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Medicine and the Value of Human Life

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Your Life Your Health

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As I read, a deep sadness crept over me. By the time I had finished reading the massive article in the *New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, July 18, 2010, I realized that the recent attempt in two states to require public funding of abortions was not an isolated event. It made me realize that voices must be raised again against the taking of the lives of children by abortion. My sadness, however, did not just come from pain for the children whose lives were being cut short. It also came from the fact that the profession I love, the practice of medicine and the educational process which leads to participation in that profession are being pressed once again to promote, practice and provide abortions on demand.

Some will have stopped reading this article after reading the title. Others stopped after the first paragraph, but for those who have read this far, let me state my position:

1. **I am against abortion** for anyone, at any time for any reason. While that position will be seen as extreme; it is not a political or public policy position. It is a personal, deeply-held religious conviction which is not subject to exception. This position will test the willingness of liberals to engage in dialogue over this very emotional issue.
2. **I am against the death penalty** for anyone, for any reason, at any time. This will test the willingness of conservatives to listen and to dialogue, not just to shout at one another; but to talk to one another.
3. **I am against euthanasia.** There is no circumstance, none, not one, in which I would participate in assisted suicide, or where I would agree with any law which allows others to practice such.
4. **I am against any violence**, homicide, suicide, or murder in the name of and for the sake of any religious idea, ideal, belief or conviction. The only righteous position for a person of faith to take is to be willing to suffer personally for refusing to compromise a belief. There is never, ever a rational or valid reason to hurt, harm or take the life of another based on their rejection of your belief.

During a debate with pro-violence advocate Michael Bray in Columbia, Maryland, referencing John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry during the abolitionist movement, Bray asked, "If Jesus had come upon the thieves who were beating the man on the way to Jericho in the story we know as 'The Good Samaritan,' he would have taken a club and beaten the thieves off." In response I said, "I know exactly what Jesus would have done." Later, a friend listening to the debate said, "Larry, when you said that I cringed because no one has any idea what he would have done." I continued with my response to Bray and said, "Jesus would have walked up among the thieves and He would have said, 'Beat Me.'" I sat down. My friend, listening to the tape said, "When

you said that, I was shocked and immediately thought, ‘say nothing else, just sit down.’” True religion never advocates violence.

The foundation of my beliefs is my belief in the absolute sanctity of every human life. In 1964, as a college student, I spent the summer in Africa as a student summer missionary. In October of that year, I was asked to speak at the state student convention of the organization that sponsored my summer program. Remember, this is the South in 1964. On August 4, 1964, the bodies of Michael Schwerner, Andy Goodman and James Chaney were discovered on a Mississippi farm.

While *Roe v. Wade* was still seven years away, the roots of that decision were alive and well in the South. As I stood before 2000 college students in the fall of 1964, I related my experiences of the summer and the deep love and affection I felt toward the Africans with whom I had spent the summer in Kenya. I added that the implications of the message that we delivered in Africa was love and acceptance toward all people in the United States. I addressed civil rights and human dignity. I was not asked to speak in the state again.

Thirty years later, I was asked again to speak in my home state. I was invited to address a pro-life program sponsored by a crisis pregnancy center. As I looked over the 500 civic and religious leaders at that meeting, I asked, “How many of you are in favor of abortion?” When no hands were raised, I asked, “How many of you oppose abortion?” All hands went up and I said, “Then we have settled that issue for this group. But the blood brother of the abortionist is the racist, the bigot, the white supremacist, person who denies the dignity and value of another person based on race or color.”

In the early 90s, I often talked to men and women who opposed abortion and who advocated violence against abortion providers and who even advocated the murder of abortion providers. I talked to Paul Hill who was writing and speaking to promote violence against abortion providers. My wife and I were in Williamsburg, Virginia when the news announced that Hill had murdered two abortion providers. I knew instantly that he had murdered two people so that he would be subject to the death penalty. I opposed Hill’s act of violence and I opposed the state’s execution of him several years later.

In 1995, Broadman Press published my book entitled *Life and Death: What the Bible has to say about violence in the pro-life movement*. In the final chapter, I stated, “Liberals are often right when they say conservative Christians seem more committed to demanding that babies be protected *en uretero* than in providing care and protection for them once they are born. It is expensive to be pro-life, rather than simply being anti-abortion.”

It is logically and morally consistent to oppose abortion, the death penalty, pro-life violence and religious violence. But moral consistency of being pro-life requires that we go further by opposing racism, child neglect and violence and abuse of children. That consistency means that we provide funds for the care of children and of their mothers. That consistency also has implications of how we treat the children of immigrants who came to this country illegally.

Rather than finding ways of divesting ourselves of those children, our nation will find ourselves abounding with blessings as we embrace them and take pleasure in caring for them.

To the previous list of things which “I am against,” I would add these:

5. **I am against racism**, prejudice and bigotry.
6. **I am against treating children** as if they are a burden and I am against neglecting, ignoring or failing to provide the basic necessities for all grandchildren and not just my own.
7. **I am against any law** being passed which would force any group to violate their deeply held religious convictions in order to be good citizens who obey the law.

