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Abortion Parley

James T. Burtchaell, C.S.C., Editor

Andrews and McMeel, Kansas City, 1979, xxiii + 352 pp., \$20.

In October, 1979, Notre Dame University sponsored the National Conference on Abortion. Father Theodore Hesburgh, president of the University, conceived the idea of such a conference in an "attempt to clarify the issue, to establish the facts," and in the hope "to elevate the discussion from inflammatory rhetoric on both sides" (p. vii). The participants were to be on all sides of the issue and the desire was to gather as many people as possible from as wide a spectrum as possible. Advertisements were placed in four major newspapers, and invitations were sent to 2,000 individuals. Despite the wide publicity, only 75 persons participated. The essays of this volume are the result of this conference.

Twelve essays ranging over a wide variety of issues are included: "Abortion Policy: Time for Reassessment," Raymond Adamek; "Predicting Polar Attitudes toward Abortion in the United States," Judith Blake and Jorge H. del Pinal; "The Abortion Decision: National and International Perspectives," Henry P. David; "Science and Its Uses: Abortion Debate and the Social Science Research," Mary Ann Lamanna; "Unwanted Pregnancy: A Psychological Profile of Women at Risk," Virginia Abernethy; "An Emotional History of the Abortions on Three Women," Arthur Kornhaber; "BETA: Report on a Program for Pregnant Women in Distress," Kathleen Assini Perry et al.; "Adoption in America: The Reality Versus the Mythology," Elizabeth Cole; "On the Public Funding of Abortion," Hadley Arkes; "Political Discourse and Public Policy on Funding Abortion: An Analysis," Mary Segers; "Foreign Aid for Abortion: Politics, Ethics, and Practice," Donald Warwick; "Abortion: Why the Arguments Fail," Stanley Hauerwas.

The nature of the conference was not that of a debate, but was rather an attempt to speak clearly about the issues surrounding abortion. The essays reflect this spirit. All of them evidence a great deal of work and preparation, and the net result of the essays is the accumulation and presentation of a vast amount of information. Nonetheless, many of the essays are rather disappointing, not from a lack of scholarship, but from their failure to tackle the central issues surrounding abortion. Psychology, sociology, surveys and statistics can shed much light on what people are doing and why they are doing it, how they feel and what they think; but they cannot answer moral questions. The essays would have been more fruitful had they tackled the moral questions surrounding abortion and the practical consequences for personal action and public policy. Some may have dodged these central issues out of a desire to be "objective."

Arthur Kornhaber's study on the emotional history of women who had abortions is sobering. He shows that many, especially the young, tend to have little control over their feelings. In contemporary culture many base their decisions on expediency and "reasonableness." Lamenting the present situation of young people, Kornhaber states: "We do not celebrate our children. Not only do we create them with impunity, we take abominable care of them. Mothers are leaving them in droves. We have relinquished our role as their protectors. We placate them with 'things' instead of with the time and attention with which our emotional

connections flourish. . . . We allow business to sell them poisons and make token hypocritical laws to placate our impotent consciences. We stimulate them sexually, so why shouldn't they get pregnant? They don't have a chance" (p. 197).

The report of Kathleen Assini Perry *et al.* on the BETA Program for pregnant women in distress is very helpful. It gives a sense of hope that true solutions can be found for difficult human situations. The BETA Program offers an overall program for women: "Our services include BETA Center, an emergency pregnancy center; BETA House, a residential facility; BETA School; BETA Industries, a self-help work enterprise; . . . a postnatal facility called BETA II . . ." (p. 203).

By far the best article is that of Stanley Hauerwas, "Abortion: Why the Arguments Fail." Hauerwas maintains that many arguments against abortion fail because of a false presupposition. Both pro-abortionists and anti-abortionists wrongly believe that they have some foundational convictions about common, basic moral principles. It is thought that these basic convictions are held by all, Christian and non-Christian alike. Thus one argues against abortion not from a Christian perspective (that would be an "irrational prejudice of religious people"[p. 327]), but from these commonly held moral principles. This, Hauerwas believes, is a false way to argue. He believes that one must first of all realize that what is at issue here is not just one moral problem — abortion — but a whole life-style, i.e., a Christian life-style versus a non-Christian life-style. Pro-abortionists will not grasp arguments against abortion precisely because they do not have the basis for recognizing their validity. They will be able to understand the arguments only if the arguments are places within the whole of Christian belief. Hauerwas states: "I am suggesting that if Christians are to make their moral and political convictions concerning abortion intelligible we must show how the meaning and prohibition of abortion is correlative to the stories of God and his people that form our basic conviction. We must indicate why it is that the Christian way of life forms people in a manner that makes abortion unthinkable. Ironically, it is only when we have done this that we will have the basis for suggesting why the fetus should be regarded as another of God's children" (p. 337). One further passage deserves quoting. From within Christianity: "Our question is not, 'When does life begin?' but, 'Who is its true sovereign?' The creation and meaningfulness of the term 'abortion' gains its intelligibility from our conviction that God, not man, is creator, redeemer and thus Lord of life. The Christian respect for life is first of all a statement, not about life, but about God" (p. 342).

