

Beginnings and Endings

Why are beginnings and endings so difficult? Life can be hard in transition. Have you ever felt anxious about meeting someone special for the first time? What about the first day on a new job? Or, having moved, do you remember the first day going to a new school full of strangers who will look you up and, maybe, look you *down*?

Perhaps some might answer, “Who? Me? Nervous because of something new, or some change? Never!” But most of us, and probably you, too, are not so self-assured of a special place and a unique role in the universe. We mortals get sweaty palms, knots in the stomach or nervous coughs when beginning some fresh adventure in life.

Every time I, Isaac, start a new chapter or whenever Rebecca puts pen to paper to compose a new poem, we feel writer’s *angst* at the beginning of a new creation. There is something a bit giddy, a little intimidating and a wee scary when transforming ethereal hopes, dreams and imaginations into something tangibly concrete. It is awe-inspiring to consider that the things we humans can imagine can impact reality, touching not only our own lives but, perhaps, the lives of many others.

The truth is that we neither live nor die as self-contained units.¹ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.²

Yes, our ideas and actions do bear consequences that touch others. Our lives are part of a complex tapestry of life made up of many threads cunningly woven together — each thread contributing something to the overall esthetic meaning of existence.

Perhaps you never feel anxious about beginnings. Maybe your concern is endings and the struggle to control that lump welling up in your throat when a career you love is ending, or at the moment you must reluctantly part with a home and its cherished, everywhere reminders to happy memories. Yes, its those endings with watering, misting eyes that can ruin the ladies’ make-up and embarrass your carefully rehearsed emotional control. How you would like to sidestep having to say those painful good-byes to dear loved ones, who must be left behind, as you embark on some journey.

Beginnings and endings, we can’t avoid them! They are the stressful mileposts of life that we must all pass. Perhaps this is the reason even in a jaded, blasé and materialistic era such as ours we can still get enormously worked up over the spiritual questions of abortion and euthanasia. Beginnings and endings in this world are like chapel attendance at a strict seminary—obligatory for all who are breathing on campus no matter whether the student is neglectful or diligent in learning the lessons of life.

They Shoot Horses Don’t They?

My first experiences with life and death came when I, Isaac, was a boy. My family raised hunting dogs, Weimaraners. Those retrievers could swim out in an icy pond and fetch with a soft mouth a downed duck or point to a pheasant hiding in the tall grass or brush. It was not unusual for us to have a dozen or more barking, scratching, panting, licking canines to frolic with on our excursions. We loved our dogs and we always refused to sell our core of prized bitches.

¹ Romans 14:7, J. B. Phillips translation

² Romans 14:7, Moffatt translation

However, raising any sort of animal or livestock has its hard moments, inescapable beginnings and endings. We treated our dogs as a valued part of our pack—worthy of good treatment and affection. Consequently our animals were brought up to be “family” friendly. But sometimes my dad would sell a thoroughly trained pup to some guy who was harsh with his dogs. Such a fellow viewed dogs as unfeeling, unintelligent creatures that were only kept around for their strictly utilitarian purpose of finding wild game. If the Weimeraner resented such treatment and showed it, such a new owner would often mercilessly beat the animal to “show it who was top dog.” Predictably, such an abused animal would prove less than enthusiastic in doing its job and would bite back if the opportunity afforded. As a result, Dad would occasionally get an animal returned with the complaint that it was worthless. We knew who was really exhibiting worthless behavior, but there was no point in arguing.

Straightening out a messed up dog was a challenge. With some we were successful if they weren’t too far gone. But others were so ruined that they were past our help. Dad would take those dogs out to our back field and give them a fast coup de grâce with a pistol to put them out of their misery. That has been the traditional remedy for a ruined or dying animal. When a horse owner had a favorite mount break a leg he would shoot it because there was no other merciful solution.

When one of our dogs got very old and became so hopelessly sick with something like heart disease or cancer that it was off its food and could barely wag its tail, we finally would look at each other and say it was time. With our cherished pets we could never do the mercy-killing ourselves. Crying all the way, we had to go to the veterinarian who would put ’em to sleep. We did this for our animals because we cared for them and didn’t want to see them suffer needlessly. But when grandma and grandpa got so miserably ill, it never occurred to us to take them out back and shoot ’em or ask the doctor to put ’em down. So much for my first experiences with endings.

As for beginnings, years later when I had my own place in the hills above Ramona, California, my number one son had a dog named Patches, which properly reflected his Heinz 57 heritage. Patches was a good dog, but he was too randy.

Now the people renting the place below us were planning on raising some popular pure-blood breed of dog for sale. Our property had a chain-link fence all around, so there should have been no trouble between Patches and the pure-blood bitches next door. Well, one day we discovered that Patches must have been part Welsh hard-rock miner. As hard as the decomposed red granite soil was at the fence line, Patches made a major excavation and had a very friendly visit next door. By the time the neighbor noticed what was going on it was too late. Patches was a good dog, but he was too randy.

Now one good visit deserves another. So my furious neighbor came over ranting and raving about my irresponsibility. Well, to keep the peace Patches had to visit the vet and leave two little things behind. Patches was a good dog, and now he would no longer be randy.

The neighbor took his bitch in for an abortion. No unwanted pregnancy for him! I suppose if we forced every human boyfriend to be neutered who created a situation in which his girlfriend felt compelled to have an abortion, then the dynamics motivating such behavior would probably be drastically altered. Such a policy just might give new weight to the word “responsibility.”

There is another approach to the unexpected, however. During my boyhood, our immediate neighbors who lived a field and a pond away had a magnificent black Newfoundland dog named Storm. One time he caught one of our Weimeraner bitches in heat. I was the one who saw them lying in the hay, and I told my mom. My parents decided not to take the bitch in for an abortion. The result was Newfaweimers, a hybrid that turned out to not have much monetary value but still made great-looking, friendly dogs. We had no problem finding homes for them. Nevertheless, if my parents had decided to take the bitch in for an abortion, I doubt anyone would have lost any sleep over it.

So why do people get so worked up about abortion and mercy-killing? If we do these things for the animals we cherish, why not do the same for the human beings who are our own flesh and blood? What is the difference between dogs and people? Some of the most intelligent and articulate commentators of our age are asking this question and failing to find the correct answer. There is a right answer. Would you like to know it?

A House Divided

When it comes to beginnings and endings in the United States, Canada and many other Western nations, the social consensus about the right thing to do has broken down. In America the result has been “culture war.”

Two-thirds of Americans consistently agree that “women should have the right to choose to have an abortion” but, as a new study by Everett Carl Ladd and Karlyn Bowman of the American Enterprise Institute points out, most Americans also believe that abortion is morally wrong (two-fifths call it “murder”) and they support laws that mandate waiting periods, spousal notification and parental consent, or that require doctors to inform patients of alternatives to abortion.¹

It shouldn't come as any surprise that polls show Americans have a similar, mirror image of mixed feelings when it comes to euthanasia.

Careful analysis of the polling data suggests that there is a “rule of thirds”: a third of Americans support legalization under a wide variety of circumstances; a third oppose it under any circumstances; and a third support it in a few cases but oppose it in most circumstances.... The most accurate characterization of the survey data is that a significant majority of Americans oppose physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia *except* in the limited case of a terminally ill patient with uncontrollable pain.ⁱⁱ

Yes, for the moment, opposing sides clash on legislative and judicial battlefields. It is a seesawing, wavering fight in which one side prevails for a while in this state house while the other side temporarily wins a skirmish at that appellate court only to later see it overturned on appeal to a yet higher court. Both sides are fiercely struggling to capture by ballot the political high ground in order to eviscerate the other side. In quiet desperation political foot soldiers are grappling in the trenches over the presidency, governorships, judicial appointments and majorities in legislatures—any high authority—from which they can effectively lob their partisan bombshells onto their opponents.

The controversy over abortion and euthanasia seems endless, to some predictably hyperbolic and thoroughly unresolvable. So why should we be concerned? Why bother getting involved? Why invest any energy in an issue that appears to be hopelessly stalemated?

During the Illinois electoral campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1858, Abraham Lincoln and Steven A. Douglas agreed to a series of debates over the hot issue of the day—the continuing denial of legal personhood to a powerless segment of humanity. This topic was also referred to as “slavery.” When Lincoln had finished his preparation for his first speech of the debate, he called in his advisors to hear it and give him some feedback. His supporters liked his speech until Lincoln gave his summary conclusion:

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.³ I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. **It will become all one thing or all the other.**”

As he read that, his friends were astonished and alarmed. It was too radical, they said; it was “a damn fool utterance,” it would drive voters away.

Finally Lincoln rose slowly and told the group of the intense thought that he had given the subject, and ended the conference by declaring that the statement “A house divided against itself cannot stand” was the truth of all human experience.ⁱⁱⁱ

Is Lincoln still right? In the United States, Canada and wherever else the debate over beginnings and endings is being fought, will the eventual outcome also be: “It will become all one thing or all the other”? It is in your self-interest to pay attention to what is at stake in the present controversy because, most likely, the currently deadlocked *status quo* can’t last forever.

A Judicial Linking of Abortion, Euthanasia, and Slavery?

The U.S. Supreme Court decided in the 1973 case *Roe v. Wade* that women did indeed have a right to an abortion based on a “right to privacy,” which the court extrapolated from the 14th Amendment’s due process clause. This clause, enacted in 1868 following America’s bloodiest war in which 618,000 died, stated:

No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive *any person* of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor deny to *any person* within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.^{iv}

While this amendment does not explicitly talk about any “right to privacy,” much less abortion or euthanasia, the court inferred the former as being a “right,” even though non-specified. For a generation most conservatives have argued that this was a bad ruling. Why? Because it allows unelected judges to create new rights never specifically approved of by the nation or its representatives. Ideas have consequences.

