

THE NATION'S PULSE

The Consequences of the Culture of Death

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The culture of death continues to claim victims, this time abortionist George Tiller. The tragedy of his murder is compounded by the obvious contradiction of someone killing him in the name of life. Perhaps it should not surprise that murder is seen as the answer in a society which devalues life.

Protecting life is the foundation for a republic such as our own. Indeed, the most fundamental liberty is to life itself.

Tiller's murder obviously violates both a commitment to life and the rule of law. No free society can survive if its members believe themselves authorized to mete out their personal version of justice on others.

The murder has turned Tiller into a martyr to some yet, ironically, his lifework was death. Celebrated by the Center for Reproductive Rights as "a stalwart and fearless defender of women's fundamental health and rights," Tiller was known for performing partial birth abortions. That often meant delivering and then killing a fetus well past "viability," that is, the ability to survive on its own.

There's no doubt that the circumstances of many of those seeking abortions are difficult. Nor can any defender of liberty feel comfortable advocating government intrusion in such a personal matter as childbirth.

Yet a baby is not the property of his or her mother. Few people disagree that children have the full right to life like adults. Moreover, the moment of birth makes no difference in the moral value of life. Even some abortion advocates are uncomfortable with the brutality of many late term abortions, of which the late Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan said "This is too close to infanticide."

Nevertheless, "viability" should have no more moral significance than birth. Once formed, every human life is unique. That death is presented as the preferred option for "unwanted" children is bizarre. With families desperate to adopt, how can one advocate killing babies as a solution?

The strongest argument for not restricting abortion is personal liberty. Yet liberty always has been constrained when another person is involved. Especially when the other person exists only

because of one's free choice.

Abortion is not a matter of choice, but an attempt to flee from responsibility. Other than in the case of rape, pregnancy results from the decision to have sex, freely made. People are, rightly, legally free to have sex with whomever they desire whenever they desire. That being the case, they also should be held responsible for the consequences of their decisions. One of those consequences is a baby.

One can argue about the appropriate responsibility of putative parents for their child. But surely they cannot argue that, having freely brought a life into being, they have an untrammelled right to snuff it out. Yet that is the position of the far precincts of the "pro-choice" movement.

Indeed, some see abortion as a positive good. Consider the "National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers," celebrated last March 10. As people, including the young, have turned against abortion -- a recent poll showed a pro-life majority -- Katha Pollitt of the *Nation* declared: abortion providers could "use some love." If only they showed a little love to the most helpless among us.

Pro-abortion forces now dominate the White House, Congress, the courts, and the media. Indeed, this is the most extreme administration since *Roe v. Wade* -- in contrast to such leading Democrats as Richard Gephardt, Al Gore, and Bill Clinton, in running for president Barack Obama didn't have to flip-flop away from any earlier pro-life votes or decisions. Yet abortion advocates remain on the defensive, angry that social disapproval leads so many medical professionals to refuse to provide and even to learn how to provide abortions.

So we see the demand not just for the right to abortion, including essentially up to the day of birth. We also see the demand to force medical students to learn and hospitals to provide abortion. And for pharmacies to provide abortifacients. Freedom of conscience is twisted to mean the denial of freedom of conscience. As a result, the Obama administration, despite the president's eloquent appeal to find "common ground," is rolling back the Bush administration rule protecting health care workers who refuse to participate in abortion. Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) complained: "It threatens the health and well-being of women and the rights of patients across the country." In her view, apparently, women not only have a right to get an abortion, but to force doctors to provide an abortion.

Although federal institutions are firmly under the control of abortion advocates, many states are not. So the battle there continues, with state governments declaring the unborn to be persons and requiring that pregnant women be informed of fetal development and view ultrasounds of their babies. Opponents complain of "emotional blackmail," but surely women should be aware that it is a life they are ending before they choose to abort their unborn children. Thus, congressional abortion proponents, backed by the administration, are pushing the so-called "Freedom of Choice Act" to override state restrictions on abortion.

President Obama's policies are resolutely pro-abortion, but at least he does what many of his backers refuse to do: extend a "presumption of good faith" to those who oppose abortion and "honor the conscience of those who disagree with abortion." Indeed, admitted the president, "abortion is never a good thing." In contrast, many abortion activists are angered that anyone would make a moral judgment about abortion. A live baby. A dead baby. What's the difference, they seem to ask?

"At some level, the views of the two camps are irreconcilable," said President Obama in his speech at Notre Dame. Sad but true. Thus, the battle over abortion must continue.

Peaceful battle, that is. Pro-life must mean pro-life. The murder of abortionists -- there have been five since *Roe* -- must be roundly condemned by anyone committed to the protection of life. There can be no moral justification for murder.

Instead, the battle must be one of persuasion. There progress is being made. And ultimately there the fight will be won.

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