Hauerwas could have made one further point: there is a need for evangelization and Christian conversion. The only real way people can fully come to know what is truly right and wrong and the only way they will be able to live upright moral lives is by repenting sin and accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior. He alone can recreate their hearts and minds by the power of His Spirit. Arguments, protests, and legislation have value, but the ultimate answer to the problem of abortion and all moral evil is true conversion to Jesus Christ.

In concluding, reference has to be made to Fr. Burtchaell's statement in the preface: "A Catholic institution such as the University of Notre Dame has no business issuing moral condemnations on abortion, any more than it would endorsing a presidential candidate or sponsoring a theory of biogenetics or ratifying a certain school of philosophical thought or favoring a method of financial accounting. To the extent that its chartered responsibilities and welfare require, a university may choose a certain accounting method for its own bookkeeping, or exclude abortion from its student health program. But for the world at large it has no teaching on these or other matters. . . . There is ancient precedent for it — in the Man who ate and supped and talked and puzzled with everyone who would abide it" (p. xxii). To say that a Catholic institution has no business making moral judgments is blatantly to miss the point of why a Catholic university is Catholic. To reduce the issue of abortion to the choice of a method of accounting is both

incredible and inconceivable. If one can so trivialize abortion, one could do likewise with racial prejudice, genocide, and a host of other horrendous evils.

The purpose of a Catholic educational institution is to teach and promote what Catholics believe to be true. This truth is not some secondary or peripheral aspect about life, such as accounting, but rather the truth of what life is all about. Jesus Christ — His person and His teaching — is the central truth of a Christian education. It is in Jesus Christ and through His teachings that one finds salvation and newness of life, for He alone is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). All true Christian educators from the early Fathers, to St. Thomas Aquinas, to St. Ignatius Loyola, to John Henry Cardinal Newman have known this truth. This is why they gave their lives to teaching and to founding schools and universities. They desired to bring to life the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the hearts and minds of their students.

There is no doubt that Jesus was full of compassion and love. However, Burtchaell's picture of Jesus as a tolerant, broadminded, sympathetic academician is hardly the Jesus of the Gospels. The scribes and pharisees knew very well that Jesus did not treat sin lightly nor was He sympathetic toward their refusal to hear the truth. His words to them were: "Woe to you scribes and pharisees. . . ." Jesus desires to forgive sin. He died on the cross and rose to glory in order to overcome sin. Through the power of the Holy Spirit He renews people's lives so that they no longer need to be slaves to sin. What Jesus does not do is tolerate sin.

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From Chance to Purpose: An Appraisal of External Human Fertilization

Clifford Grobstein

Addison-Wesley, Massachusetts, Advanced Book Program, 1981, xvi + 207 pp., \$17.50 (paperbound).

This book deals with some of the recent advances in bio-technology, some possibilities for the future and the ethical, legal and policy issues which these raise. These matters have, of course, been discussed before. But there are some features of the work which make it especially commendable.

The author approaches these complex questions as a scientist (a biologist) who is concerned with the appropriate role of science in the formation of public policy. The responsibilities of the scientist, as he sees them, are 1) to summarize accurately the existing state of relevant knowledge; 2) to highlight the gaps in knowledge relating to public policy and, if possible, to suggest ways to dispel these; 3) to examine policy options and their consequences; 4) to make this information available to all parties; and 5) to present personal value judgments, if warranted, but in a clearly labeled way. He does not propose that science alone can solve questions of ethics and policy, but it can establish common ground and exclude imaginable options not rooted in verifiable fact. These proposals establish