In essence the U.S. judiciary has become an unaccountable aristocracy. It has the power to impose its own moral perspective on everyone else. For conservatives this is anathema. On the other hand, for delighted libertarians, what couldn’t be won at the ballot box could be achieved by hiring legal gunslingers, that is, lawyers. If it took the judiciary to enforce what libertarians perceived as the Constitution’s broad protection of their personal liberties from State restraint, then so be it.

It is an ironic paradox of the American political system, and it doesn’t matter whether one is libertarian or conservative, at the end of the day some group’s point of view gets imposed on others who don’t appreciate it. However the question of whether

³ Matthew 12:25

American-style democracy is really the best path to true liberty and justice for all humanity is beyond the scope of this book.

In March 1996 the U.S. 9th Circuit of Appeals overturned the State of Washington's law that made physician-assisted suicide a felony. Writing for the court's 8 to 3 majority, appellate Judge Stephen Reinhardt cited the 1992 Supreme Court decision in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* as its precedent: "These matters, involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the 14th Amendment."

Judge Reinhardt then went on to argue in his opinion: "Like the decision of whether or not to have an abortion, the decision how and when to die is one of 'the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime,' a choice 'central to personal dignity and autonomy.'"^v

Thus that court saw a clear justification for linking the two issues in its legal philosophy. The lower court was merely taking its cue from the vision of freedom that the Supreme Court opined in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. The Casey case put forward a broad, generalized idea that would in practice allow each individual the full exercise of privacy rights, including abortion and, by logical extension, euthanasia. Perhaps a detached observer might suggest that the court was merely trying to make its path easier by having the politically correct prevailing winds blowing at its back as it walked towards an unrestricted right to total personal freedom. To the court such a freedom was the right to create one's own truth and to totally control one's personal destiny. This legal opinion is a concrete expression of the fuzzy, but nevertheless popular, "do-your-own-thing" philosophy. From the court's point of view in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the right to privacy is indeed sweeping:

The right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe and of the mystery of human life.^{vi}

A month after the 9th Circuit's decision, the U.S. 2nd Circuit Court also held in favor of doctor-aided suicide using the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. The 2nd Circuit Court held that it was discriminatory for physicians, on the one hand, to be able to disconnect life-support systems in order to "hasten" death for terminally ill patients, but not to be able to administer fatal doses of drugs to patients who also wanted to "hasten" their death yet didn't have the technology disconnect option. Thus the 2nd Circuit Court saw no difference between passively allowing death by discontinuing technological assistance and actively causing it by fatal injection.

These two appeals court decisions forced the U.S.'s Supreme Court to take up the controversial question in 1997. The Supreme Court decided 9-to-0 to reverse the two lower court decisions saying that the Constitution did not confer any broad rights to assisted suicide. Seemingly, the court decided to avoid creating a new firestorm of controversy similar to its *Roe v. Wade* abortion decision. But the high court left the door open for states to experiment with a variety of policies, hoping against hope that a public consensus might coalesce.

Clearly, the Supreme Court sought to finesse a potentially explosive situation. Yet if there is a "right" to abortion, why not euthanasia-suicide as well? Logically, such a *status quo* is not stable. The court must know it is just buying time before eventually

approving euthanasia as well. Or, as unlikely as it seems, the Supreme Court might be merely waiting for a few new appointments by a conservative President to create a solid majority to strike down abortion's "right to privacy" prop, eliminating an unstated right that appears unlikely to be approved in the near future by an explicit constitutional amendment! Impossible?

Human decisions change. The tides of mortals' ethical consciousness wax and wane. The courts have been known for issuing unjust, immoral decisions that were later repudiated. At least for Americans this is the extremely painful lesson of their own history.

Dred Scott and Legal Personhood

In 1857, the year before the Lincoln-Douglas debates, high-powered constitutional lawyers representing the bitterly opposed pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions argued *Dred Scott v. Sanford* before the U.S. Supreme Court. Simply put, *Dred Scott* was about the possible legal "personhood" potential of all African-Americans and the future of slavery in the United States. By a 7-to-2 vote (along strictly partisan lines) the court, at the urging of President James Buchanan, hoped to settle the troublesome question once and for all. The majority opinion written by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney held: "No slave nor descendant of a slave could ever be a U.S. citizen nor ever had been a U.S. citizen."^{vii}

Blacks could not be legal persons! Chief Justice Taney asserted that the Constitution's framers had only intended white men to have person status. Because the 5th Amendment had prohibited Congress from taking property without "due process of law," a slave-owner had the right to take his property anywhere he wanted in the nation without limitation. This voided the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had allowed many future states and territories to be legislated free of slavery. Chief Justice Taney insisted that Congress was obliged instead to protect slave-holders in their property rights throughout the nation.

A voiceless slice of humanity—who only wanted the chance to freely live, dream and hope like everyone else—saw their very humanity denied. Legally they were not persons so they could be deprived of life, liberty and property without due process. They were denied the equal protection of the nation's laws. Practically speaking, they occupied the same legal status as dogs! The anti-slavery faction in the North was morally outraged. As Amherst College political scientist Hadley Arkes observed:

"*Dred Scott* convinced the North that no compromise was possible with slavery. If they did not extinguish it, they would forever be its accomplices, collaborating in the return of fugitives, watching their neighbors whip them, and allowing their children to grow up in a culture shaped by the peculiar institution."

Since the beginning of the American abortion debate, *Dred Scott* has been a ready lesson.... Those who would deny the "personhood" of some segment of humanity will always try to force everyone else to collaborate in their injustice, fearing that otherwise they will lose their "right" to it.^{viii}

Is it fair to compare the Dred Scott case and its struggle over slavery with today's heated debate between the Pro-Choice group favoring unlimited rights to abortion and euthanasia and the Pro-Lifers who want to ban or strictly regulate these peculiar institutions? Does Lincoln's point about a house divided bear a modern comparison? Will we become all one way or all the other?

I doubt that a significant percentage of today's Americans would favor returning to the *status quo* of the mid-19th century. Who among us today would seriously argue that it is ethical to deny people of color their humanity and their right to legal personhood? Well, okay, there are a few fringe extremists who would like to turn the clock back, but no one should take them seriously. The absolute moral truth that slavery is evil and liberty good prevailed. Nevertheless, American society still feels that slavery, being deprived of one's civil rights, is an appropriate institution for condemned criminals and certain individuals who pose a danger to themselves and others. But even so, the value that generally holds slavery as wrong has thoroughly prevailed. Why? Because the clarity of its moral certitude comes from the moral logic of the universe. This level of ethical understanding is constant and defines the only values that will prove to be enduring.⁴

Slavery is a reprehensible moral evil. Yet it took almost one-and-a-half years of the Civil War's horrendous bloodletting before Abraham Lincoln felt sufficiently sure that a majority of the North's public opinion would back making the end of slavery a valid tactic and purpose of the war. Nevertheless, when Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, an unenlightened minority continued to vociferously oppose him:

A mutiny broke out in the army. Men who had enlisted to save the Union swore that they wouldn't stand up and be shot down to free niggers and make them their social equals. Thousands of soldiers deserted, and recruiting fell off everywhere.^{ix}

Moral certainty is nourished through convicting struggle. While ethical dilemmas may arise from purely personal circumstances, they can and often do have broad community implications. Many interior conflicts have profound external consequences. Individual actions touch others in a host of unimagined ways, altering even the destiny of the yet unborn.

Generations of Americans wrestled over the question of slavery before a consensus was achieved. While waiting for their liberation and the fulfillment of the promise of equality under the law, millions of African-Americans and others suffered. In the cycle of such things, we shouldn't be surprised, today, that the moral questions of abortion and euthanasia elicit a confused, mixed or, maybe, an ambivalent response from many people.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.⁵

We-the-people have not yet reached a defining climax in our struggle for moral clarity on these two issues. Until this happens, it is our duty to patiently soldier on in our search for a consensus based on the universal ethic that defines what is permanent and not mere social fashion.

Put to the Test

Why do we do the things we do? Everyone wants to be happy, successful and, generally, enjoy life. But sometimes in our pursuit of the good life we crash into reality

⁴ Exodus 5:1; Isaiah 61:1; Second Corinthians 3:17

⁵ Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, New Revised Standard Version

and find ourselves involved in some unpleasant, uncomfortable or down right painful situations.

Sometimes such nasty introductions to the undesirable side of life are wholly of our own making. It's like the times I started out on a journey after consciously ignoring the sound advice of knowledgeable friends about the best route to take. Like everyone else, I had choices to evaluate and decisions to make. And I made them expecting the best. But sometimes I erred. Something I never expected to happen to me happened anyway. And then I regretted my choice because I found myself stuck in some place or some situation in which I didn't want to be.

Naturally, not every encounter with a difficult reality is always our own fault. There have been those moments when I've done my homework and sought out advice while making my plans. With care I selected a route and began my journey hoping to make good time to my desired destination. But all of a sudden—blam!—out of nowhere an unexpected blowout, a breakdown or a poor road condition. Suddenly I found myself trying to cope with a problem I didn't actively invite and, maybe even tried to avoid. Such was the mind-numbing, all-night ordeal Rebecca and I spent during an unannounced, late-spring blinding blizzard crawling behind an intrepidly plodding semi, shivering in our California coupe. What should have been a pleasant drive through the Rockies became an ordeal. We had to keep going, afraid of the consequences if we should stop and get stuck in the snow.

Now no girl grows up dreaming about the day she'll have an abortion. Young children don't endlessly fantasize about a future, despondent day when they feel moved to ring up Dr. Death to discuss euthanasia or assistance in committing suicide. So what happens to change our point of view along life's journey?

What happens is we encounter a hard reality that puts us to the test. A real inconvenience, a great embarrassment, a tremendous disappointment, a sore trial, a life-threatening crisis, a time of seemingly endless indignity or pain—these are the hard occasions that challenge the very essence of our being. Who are we really, and what will we actually do when given a tough choice? *Someone* really wants to know!⁶

The Plain, Unvarnished Facts

Many facts about abortion are plain. Those about euthanasia, however, are at present mostly hidden or at best hard to assemble into a big picture due to limited data.

