration reported complications. Worldwide there have been over 30 deaths reported following RU-486, mainly attributed to septic shock. Family First MLC Robert Brokenshire believes that women need to have this information to give fully informed consent to taking RU-486, and that they also need information about alternatives such as adoption and foster care. (The Advertiser, 4th Feb 2014)



Are we overusing IVF ?

Since the birth of the first baby by in vitro fertilization in 1978, the technique has been hailed as a major medical advance. IVF was originally developed for women with tubal disorders, but there is now a tendency to make an early move to IVF in cases of mild subfertility. In private clinics there may be more focus on financial returns and less academic oversight of who receives treatment and when. The extended use of IVF also increases the risk of harm, especially in those parts of the world where multiple transfer of embryos is common (in the USA and Asia multiple birth rates are 20 to 30 per cent). Animal studies have shown epigenetic and developmental abnormalities after IVF, and trials on the long term safety of IVF are needed to inform human couples. The authors argue that "we owe it to all subfertile couples and their potential children to use IVF judiciously and to ensure that we are first doing no harm." (Kamphuis et al, British Medical Journal 28th January 2014)

Australia continues to have many abortions

In December the SA government released their pregnancy outcome report for 2011, noting reported births of 20,344 and reported abortions of 5,010, about one abortion per four births as in recent years. More than a third of the women had previous terminations, with 110 having had the procedure four times or more. The Tasmanian government passed its new abortion law on 21 November 2013, the first law in Australia to ban even silent peaceful protest within 150m of an abortion clinic, with a penalty of up to 12 months jail and a \$65,000 fine. It is similar to the VIC law of 2008 in allowing abortion right up to the time of birth (after 16 weeks with the approval of two abortion clinic doctors). Chelsea Pietsch has posted a comment on the TAS law at onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=15765.

The protest ban may infringe the right to freedom of speech. Before the TAS elections on 15th March, some Christians plan to advocate outside the clinics for the UN Declaration of Human Rights and The Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which support the right to life before birth as well as after birth. If they are charged their legal team may argue the protest ban is unconstitutional. (various sources)

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