Conservation versus Liberal

Conservative Christians must know that it is possible to serve mankind without loving God; but, it is impossible to love God without serving mankind. Liberalism has tended to focus its attention upon the “here and now,” because of its pessimism about the “then and there.” Conservatism has tended to focus attention upon the “then and there,” because of its pessimism about the “here and now.” The Truth is that both are of concern to people of faith. And, it is in the “here and now” that one’s confidence in the “then and there” will be demonstrated. The pretense of declaring one’s love for God, and at the same time ignoring one’s responsibility to one’s fellowman, is a fraud.

Public Policy

Theocracy is society under the rule of faith; democracy is society under the rule of law. At first glance, the former may seem to be preferable, but on careful consideration, there are problems with theocracy. First, is the question, “The rule of whose faith?” and the second is, “Who interprets the rules by which faith will rule?” Man’s attempts to establish the rule of faith upon earth have only resulted in despotism. And, man’s yearning for the rule of faith upon earth must be satisfied by faith’s rule in one’s own heart. Well-intentioned, but misguided people may try to force others to obey rules of faith, but the so-called theocracies produced by them are really the ultimate expression of humanism, where men exalt themselves to the throne of God, determining that any means justifies the end of their concept of the Law of God being imposed upon others.

The Crusades and the Inquisitions were not expressions of faith; they were manifestations of the denial of faith. The horror of members of one faith murdering members of another is the result of man’s misguided attempt to impose religious beliefs upon another. And, the leadership of a theocracy is not subject to the checks and balances of accountability as is the leadership of a democratic republic.

Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, who is principally associated with ethnic cleansing, was honored by the Greek Orthodox church as a member of the 900-year-old Knights’ Order of the

First Rank of Saint Dionysius of Xanthe for his “contribution to the peace of the world.” With this honor, the church encouraged him to wield the sword in a “holy war.” Endorsed by religious convictions, without the controls of democracy, the passions and cruelty of men know no limits.

The principle difference between the fanatical agenda of the fundamentalists-terrorists in Iran and the political agenda of the conservative-fundamentalists in America is that the former wish to impose their beliefs on others, and to exclude from participation in the political process those who reject the “true” faith; while the latter desire to see their beliefs influence public affairs, and to include as participants in the political process those who share those beliefs, while not excluding those who reject them. The former is tyranny; the latter is democracy. The former is done in an attempt to gain salvation; the latter is the grateful act of those who have been saved.

Simple Rules -- Personal Convictions Should not Form Public Policy

Though I am absolutely opposed to abortion, I will not attempt to impose that view upon others. When Southeast Texas Medical Associates, LL)P was formed in 1995, one of the principles upon which it was founded was that of being pro-life. To be a part of SETMA, a healthcare provider had to agree not to practice, promote, facilitate or participate in abortion. No inquiry is made of potential providers as to their personal beliefs. It is simply, contractually agreed that no one will violate these principles while a provider with SETMA.

As a matter of public policy this position is consistent. A person can vote as they choose, free from the contractual restraints of their job. They can believe as they personally choose. And, if they desire to practice, promote or provide abortion services, they can resign and go to another practice. No one at SETMA will attack them, threaten them or harm them for their belief.

Public Policy Should Not Offend Personal Convictions

As a matter of public policy, I believe that no obligation should be imposed upon anyone which would require them to violate their deeply-held religious conviction, unless the practice of that conviction would restrict the freedom of others. In January of 2009, I wrote our new president after he had signed presidential directives which would promote public funding of abortions and said:

“Good government should never do as you have and that is to put good men and women in the position of having to break the law in order to obey their convictions.

“I understand that your earliest and strongest supporters were those individuals and organizations which demand that you sign presidential directives which encourage and pay for abortions. I had hoped that your wisdom and desire to build bridges would guide you not to create more chasms. Alas, they did not.

“As I struggle with the moral dilemma you have created for me, I hope that your paying of your political debts does not lead you to other equally divisive and unwise acts.”

Graduate Medical Education Should Not Demand Abortion Training

Graduate medical education requirements should not impose upon students a demand that they perform abortions. The *NYT*'s article reference above stated, “(In 1995), the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education — which represents the medical establishment — decided, for the first time, to make abortion training a requirement for all OB-GYN residency programs seeking its accreditation.” This ruling violates the principles dictated by a balance between public policy and personal convictions.

Confrontation versus Confession

My patients have the right not to hear what I believe, but they also need to know how what I believe may affect the treatment options which they will receive from me. The areas which are covered by that dichotomy are few; abortion is one of them. I cannot be forced to provide treatment or options which violate my personal beliefs. However, sometimes it is possible for those with different personal convictions to work together.

A number of years ago, I had a patient who needed a blood transfusion. I told him that, and he told me that his belief did not allow for blood transfusion. He began to explain that belief to me. I stopped him and said, “I respect your right to believe as you do, but I do not share your belief. If you insist upon explaining your belief, I will insist upon equal time to explain to you why I disagree with you. Now, do you want to continue this conversation, or do you want me simply to agree to abide by your deeply held, religious conviction?” He smile and said, “Thank you.”

I make no apology for being a Christian who believes that the Bible is the truth. Rather than making me reject you, if you don't believe, as I do, my belief requires me to respect you and value you, even as you disagree with me.