In the 25 years since *Roe v. Wade* became law on January 22, 1973, there were roughly 37 million abortions in the United States. As it presently stands, about 43 percent of American women will have an abortion. When it comes to modern life experiences for American women, abortion is just about as common as divorce.

Roughly 1.4 million women have abortions each year—89 percent before the 12th week of gestation. **Eighty-two percent are unmarried or separated**, and 44 percent have had at least one previous

⁶ “And you must remember all about how the Eternal your God led you through the desert during these forty years, to teach you your need of him, to prove you, to find out if it was your purpose to obey his orders or not. So he made you feel your need of him, he let you hunger and then fed you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had ever known, that he might make you know that man lives not only by food but by every word that comes out of the lips of the Eternal.... You must keep this in mind, that the Eternal your God disciplines you as a man disciplines his son,” Deuteronomy 8:2-4, 5, Moffatt.

abortion. Catholic women have them at a higher rate than do Protestant women; those in school do so at a higher rate than those who are not.^x

Percentage-wise, Japan slightly beats out the United States in the prodigious use of abortion among the Westernized family of nations. The Japanese and the Americans have about one abortion for every three live births. The Italians, British and French abort about one for every four live births.^{xi} The Canadians have about 280 abortions for every 1,000 live births.

While the abortion rate has been slowly declining in the U.S., possibly due to the generally aging population, the Canadian rate is still increasing, setting new records. In 1995 there were 106,658 abortions in Canada. The present rate is 46.1 percent higher than when abortion on demand was first legalized in Canada in 1988.^{xii}

Most of the women who are having abortions are unmarried 20-somethings. Overwhelmingly, the abortion demand curve is engendered by premarital sex. Logically, this same category of young adults—not teenagers—is also responsible for most out-of-wedlock babies. This is a significant change. As late as 1975, teenagers were still having most of the unwed births.

While American opinions about adultery, homosexuality and teenage sex have barely changed in the 25 years since *Roe v. Wade*, this relative social conservatism is definitely not true about the attitude toward consensual premarital relations between adults! First time brides may still customarily wear unblemished white, but pure as the driven snow they ain't. Today, only about 14 percent of brides are virgins by the time they get to the altar. In the early 1960s about 43 percent were virgins on their wedding night.^{xiii} What is the reason for this change?

Some commentators might cite the widespread initiation of sex education classes in public schools as well as easy access to contraceptives like the pill, IUD, condoms—and abortion.^{xiv} However, does the mere access to some material resource or knowledge mean people will actually use it? The presence of a can full of gasoline doesn't mean the possessor will set the neighborhood ablaze! A loaded handgun with the hammer down and locked in a draw won't murder anyone by itself.

Still, easy access to a material resource makes its use an attractive, convenient alternative. Any product manufacturer would tell you that ease of use helps lead to more sales. But generally, broad social changes in human behavior require some inspiration, some motivation to change. Humans are remarkably conservative creatures in their habits. We must be enticed or strongly persuaded to break out of our previous rut. Human behavior is a complex dance involving personality and socialization. What values and convictions *do* we really hold? What is worth struggling for, or against?

Some are inclined to argue that the entertainment media has played a critical role in selling the Western world on the supposed desirability of premarital sex. Of course, the media's role is but one of several modern influences that have helped push along the ideological movement that makes self-gratification and unrestricted self-fulfillment life's main purpose. But whether or not one can "prove" to a doubting Thomas that the entertainment media led the reshaping of society's values or merely followed the crowd's premarital bed hopping, it is clear the casting couch has been well occupied. No one

could deny that the entertainment industry's gurus have indeed taken advantage of the opportunity to portray this "fun" social change.⁷

The sexual revolution launched in the mid-1960s and early 1970s has had many unforeseen consequences. As accepted as it may be, consensual premarital sex can still have results that are not welcome. Unexpected consequences get in the way of the life we want to lead and the things we want to do. Unwanted sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies can ruin your whole day—or alter a life's whole script.

Consequently, the widespread practice of premarital sex created a number of new service industries worth hundreds of millions of dollars in the U.S. alone! Dedicated to customer convenience, the abortion industry promises to safely dispose of, or recycle, the unwanted fetal byproducts of premarital sex and imperfect contraception. After all, people who engage in premarital sex are merely seeking emotional and physical satisfaction for the moment, not a lifetime of personal responsibility that was the traditional fruit of human sexuality.

Abortion today is *not* primarily about countering threats to mothers' health, or dealing with the involuntary, abusive consequences of rape and incest. Only *one percent* of abortions are due to rape and incest! The health of the mother was a concern mentioned in only *seven percent* of abortions. Even concern over the health of the fetus was cited by just 13 percent of those terminating a pregnancy.^{xv} Not exactly what you expected, perhaps? Then again, maybe you already surmised it.

A *U.S. News* survey found, that even for most abortions occurring in the 20th week or later, the health of the fetus or mother was a relatively minor factor in the decision to have an abortion.^{xvi}

Inconvenience and Fear

Rebecca and I know what it means to worry about the health of a fetus as well as what it means to be inconvenienced.

When I was laid off from a job editing a magazine in Southern California, we decided to move in with Rebecca's father, mother and grandmother. We wanted to keep our expenses down so that we could write this book. Rebecca suspected she was pregnant when she was packing, but didn't say anything to me. There were enough problems to deal with at that moment.

We only had three weeks to make our December 1 deadline for our family's "Adventure in Moving" from sunny San Diego to a relatively cold, soggy northwest. We were moving from a spacious 2000 sq. ft. house into a 600 sq. ft ground floor apartment with our three boys. Our space situation reminded us a bit of the "old woman in the shoe" nursery rhyme. We were, of course, somewhat spoiled. Many families in the developing world cram eight or more into one room! Nevertheless, in Canada indoor space is especially valued because of our winter rigors.

About one month after we had settled in and the boys had enrolled in their new school (This was our fifth move within five years. Working for a religious organization can be worse than the army.), Rebecca bought a pregnancy test at the local pharmacy and

⁷ "Several studies have found that prime-time network shows implicitly condone premarital sex, and air as many as 8 depictions of it for every 1 of sex between married couples. And a *U.S. News* poll shows that while most Americans—74 percent—have serious qualms about teens having sex before marriage, more than half believe it is not at all wrong, or wrong only sometimes, for *adults* to have premarital sex," David Whitman, "Was It Good for Us?" *U.S. News & World Report*, May 19, 1997, p. 58.

confirmed her suspicions. Not everyone in the family welcomed the news as being timely.

Fortunately for us, Canada has affordable medical coverage that doesn't exclude "pre-existing" conditions. For full coverage we paid about \$50 U.S. per month for a family of five with one more in the hopper. I don't think I could have gotten the same coverage in America for \$500 per month, which would have been unaffordable for us. Believe me, there are times to sing "O Canada!" This was especially good news for aspiring literary types with no immediate money coming in.

Yet, it is often unappreciated that having access to medicine's full array of services and technology can be a mixed blessing. Just because we can do something doesn't mean we should. This point is too often overlooked by too many when some new invention, some new freedom, some new "right" is raucously proclaimed by the latest secular messiah.⁸

No one promised us that our lives would be without trouble in our beginnings and endings. A person needs wisdom and the sure, unwavering voice of the moral logic of the universe to quietly whisper guidance when confronted by a maze of possible and often confusing medical alternatives.

After Rebecca's first prenatal exam, the doctor informed us, as required, about the increased likelihood for a couple who were 40-somethings to have a Down's syndrome child. And, as if that wasn't enough, there was our complicating Rh blood-type problem, another potential source of catastrophe.

Rebecca and I are opposite blood types. Facetiously, we sometimes joke about who is hot and who is cold, or who is the alien among us. But seriously, this Rh blood difference can create a whole spectrum of threats to the fetus, ranging from mild anemia to severe retardation to death.

Modern medicine attempts to resolve some of these Rh blood problems by injecting rhogam into a new mother after she has delivered. This blood product was developed to try to prevent a mother's blood from forming antibodies, which could attack any future fetus having a blood-type opposite to that of the mother's. But after the birth of our babies, Rebecca refused to have this shot for a variety of reasons. These included the potential for contamination by undetected viruses like HIV in the rhogam. Our first child was born in the Los Angeles area just as the AIDS epidemic was becoming recognized by the medical community. Tainted blood has led to many thousands contracting fatal diseases. The medical texts discussing rhogam were too full of descriptive phrases like "we think," "it is believed," and "we hypothesize" to make Rebecca trust this medical procedure.

Since Rebecca had refused the rhogam previously, her chance for developing antibodies had increased with every succeeding pregnancy. She had had three children and three miscarriages. The risk was real. So she had to have her blood regularly tested for antibodies. If a sufficient level of antibodies developed the doctor would have to figure out how bad the effect might be. There were questions like: should labor be induced early if there was a bad Rh reaction, whether to have a Cesarean, whether a

⁸ "With their high-sounding nonsense they use the sensual pull of the lower passions to attract those who were just on the point of cutting loose from their companions in misconduct. They promise them liberty. Liberty!—when they themselves are bound hand and foot to utter depravity. For a man is the slave of whatever masters him," Second Peter 2:18-19, Phillips.

massive blood transfusion would be needed and so forth. The doctor warned us that there was no guarantee that the fetus would escape a serious health trauma.

Early in this unplanned pregnancy the doctor also strongly suggested Rebecca have tests performed to determine whether the baby might have Down's syndrome. Rebecca was familiar with Down's syndrome kids. Her mother had been a special education teacher. She had made a career of working with children having this genetic defect. Also, one of Rebecca's cousins had Down's. Rebecca recognized Down's syndrome for what it was. She had grown up seeing a lot of it.

Sometimes we do things we later regret due to fear of the unknown or fear of our inability to cope. Rebecca knew that Down's children were mostly happy, albeit somewhat simple and limited kids who could, nevertheless, enjoy life for a time just like you and me. We knew that if we had a Down's syndrome child our life would be turned upside down. Of that there was no question, no doubt at all. Should we put our hopes for the kind of life we wanted to lead at risk?

And when a person knows the right thing to do, but does not do it, then he is sinning.⁹

We declined the test. To what purpose? Some things are better not known until the season blows upon you, swirling either the hard ice of winter, or the soft moisture of spring. We would not terminate the pregnancy merely for our convenience—or fears. The Scriptures counsel faith and perseverance when working through a problem. Without a doubt life can bring the unexpected and the inconvenient. Medical technology tantalizes, allures, promises easy escapes. But there are no free lunches and terminal reality has a way of reasserting itself later on.

When we married, it was for better or worse. Mostly it has been for the better. Perhaps it was our time to taste a little of the other category. With beginnings and endings we have the opportunity to squarely face and overcome our own fears and selfishness. We ought to confront them and prevail.

Our baby was born almost two weeks past his due date. But besides being fashionably late and arriving in the wee hours of the morning, he was a fine and bonny son.¹⁰

The biggest problem we had to deal with once the baby arrived was sleep deprivation. We've also had to figure out how to reorganize our limited space, resources and time to nurture one more little person who has his own definite opinions about what he likes and when he likes it. Whatever the pain of delivery and other assorted inconveniences throughout this latest pregnancy, Rebecca's own health was never at stake. Some women are not so fortunate.

I know of a woman who in the first trimester of her pregnancy came down with appendicitis. She desperately needed the appendix out, but out of concern for the operation's detrimental effect on her baby she put it off. She and her doctor wanted to save the baby. They waited. The mother's condition deteriorated to the point that the doctor felt he could no longer delay. It was practically too late to save even the mother. The operation was performed. The mother recovered and did not lose the fetus as a result

⁹ James 4:17, International Children's Bible

¹⁰ "When a woman gives birth to a baby, she has pain, because her time has come. But when her baby is born, she forgets the pain. She forgets because she is so happy that a child has been born into the world," John 16:21, ICB.

of the operation. But no one was sure what effect the operation and various drugs used during it might have had on the baby. Even today with our advanced diagnostics one can only make educated guesses as to the likely outcome of such a situation.

The good news was that the baby kept growing. The bad news was that this growth kept the appendectomy's incision from ever fully healing during the pregnancy. The woman had to wrap belts around her to support her swelling, cut abdomen. She endured considerable discomfort. At full term she gave birth to a healthy and lively baby boy.

Now as to the question of whether I, Isaac, am normal or not, that is for others to judge. But I do appreciate my mother's willingness to have risked her life for me. Her example illustrates a vital principle. Jesus of Nazareth pointed out that service to others, even to the point of self-sacrifice, is paradoxically the way to fully enjoy an abundant life:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.¹¹

I believe that I have been a joy to my mother even though I have also caused her pain. Nevertheless, I am not the judge of any woman who would prefer to have an abortion rather than to put her life at risk for an unknown fetus whose face she has never seen. Still, I am glad my mother was not such a person.

Even the armed forces know that self-sacrificing behavior is exceedingly rare. In times of great struggle when mere bravery seems common, the military save their highest medals of honor for those who go above and beyond the call of duty. Such people freely lay down their lives, risking all. No one else could have ordered them to do so. No army quartermaster can issue such devotion along with the helmet, boots and rifle. Human institutions cannot legislate this kind of self-sacrificing, self-effacing love that Jesus was talking about. No human constitution, no human court can require a man or woman to so love another person. Only the unseen God can do that because he supplies the needed love. He will reward, later, those who are motivated by such love and lay it all on the line to serve others.

Perhaps this perspective is hard to understand in a materialistic age. Ours is a selfish time when the presumed rights of the mother to an unfettered existence supersede those of unborn child, father, family or community. Life's real heroes are few and far between today. But when we do hear about someone who does have such love, we take notice and are inspired. Our courage and faith are then strengthened by knowing that God still works through such weak and thoroughly human specimens as ourselves.

A Slippery Path

There is nothing new about the discussion over euthanasia. From the beginnings of Western medicine in Greece more than 2,000 years ago, the morals of mercy-killing and doctor-assisted suicide have been furiously debated.¹²

¹¹ John 15:12-14, NRSV

¹² "All the arguments made to justify—or condemn—the two practices [doctor-assisted suicide and euthanasia] were articulated before modern biomedical technology existed. The ancient Hippocratic Oath enjoins physicians to "neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor make a suggestion to this effect." The oath was written at a time when physicians commonly provided euthanasia and assisted suicide

Why do we continue debating about the various forms of euthanasia? The reason is that most people today want to avoid dying an excruciating or bitter death—one without hope, without comfort, without support—if at all possible. As a result, some form of mercy-killing or assisted suicide seems desirable, a quick and easy way out of a miserable situation. According to the pro-euthanasia view, such convenience ought to be held in dignified reserve, but always ready to be called forward when needed.

How soundly based is our fear of a nasty ending? Back in 1908 Dr. William Osler made a study of 486 deaths at a respected Baltimore hospital. At that time only one in five terminal patients seemed to have any degree of suffering. Dr. Osler wrote in his book, *Science and Immortality*, that for “the great majority death was a sleep and a forgetting.”^{xvii}

Of course, the deaths Dr. Osler witnessed were just a minority of those dying during the early 20th century. Most people, then, died at home among family rather than at impersonal institutions like hospitals or nursing homes. But today, a big majority—roughly 80 percent—of dying patients are sequestered at cost-conscious health-care businesses. And many of these terminal patients say they feel “distress” during their last days among the living.^{xviii}

Distress? Most dying patients are not beyond modern pain control methods and the peaceful, pain-numbing embrace of an opioid like morphine.¹³ Evidently, some type of distress seems to be arising for reasons other than purely physical pain. Still, the anguish that many dying patients feel is real, troubling them as well as their caregivers. So the push is on to remake the social policy about endings. That is to say, *some* patients and *some* medical authorities would like to be able to cut their endings short.

At present in North America only Oregon has a statute permitting doctor-assisted suicide, but that may change. If we-the-people decide to embrace various forms of euthanasia, who we are as a nation and the nature of our society will be affected.¹⁴

An understatement? Perhaps. Robert Beezer, a judge on the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals who rejected that court’s majority position favoring euthanasia, warned in his dissenting opinion:

for ailments ranging from foot infections and gallstones to cancer and senility. Indeed, the Hippocratic Oath represented the *minority* view in a debate within the ancient Greek medical community over the ethics of euthanasia,” Ezekiel Emanuel, “Whose Right to Die,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1997, p. 74.

¹³ “There have been enormous advances in the management of pain... Drugs can be delivered through skin patches, topical creams and implanted pumps as well as intravenously. New automated delivery systems, which measure levels of medication in the blood, can stop pain before it starts while minimizing side effects such as nausea, grogginess and constipation,” John Horgan, “Seeking a Better Way to Die,” *Scientific American*, May 1997, p. 103.

¹⁴ Not Dead Yet is an advocacy group for the disabled founded by Diane Coleman. Despite spinal muscular atrophy from age 11, Coleman earned a law degree, worked full-time as a lawyer for seven years and continues to live on her own. Not Dead Yet strongly opposes the euthanasia movement. Recently a dozen severely disabled members of the group attended the murder trial of America’s Dr. Death, Jack Kevorkian, in their wheelchairs to dramatize their Pro-Life position. They believe assisted suicide and euthanasia are simply forms of deadly discrimination fostered by those who feel revulsion toward people with disabilities. According to Ms. Coleman, “With cuts in health care, we are seen as a burden, a problem to be solved. There is a growing disrespect and devaluation of us people with disabilities.... Any suffering can be relieved by being killed, you know,” Charles Laurence, “Dr. Death Meets the ‘Not Dead Yet’ Society,” *National Post*, March 25, 1999.

If physician-assisted suicide for mentally competent, terminally ill adults is made a constitutional right, voluntary euthanasia for weaker patients, unable to self-terminate, will soon follow. After voluntary euthanasia, it is but a short step to a “substituted judgment,” or “best interests” analysis for terminally ill patients who have not expressed their constitutionally sanctioned desire to be dispatched from this world. This is the sure and inevitable path.... It is not a path I would start down.^{xix}

This is the slippery slope argument. Have you ever, personally, gone down a slippery slope? Actually, I go down slippery paths fairly frequently. I like to hike. In coastal British Columbia this means less than ideal trail conditions a good part of the year due to the soggy conditions in our temperate rain forests. A hastily placed boot heel can give a cheap thrill, a little glide, an unexpected slide. Suddenly the hiker is left scrambling for another sure footing or rubbing a sore posterior. Only constant prudence and diligent attention can prevent a painful fall. Where I live the decision to take some slippery paths may have unpleasant, even dangerous consequences.

So when the weather is bad or threatening I usually avoid certain trails because the risk of serious, unpleasant problems is significant, especially when I’m leading a group of inexperienced people or carrying a child on my back. So in a similar vein, is it worth the unexpected risks to both individual and community to walk down the euthanasia path?

Death Goes Dutch

Euthanasia has been tolerated in the Netherlands since 1973. Yet Dutch voters have rejected outright legalization several times. So although it is still technically illegal, Dutch prosecutors won’t file murder charges against physicians who adhere to a set of mercy-killing guidelines that were negotiated between the medical and legal establishments. These guidelines emphasize that euthanasia must be, supposedly: voluntary, for unbearable suffering (either physical or psychological), assented to by a second physician and properly reported to the coroner.

In North America most arguments for and against euthanasia are based to some extent on this Dutch experience. The best known empirical study of euthanasia à la hollandaise is the comprehensive Rummelink Report, which was first published in 1991 and later revised in 1996.

Each year in the Netherlands there are about 9,700 requests for a hastened death according to the Rummelink Report. Annually, a little more than 3,600 of these requests are agreed to by physicians. Approximately 80 percent of those requesting termination have cancer while another four percent have a deteriorating neurological condition like multiple sclerosis. These assisted deaths represent about 2.7 percent of all deaths per year in the Netherlands.^{xx}

If such a percent held true to a potential American application, we might expect about 67,500 assisted deaths annually. But, of course, the United States has neither universal health insurance nor a relatively homogenous population like the Netherlands. Consequently, the percent of voluntarily hastened deaths in the U.S. might be significantly higher in its real world application. Besides, the statistics on *voluntary* euthanasia are not the whole picture.

The Rummelink Report also noted that in addition to these 3,600 annual cases of voluntary termination, there are about another 1,000 instances of what can be only be

qualified as *involuntary* euthanasia—a type of mercy-killing—as defined by the Dutch guidelines.¹⁵

Despite such unsettling anomalies, one might be led to conclude that most of these premature deaths in the Netherlands, voluntarily requested or not, were due to uncontrollable, excruciating pain. But is this the case? Consider this evidence¹⁶ from those who could, at least, speak for themselves: “In only 32 percent of all cases did pain play any role in requests for euthanasia; indeed, **pain was the sole reason for requesting euthanasia in no cases.**”^{xxi}

According to the Dutch research, uncontrollable pain was NOT the main reason for the great majority who opted out of life early. So if pain isn’t the main motivator for a fast exit, what did the Dutch conclude was driving people who knew they are already dying to request that their lives be cut still shorter? The answer is surprising: a perceived loss of dignity.¹⁷ So it is not surprising that the biggest study on the dying in the United States during the early 1990s suggested that depression and mental distress were major components in end-of-life issues.¹⁸

A Change in the Culture of Medicine

No one ever promised that dying was going to be something to enjoy. But it seems that fewer and fewer of us are presently finding death to be “a sleep and a forgetting,” a gentle fading away, which was the experience of a majority of our forebears. For all of our material advancement in medical science, we are, apparently, doing something wrong. While the health-care community remains deeply divided over whether euthanasia should become approved social policy or not, practically everyone

¹⁵ “A study of nursing-home patients found that in only 41 percent of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia cases did doctors adhere to all the guidelines.... In 15 percent of cases the patient did not initiate the request for physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia; in [another] 15 percent there was no consultation with a second physician; in seven percent no more than one day elapsed between the first request and the actual physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia, violating the guideline calling for repeated requests; and in nine percent interventions other than physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia could have been tried to relieve the patient’s suffering [but weren’t]. Euthanasia of newborns has been acknowledged. The reported cases have involved babies suffering from well-recognized fatal or severely disabling defects, though the babies were not in fact dying. Precisely how many cases have occurred is not known.... Providing euthanasia to newborns (upon parental request) is not voluntary euthanasia, and does constitute a kind of ‘mercy-killing.’” Emanuel, p. 77.

¹⁶ “A study of patients in nursing homes in the Netherlands revealed that pain was among the reasons for requesting physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia in only 29 percent of cases and was the main reason in only 11 percent,” Emanuel, p. 75.

¹⁷ “The Rummelink Report found that among Dutch patients the leading reason for requesting euthanasia was a **perceived loss of dignity**. The study of Washington State physicians found that the leading factors driving requests were **fear of a loss of control or of dignity, of being a burden, and of being dependent**. Among the New York HIV-infected patients the leading factors were **depression, hopelessness, and having few — and poor quality — social supports**,” Emanuel, p. 75

¹⁸ The Study to Understand Prognoses and Preferences for Outcomes and Risks of Treatments (SUPPORT) was conducted at five American teaching hospitals. Researchers surveyed relatives who visited their family member for their observations about the dying patient’s apparent mental and physical condition. Publishing its results in 1997, SUPPORT found that of 3,357 deceased patients about 40 percent were said to have had pain “most of the time” while 25 percent had appeared to be depressed or otherwise mentally distressed. Two-thirds of the dying were characterized as having had difficulty “tolerating” their condition. Cf. John Horgan, p. 101.

involved with end-of-life issues agrees that care for the dying can and should be greatly improved.

Dr. Linda L. Emanuel, director of the mainstream American Medical Association's Institute for Ethics (The AMA opposes euthanasia and doctor-assisted suicide) sees a great need to re-educate doctors in the proper care of the terminally ill. Organizations like the AMA are trying to encourage physicians to shift their efforts for such patients from invasive and painful heroics attempting an unlikely cure, to measures designed to make whatever remains of life more comfortable and worthwhile. This revised end-of-life approach advocates hospice palliative care. The significance of such a proposed change in perspective for North American medical practice is not be underestimated. Dr. Linda Emanuel calls it a change in the very "culture of medicine."^{xxii}

John Tomczak, a nine year volunteer at our local Victoria Hospice, has witnessed the difference palliative care can make to the dying and their family. Writing during the trial of a Canadian doctor accused of practicing euthanasia and the ensuing legalization debate that appeared in the media, Tomczak stated in a letter to the editor of our local newspaper: "I am always amazed at the change in the attitude of patients once the pain is controlled. I have had friends go from abject misery and despair to one of acceptance and being grateful for the opportunity to visit with the family and friends and for the time to tidy up all those loose ends. Why anyone would allow a patient to die in pain with the expertise and medications available today is unconscionable."¹⁹

For many reasons, the need to change the culture of medicine is urgent indeed. Almost imperceptibly, with great subtlety, the practice of some health-care workers has been shifting. Ignoring their Hippocratic Oath, they have taken it upon themselves to effect euthanasia privately.²⁰

The results of a survey published in April 1998 in the *New England Journal of Medicine* announced that about six percent of American physicians admitted that they had hastened a patient's death by lethal injection or by writing a fatal prescription. One of these doctors reported that he had written 25 such prescriptions and had given 150 lethal injections.^{xxiii} And this was NOT the infamous Dr. Death of Michigan.

Many other health-care givers, however, think such actions by their colleagues are both inappropriate and unacceptable. From their perspective, the incredible advances in modern medicine do not create a greater need for euthanasia, rather, just the opposite!

¹⁹ "Victoria Hospice cares for more than 20 percent of the deaths in the Capital Region. I know more than 600 folks who have had their loved ones die in the care of Victoria Hospice. The stories I have heard are full of gratitude and hope that all, in our community, will share their experiences. On the other hand, I have heard stories of loved ones who have died unnecessarily painful deaths simply because the attending physician does not believe in hospice palliative care.... Those who take a human life, under the guise of euthanasia, have a weapon that is a lot stronger than a knife or drugs or even a plastic bag. They have the press. They have found the perfect formula for their cause.... Wouldn't it be wonderful if our citizens could read about the quiet, pain-controlled death of each of our neighbors? Think of how much good that would do for our community. We could be an example for the rest of Canada. This is not a matter for the courts, rather it is a matter of the moral fiber and conscience of all Canadians," John Tomczak, "With Hospice, No One Need Die an Agonizing Death," *Times Colonist*, September 5, 1997.

²⁰ "According to a report in the May 23, 1996 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 20 percent of a group of 850 nurses working in intensive care units acknowledged having deliberately hastened the death of a patient. A survey of 118 San Francisco-based doctors... found that half had prescribed lethal doses of drugs to patients suffering from AIDS," John Horgan, p. 105.

Representative of this opinion is Dr. Kathleen M. Foley, an authority on the treatment of pain and director of philanthropist George Soros' Project on Death in America.

Foley opposes legalizing physician-assisted suicide, which she denigrates as "treating suffering by eliminating the sufferer." In the course of her career, she says, she has repeatedly encountered patients who asked to be put out of their misery. In almost every case, she says, the requests abated after the patients had received supportive care, including analgesics, antidepressants or counseling.^{xxiv}

What is the real significance of the slippery slope that Justice Robert Beezer talked about? Euthanasia is already a legal reality in a few places and is being privately embraced in many others. What difference does it make if we, as individuals or as a community, tolerate a small percentage of hastened deaths? Aren't we talking about something that already goes on behind closed doors, quietly, and that is only relevant to an "unproductive" class of people who were going to die relatively soon, anyway? If doctor-assisted suicide and euthanasia become routinely accepted, how could that put society as a whole at risk?

The answer is that ideas have consequences. There is cause and effect. But many consequences, many effects are initially unforeseen. It is hard to perceive up close how adding a few threads here and taking away a few threads there can change the tapestry of life. You have to stand back to take in a realistic impression of the whole.

A respected teacher of ethics frames the question of euthanasia, doctor-assisted suicide and abortion into a basic difference of perspective in how society approaches human existence. In a position paper called "Evangelium Vitae," Pope John Paul II foresees a growing conflict between what he calls "a culture of death" and "a culture of life."

Abortion and euthanasia, the Pope argues, are threats to democracy. He says that our liberal society is myopically concerned with efficiency and increasingly characterized by a war of the powerful against the weak.

The Pope attributes an erosion of respect for human life to our exaggerated individualism and to the materialism, hedonism and moral relativism it fosters. He says **we have turned a blind eye to the "necessary conformity of civil law with the moral law"....**

The centerpiece of the Pope's argument is that there are certain objective moral facts that cannot be altered, even by our society's instincts toward moral pluralism, compassion and majority rule. Abortion and euthanasia are crimes, he says, and **societies where such killing is allowed will invariably revert to barbarianism and list toward totalitarianism.**^{xxv}

The new millennium will bear witness as to whether Abraham Lincoln was right when he said, "It will become all one thing or all the other."

The Freedom to Choose

Perhaps someone who is religious might think that the responsibility for our society's confusion over abortion and euthanasia is primarily attributable to the secular in our midst. After all, since such humanists have a materialistic worldview, they can't help but be spiritually blind, unable to discern the moral logic of the universe when it comes to beginnings and endings. And although I hesitate to reduce the social and political culpability of these "infidels" among us in this matter, it seems to me that all the blame for our society's confusion about our beginnings and endings cannot be laid solely on their doorstep.

Why? Because the overwhelming majority of us here in North America say we believe in God and maintain some sort of religious affiliation. Yet it is we-the-people who are having the abortions and who are voting to legalize euthanasia.

It is incorrect to place all the blame for society's confusion over abortion and euthanasia on those readily identifiable special-interest groups who *seem* so alien, so radical—those vociferous atheists, radical feminists and sensual hedonists. Sure, such groups are vocal. They grab some headlines and have some influence. But although we may feel annoyed with them, maybe we also resemble them far more than we care to admit. Do our moments of doubt, weakness and selfishness lead us off the straight path through this crooked world? Sadly, the main source of our society's confusion is to be found much closer to home. We, the religious, don't really see, understand or believe as we ought.

The cartoon character Pogo once philosophized: "We have met the enemy and he is us." During America's pre-Civil War days, Abraham Lincoln could have penned those very words himself.

Lincoln realized [early in the election of 1860] that he would be victorious; but, nevertheless, he feared that he would not be able to carry his own precinct or his home town. A committee made a house-to-house canvass in advance, to find out how the people in Springfield were going to ballot. When Lincoln saw the result of this canvass, he was astonished; all except three of the twenty-three ministers and theological students in town were against him, and so were many of their staunchest followers. Lincoln commented bitterly: "**They pretend to believe in the Bible and be God-fearing Christians; yet by their ballots they are demonstrating that they don't care whether slavery is voted up or down. But I know God cares and humanity cares, and if they don't, surely they have not read their Bibles aright.**"^{xxvi}

For most of us there is no need to be in confusion when it comes to beginnings and endings. We can have the knowledge to clearly understand the right thing to do. As it is written: "There are some things the Lord our God has kept secret. But there are some things he has let us know. These things belong to us and our children forever. It is so we will do everything in these teachings."²¹

Would it surprise you to know that God is adamantly "*pro-choice*"? There can be no debate on this point! When it comes to the questions of abortion and euthanasia, the moral logic of universe is absolutely pro-choice! Listen to the total freedom to choose that the Scriptures conferred on a people who were fast approaching a time when they would have to make some critical decisions defining the essential nature of their society.

Today I ask heaven and earth to be witnesses. I am offering you life or death, blessings or curses. Now [as to my point of view, says the divine speaker], choose life! Then you and your children may live. Love the Lord your God. Obey him. Stay close to him. He is your life.²²

God believes in free moral agency for individuals and nations. Of necessity we must make choices about which way to go at the various crossroads in our individual and collective existences. As we start a new millennium, how we deal with our updated takes on beginnings and endings are tests that will define whether we are choosing life or death for ourselves, our family and our society.

²¹ Deuteronomy 29:29, ICB

²² Deuteronomy 30:19-20, ICB

Our choices will bring us consequences, according to physical and spiritual laws that have long operated throughout the universe. These consequences will be, eventually, either happiness and success, or adversity and destruction.

The One who inspired the universe's moral logic prefers to see us choose life. In a true sense God is *pro-life*. Nevertheless, the right to choose remains ours. That is what free moral agency is all about.

Free moral agency, however, has nothing to do with establishing a right for ourselves to create our own reality about human existence, the universe, or the mystery of life. We live in a real-time world in which the rules of life's road and the possible outcomes have already been established. To deny this is merely dysfunctional delusion. The law of gravity continues to operate and have its effects whether you heatedly deny it or not. You have nothing to do with its empowerment. It is the same with the moral logic of the universe.

Often when hiking, Rebecca and I come to a trail junction with paths leading off in separate directions, ending up at widely different destinations. We have the right to choose either path for our day's journey. But we cannot choose the path leading off to the left and travel down it all day long expecting to arrive, ultimately, at the right hand path's destination. That seems simple enough, eh? However, it never ceases to amaze me how many want to go left but end up right! Such people are "too complicated." To correct such an error in the wilderness takes some serious cross-country bushwhacking, which is hard work indeed, or some humiliating backtracking. It is much easier to keep it simple by taking the right path in the first place to get to the plainly marked, desired destination.

I, Isaac, doubt that you really want to choose adversity, destruction and death for yourself. So what does the moral logic of the universe really have to say about beginnings and endings? The answer for some might be startling, while others might find it reassuring or even inspiring. Nevertheless, what the Scriptures really do teach about abortion and euthanasia is so plain that we ought to be able to achieve moral clarity on these issues—if we would read our Bibles "aright" as Lincoln said.

L'Chaim, To Life!

From the divine perspective of things, every human life can increase the household of God and bring additional strength and unique potentials.²³ Even from a purely secular point of view, how can you place a value on a Lincoln or a Ghandi, a Galileo or a Da Vinci, a Moses or a David? God is in the business of adding value to his created family. Any particular individual can immeasurably add value in wholly unforeseen ways. Each person has the potential to create something special that can be woven into the shared tapestry of life. God knows this. In fact, it is revealed that the Creator makes it his business to get involved with a new human life long before most governments are willing to grant legal personhood to the developing being. In Psalm 139 King David was inspired to write:

You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because you are to be feared; all you do is strange and wonderful. I know it with all my heart. When my bones were being formed, carefully put together in my mother's womb, when I was growing there in secret, you

²³ Ephesians 2:19

knew that I was there—you saw me before I was born. The days allotted to me had all been recorded in your book, before any of them ever began.²⁴

Many Bible versions like the *New Revised Standard Version* translate “You saw me before I was born” as “Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.”²⁵ This divine involvement in forming or fashioning a new life in the womb for some godly service is an understanding repeatedly encountered in the Hebrew Scriptures.²⁶ Perhaps one of the most famous of these Hebrew Bible citations is about the Prophet Jeremiah, of whom the LORD says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”²⁷

For a world beset by a crippling addiction to the philosophies of meaninglessness and materialism, the idea that an individual can have a destiny determined by an unseen God even while still in the mother’s womb is exceeding strange, even wild! Yet that is what the moral logic of the universe teaches. Speaking of Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of the biblical matriarch Rebekah, the Greek Scriptures assert:

But before the two boys were born, God told Rebekah, “The older will serve the younger.” This was before the boys had done anything good or bad. God said this before they were born so that the one chosen would be chosen because of *God’s own plan*. He was chosen because he was the one God wanted to call, not because of anything he did.²⁸

As the inspiring muse of the biblical writers, the Creator often used positive and negative birth experiences to teach a number of important lessons.²⁹ But one of the most famous of these stands out due to its extraordinary implications for the purpose and meaning of human existence.

A physical birth, everyone knows, is first required before a human can fully participate in a temporary, physio-chemical life that can be lived in a material universe. The practical effect of today’s popular abortion techniques is to merely cut short the chance of others to fully participate in such an existence.

So is abortion no big deal? The aborted will have no consciousness that they ever missed anything. All physical life is soon over anyway. Whatever fulfillment we find in this temporary life is eventually extinguished as our days fade away. Is that all there is to our beginnings and endings? A matter of accompanying Mother Earth for a few score revolutions around the sun—or maybe just a fraction of one? Well, that depends on our perspective and our choices.

The Scriptures reveal that there is another possible dimension to human existence. In essence, reality comprises much more than merely those things we can perceive by our limited physical senses of sight, sound, taste, touch and feel. Changeable material reality

²⁴ Psalm 139:13-16, Good News Bible, Today’s English Version

²⁵ The Hebrew word for “my unformed substance” is *galmi*, which *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* and Jay Green’s *The Interlinear Bible* also translate as “my embryo.”

²⁶ Isaiah 44:2, 24; 49:5

²⁷ Jeremiah 1:5, NRSV

²⁸ Romans 9:11-12, ICB

²⁹ “Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD; shall I that cause to bring forth shut the womb? saith thy God,” Isaiah 66:9. “Thus saith Hezekiah: This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of contumely; for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth,” Second Kings 19:3, *The Holy Scriptures*, Jewish Publication Society.

is underlaid, sustained and directed by an unseen, enduring, foundational reality that is spiritual.

So we set our eyes not on what we see but on what we cannot see. What we see will last only a short time. But what we cannot see will last forever.³⁰

Why even renowned cosmologists speculate that there may be other universes operating under rules of physics completely different from our own! These cosmologists understand that our material universe had a definite beginning and they speculate about its possible end. But what was our material universe created from?

You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.³¹

Now according to the Creator of everything, those things we do not see, the spiritual, non-physical plane of permanent life can only be accessed by those who go through a spiritual birth process. This spiritual metamorphosis is the portal to a new dimension of life that is never ending, eternal.

A physical being born in a material universe must become spiritually engendered and, then, spiritually born before entering what the Scriptures call “the kingdom of God.”³² Jesus of Nazareth taught that flesh-and-blood humans need yet another birth—a “second” birth, a spiritual birth—before they can fully participate in a spiritual universe.³³

From the scriptural standpoint begetting by a father is the beginning of personal recognition. The book of Hebrews quotes God the Father as saying of Jesus:

Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten³⁴ Thee.³⁵

The Greek Bible stresses that God the Father recognized Jesus as his son on the very day he engendered him in the womb of his mother, the virgin Mary.³⁶ And Jesus of

³⁰ Second Corinthians 4:18, ICB

³¹ Hebrews 1:10-12, NKJV, cf. Psalm 102:25-27

³² First Corinthians 15:50

³³ “I am telling you in solemn truth: unless a man be born afresh, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “How is it possible,” Nicodemus enquired of him, “for someone already old to be born? Is he to enter his mother’s womb a second time, and so come to birth?” “I am telling you in solemn truth,” replied Jesus, “that a man cannot enter the kingdom of God unless he be born through water [baptism] and through the Spirit,” John 3:3-5, Cassirer translation. Verses 6-8 show that this other dimension of life is very different from our present experience: “That which takes its birth from the flesh is no more than a thing which is of the flesh, while that which takes its birth from the Spirit is a thing which is of the spirit. Let it not be a matter of surprise to you if I said that what is required of you all is that you should be born afresh. The wind blows wherever it please. You can hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with anyone whose birth comes of the Spirit.” In the above verse the Greek Scriptures use the word, *gennao* (from which we also get this verb’s familiar noun form *genesis*, meaning “birth” or “engender”), to describe a beginning that starts with begetting by a father (“conceived” see Matthew 1:20, NKJV) and then birth by a mother (“born” see Matthew 2:1, NKJV).

³⁴ Here again the word for “begotten” is the verb *gennao* and refers to a begetting by a father rather than birth by a mother in this instance. This verse in the Greek Bible’s book of Hebrews is quoted from its original source in Psalm 2:7. The Hebrew verb there for “begotten” is *yelad*. Interestingly, the verb *yelad* is as flexible as the Greek verb *gennao* and can also mean to literally “begat” by a father (Proverbs 23:22) as well as to bring forth or bear by a mother (First Kings 3:17-18).

³⁵ Hebrews 1:5, KJV; cf. Hebrews 5:5 and Acts 13:33

Nazareth's actual rebirth into the spiritual universe came at his resurrection from the dead. He pioneered for humanity the path into a promised land of everlasting, abundant life. His example fulfilled the divine birth typology from conception to parturition.³⁷

Children were considered in the Bible as one of the greatest blessings a person could receive from the LORD.³⁸ The human birth process is a sacred symbol, which should not be corrupted by violence. This is a teaching from the moral logic of the universe. Only those who freely choose to follow this moral logic will discover the permanent, enduring greatness and fulfillment found in the kingdom of God. Jesus made it clear that our willingness to listen to and teach from the divine narrative will bear important personal consequences.³⁹

The Case for Personhood

Following the divine summarization of the universe's moral logic, the Ten Commandments,⁴⁰ the Creator gives statutes to explain in detail these basic principles as applied to problems found in ancient Hebrew culture. One of those statutes discussed the possible situation of when a person *accidentally* caused a pregnant woman to miscarry.⁴¹

There was no statute specifically addressing the penalty for someone who *deliberately* rather than accidentally caused a miscarriage. According to an eminent professor of biblical scholarship, the late Umberto Cassuto, Magnes Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, there was no need for such a statute since the statute on willful homicide covered all human life, slave or free, man or woman—even the unborn!⁴²

In the context of the ancient Middle East, there were legal systems such as Hammurabi's code with laws that discriminated between people of different social

³⁶ Matthew 1:20

³⁷ "The gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God *with power* according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead," Romans 1:3-4, NRSV; "The firstborn from the dead," Colossians 1:18, NRSV; "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died," First Corinthians 15:19-20, NRSV.

³⁸ Psalms 127:3-5; 128:3-4

³⁹ "Don't think that I have come to destroy the law of Moses or the teaching of the prophets. I have not come to destroy their teachings but to do what they said. I tell you the truth. Nothing will disappear from the law until heaven and earth are gone. The law will not lose even the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter until all has happened. Whoever refuses to obey any command and teaches other people not to obey that command will be the least important in the kingdom of heaven," Matthew 5:17-19, ICB.

⁴⁰ Exodus 20:1-17

⁴¹ "If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit [fetus] depart from her, and yet no mischief follow [usually understood as meaning that the woman doesn't die]: he [the person responsible] shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth," Exodus 21:22-24, KJV.

⁴² "In the Pentateuch [first five books of the Bible] there is no special law referring to the case of one who strikes a pregnant woman *willfully*. Nor was there any need for it, since this contingency is included in the injunction of verse 12 [of Exodus chapter 21], if the woman dies ["He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death," Exodus 21:12, KJV], and in the case of verses 18-19 [where the injured person must be compensated for medical bills and lost time].... Only the law of the one who strikes a woman with child unintentionally is stated," Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1987, p. 274.

classes. But, this was not to be the way for any society choosing to live by the divine narrative. “No differentiation is to be made on the basis of the social class [or legal status] of the woman; all human beings are equal,” according to Professor Cassuto.^{xxvii} But what about an injury to the fetus? What was the status of the fetus under biblical law?

The penalties for injuring accidentally mother and/or fetus were the same—a ransom or just compensation that is expressed as “the value of an eye for an eye.” The legal status of mother and unborn child was the same.⁴³

However, a willful murderer *could not* pay a financial settlement or a ransom to escape blood guilt. A willful murderer could only pay life for life. The implications of this should ring a bell for people who are, according to Abraham Lincoln, pretending to read their Bibles.

In the Scriptures, the legal ruling immediately preceding the statute about the accidental injury of a pregnant woman concerns the possible liability of slave owners who severely beat their slaves. Thus the Creator links and acknowledges the personhood of both slave and unborn—a rare thing in ancient societies. Again, Professor Cassuto commented about this divine moral law:

*And when a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod,*⁴⁴ the customary instrument for punishing slaves, *and he dies* immediately as a result of the beating *under his hand, he shall surely be punished* [literally “avenged”]. The slave, too, is a human being, he, too, was created in the Divine image, and **whoever assails the sanctity of his life shall be answerable for it and be put to death.**^{xxviii}

The people who endured slavery in American history were considered to be legally devoid of “personhood,” without any rights that needed to be considered by those who were enfranchised. Such a situation remains the plight of the unborn of today who are deemed unworthy of due process and the equal protection of the law by human governments. Nevertheless, the sanctity of a slave’s life and that of any other powerless segment of humanity has always been protected and even actively avenged⁴⁵ by their Creator.

Ideas have consequences. About 25 percent of all Southern white males died during the Civil War and about another 25 percent were crippled as a result of their war wounds.^{xxix} While those who fought on the Union side suffered a greater number of casualties, they were a smaller percentage of the North’s population. Still, when North and South are combined, the Civil War cost the lives of about 19 percent of the nation’s white male population. Those soldiers paid with their blood for the whole nation’s blood guilt toward its slaves. Am I being too hard or unfair on those long-dead people?

⁴³ “***But if any mischief happen, that is, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, etc....*** This principle implies, according to the Rabbis, that one who takes a life must pay the value of the life.... The payment is a form of ransom that takes the place of the bodily punishment prescribed by the ancient system. It is what is called in legal terminology a settlement... Theoretically, he who blinds another’s eye should be sentenced to have his own blinded; only he is permitted to give a ransom in order to save his eye. **According to Numbers 35:31 it is only from a willful murderer that it is forbidden to accept ransom;** this implies that in all other instances the taking of a ransom is permitted.... This being so, the meaning here in our paragraph of the expression *life for life* is that the one who hurts the woman accidentally shall be obliged to pay her husband the value of her life if she dies, **and of her children if they die,**” Cassuto, pp. 275-277.

⁴⁴ Exodus 21:20

⁴⁵ Exodus 1:22 and Exodus 13:14-15

If I, Isaac, am being hard, I am talking about my own ancestors. Different branches of my family fought on opposing sides during the Civil War. Just the other day I got out some of our Confederate money for my boys to look at. That side of my family owned a significant number of slaves. They had raised and led a large force of cavalry for the Confederacy. But on top of my armoire amidst my hunting rifles rests an old Union Cavalry saber. The last time I sorted things out up there I pulled the blade out of its scabbard and wondered how many fellows saw the business end of that long piece of steel. Did my forebears ever meet in battle? “We have met the enemy, and he is us.”

According to the moral logic of the universe there will always be an irreducible difference between a being created in the image of God and a dog. It doesn't matter whether some human society maintains peculiar institutions that do not deign to confer upon the helpless a legal acknowledgment of personhood—because God does! There will always be a price to pay for blood guilt as defined by the Scriptures.⁴⁶

Does Murder Require Hate?

If a society decides to say that there is less sanctity to the life of someone who may be terminally ill at age 80 or, just newly born but having a genetic defect, such decisions do not alter the divine moral principles. Society will reap the results of any choice to ignore or repudiate moral logic. Euthanasia is not merely a potentially slippery slope. It is a fatal slope for those involved.

Can euthanasia or mercy-killing really be considered murder? Some in the religious community flatly deny that the modern medical practice and theory of euthanasia has anything to do with murder. A newspaper op-ed piece written by a retired minister argued: “The euthanasia controversy has led to heated debates in religious and other circles, mostly among people who know little or nothing about its theory and practice and call it simply murder. The biblical command “You shall not murder” means bloodthirsty, hateful murder, which is never the case in medical practice.”^{xxx}

Do the Scriptures really limit the definition of murder to “bloodthirsty, hateful” behavior? Or was the biblical command also intended to absolutely prohibit taking another's life even for “merciful” reasons?⁴⁷ Consider the earliest injunction against taking another's life found in the biblical book of beginnings: “And surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from **every man, from every man's brother** I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed. For in the image of God He made man.”⁴⁸

Why does this verse seemingly repeat the same thought that God will require an accounting for a slain person's blood: “And from every man, from every man's brother”?

⁴⁶ Ezekiel 7:23 and 9:9; Hosea 4:1-3

⁴⁷ “Euthanasia guru Jack Kevorkian made opening statements in his own defense... as he faced murder charges for the first time in connection with his video-taped mercy-killing of a terminally ill patient. ‘My intent was not to murder Thomas Youk,’ he told the 14-member jury in his statement, referring to a 52-year-old man afflicted with Lou Gehrig's disease, a fatal muscle disorder..... At one point, [John Skrzynski, assistant Oakland County prosecutor] interrupted Dr. Kevorkian's short opening statement to object to his quotation from a legal manual which said ‘you need an evil will’ to be guilty of malice, one of the elements of murder. After upholding the objection, Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Jessica Cooper instructed the jury: ‘**Malice is intent to kill,**’” *National Post*, “Kevorkian Says His Actions Are Excusable Homicide,” March 23, 1999.

⁴⁸ Genesis 9:5-6, New American Standard Bible

Was it for mere emphasis? The phrase “from every man” would seem to be sufficiently broad and clear to avoid misunderstanding. Could anybody read “from every man” and think that a man could murder his brother and somehow get away from a divine reckoning? I doubt anyone would think fratricide any less of a crime or substantially different from common homicide. So why mention “from every man’s brother”?

Rabbi Jacob Zevi Mecklenburg in his 19th century commentary *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Kabbalah* suggests that while the motive for most murder is hate, some kill their “brothers” out of “love” if the circumstances seem “right” to them.^{xxx1} Rabbi Mecklenburg’s point was that the Scriptures branded any *intentional* killing of another human being—regardless of the motive—as plain murder.⁴⁹ Thus the various forms of voluntary euthanasia, doctor-assisted suicide and mercy-killing, which are all intentional, premeditated acts, are prohibited. There is a scriptural example to clarify this point.

On the third day, a man came from Saul’s camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head [a sign of mourning].... David said to him, “Where have you come from?” He said to him, “I have escaped from the camp of Israel.” David said to him, “How did things go? Tell me!” He answered, “The army fled from the battle, but also many of the army fell and died; and Saul and his son Jonathan also died.”

Then David asked the young man who was reporting to him, “How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan died?” The young man reporting to him said, “I happened to be on Mount Gilboa; and there was Saul leaning on his spear, while the chariots and the horsemen drew close to him. When he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. I answered, ‘Here sir.’ And he said to me... ‘Come, stand over me and kill me; **for convulsions⁵⁰ have seized me, and yet my life still lingers.**’ **So I stood over him, and killed him, for I knew that he could not live after he had fallen.**⁵¹

The clear idea is that Saul was in significant distress and wanted a hastened ending. Did the young soldier who reported the battle’s news exhibit any “bloodthirsty, hateful” behavior toward Saul, his brother-in-arms and leader? Not at all! Saul, in agony and perhaps fear, voluntarily asked to be given a quick and merciful death. The young man explained that, judging from what he could see, Saul was a terminal case and, besides, he was merely doing his duty, following orders. What was David’s reaction to such hard and painful circumstances? Was mercy-killing okay?

David said to him, “Were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD’s anointed?” Then David called one of the young men and said, “Come here and strike him down”.... David said to him, “Your blood be on your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, ‘I have killed the LORD’s anointed.’”

The young messenger hoped for a big reward for the news he brought, and perhaps, for finishing off David’s enemy, Saul. What he got in the end was not what he expected. Yet David’s response⁵² was in perfect agreement with this moral principle:

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.⁵³

⁴⁹ The Scriptures are specific about when killing is permitted or required as in the case of a just judiciary who are acting on God’s behalf applying the death penalty to a convicted murderer.

⁵⁰ The Hebrew word for “convulsions” in the text is somewhat obscure. *The Interlinear Bible, The Holy Scriptures* by the Jewish Publication Society and *New American Standard Bible* translate it as “agony.” Others use “anguish.”

⁵¹ Second Samuel 1:2-10, 14-16, NRSV

⁵² Numbers 35:16

David's example of how he dealt with mercy-killing was not preserved as a mere footnote about someone who has been dead for almost 3,000 years. It was preserved to teach us today something specific about the high respect and awe in which we are to hold the divine gift of life. Dr. Cassuto noted that the well-known commandment "You shall not kill"⁵⁴ is given in its absolute form...

...without object or complement, without definitions or qualifications, without particulars or conditions, like the enunciation of fundamental, abstract and eternal principles, which transcend any condition or circumstance.... as a fundamental basis and central pillar of the life of humanity according to the Creator's will.... The Torah wishes to affirm and establish the principle, in the name of Divine law, that human life is sacred, and whoever assails this sanctity forfeits his own life—measure for measure.^{xxxii}

The Antidote for Human Distress

Uncontrollable pain is not the main reason driving those seeking a hastened death. Rather it is the fear of losing control or dignity, the fear of being a burden or being dependent. The gathering steam to legalize euthanasia is fired by the hopelessness of those "having few—and poor quality—social supports." Is the real solution to fear, hopelessness and loneliness a simple overdose of barbiturates or slipping a handy plastic bag over someone's head when no one else is supposedly looking? Listen to what the Apostle Paul, a man familiar with distress and suffering, has to say:

Now, brothers, what we have in mind in addressing you in this manner is our desire that you should not remain in ignorance of the nature of the afflictions which came upon us in Asia, that they were weighing us down excessively and were quite beyond our strength, so much so that we came to despair of life itself. Why, looking into ourselves, we could find but one answer: that death must come. **However, the purpose of it all was that we should place our confidence not in ourselves but in God,** who raises the dead to life. He delivered us—and will deliver us—from so deadly a peril. It is on him that we have set our hope that he will deliver us yet again.⁵⁵

Whenever we read essays favoring euthanasia we usually notice those authors fail to discuss the natural antidotes to human anguish and distress—faith, hope and love! Many men and women of God have suffered painful, distressing circumstances. But they knew that there was always something to be learned by such an experience. The Prophet Isaiah described the LORD's servant as one who endured difficulty knowing there was purpose:

He was hated and rejected by people. He had much pain and suffering. People would not even look at him. He was hated, and we didn't even notice him. But he took our suffering on him and felt our pain for us. We saw his suffering. We thought God was punishing him. But he was wounded for the wrong things we did. He was crushed for the evil things we did. The punishment, which made us well, was given to him. And we are healed because of his wounds.⁵⁶

Many have long felt that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, at least that was the sure perspective of Jesus' immediate followers who wrote the Greek Scriptures. Those disciples perceived that because their Lord and Master had experienced

⁵³ First Corinthians 3:16-17, NRSV

⁵⁴ Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17

⁵⁵ Second Corinthians 1:8-10, Cassirer

⁵⁶ Isaiah 53:3-5, ICB

firsthand a full measure of the pain and suffering that is so common to this present material world, he would be willing to help them in their anguish. While in distress, they could hope in a future life without suffering, pain and crying.⁵⁷

Seeing that we have a great High Priest who has entered the inmost Heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to our faith. For we have no superhuman High Priest to whom our weaknesses are unintelligible—he himself has shared fully in all our experience of temptation, except that he never sinned. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with fullest confidence, that we may receive mercy for our failures and grace to help in the hour of need.⁵⁸

God is indeed interested in adding spiritual value to his family. But he forces no one into a course of action which that person doesn't want to take. The desire to do the right thing must be voluntarily generated, our own choice. But really, what choice is there between an eternal life in the spirit and a mere temporary physio-chemical existence?

When we put our lives into the hands of the unseen God truly strange things can happen. Purpose can emerge even from what appears to be purposeless hardship. Consider this letter from an elderly Australian living in Canberra who suffered from a terminal condition.

My dear friends and family in God's church,

Time was fast slipping away when on September 8, I was given only a month to live. Even if I lived for a time beyond that, I would surely not be here in six months' time. I accepted that as being medically correct and asked nothing of our God, for (I considered) I might have had my share of healings in previous years. I might well have done all that I would do in life—although in retrospect, who of us would not do some things differently. Certainly, I had been abundantly blessed, with a sure knowledge "of whence cometh my help" and a purpose in life when my husband Keith and I were called into God's church. How exciting is the knowledge and truth we have been given. How wonderful is this family of God that we all belong to.

My dear brethren, you asked God for my healing and, in dozens of letters and cards, you expressed your love and your prayers for me. I was truly overcome. It has been an awesome, wonderful experience. I then approached God differently. I asked Him, "What will you do with all these positive, believing prayers of your people?" His answer—He healed me! I am no longer frail and dying, but well and working in my home and garden. I am looked on by my family in wonderment. All acknowledge the greatness of God and the love of you, my church family. My youngest son and his wife, with great joy, have been called into God's church after some years of seeking to know God's will in their lives.... We thank you—every one of you. With love, June Montgomery.

It is *always* a mistake to shortchange God. There is no situation or problem that can be accurately called hopeless and without possibility if the Creator of all life is involved. Read this letter from a woman who prefers to remain anonymous in Kennewick, Washington:

I wanted to tell you personally of a healing miracle that has occurred in my family. My eldest daughter went into labor to give birth to her first child, my second grandchild. The following morning, I was called to the hospital. The unborn child had expelled its bowels prior to birth, which is a sign of a distressed fetus. The hospital staff placed a monitor on its head to measure the heartbeat. They said there was something wrong with the baby, but they couldn't tell what, till it was born.

⁵⁷ Revelation 21:4

⁵⁸ Hebrews 4:14-16, Phillips

The boy was limp at birth. His respiratory system failed, and he was put on machines to keep him alive. His head was grossly malformed—his skull from the front hair line to the back of the head, about ear level, was missing. The skin was there but no bone. The doctor felt that part of his brain was undeveloped and scheduled a brain scan for the next morning. He said, “Even if his brain was intact, it would take years for his head to look like a human skull.” His jaw was pushed back and sideways, and his nose was flattened to one side.

Things looked bleak indeed, so I called the minister in my church and requested prayers for the baby. One hour after the request went out, he was removed from the machines as his respiratory system had stabilized.

I went home that evening to rest and when I returned the next morning, the head RN said, “Come and see our miracle baby.” The boy’s head was perfectly formed, the skull intact, his jaw line normal and his little nose straightened out. He was kicking and yelling, telling us he was fine! I told the nurse of the church’s prayers and she said, “It could only be an act of God,” and she sure believes it!

My daughter is not in the church, but God has used this situation to inspire this whole church. My dearly beloved brethren’s faith has increased as a result of this miracle.... I thank God many times daily for that beautiful little boy and for His people. This church is so full of love and compassion.

The medical situations of the above two cases looked hopeless at critical points. Would a human decision to cut short those lives have been morally appropriate? We don’t think so!

Rebecca and I have known many people of faith over the years with similar stories of dire health circumstances. With their backs up against the wall, facing a traumatic beginning or ending, they made a desperate approach to the throne of grace, seeking deliverance. Some received their deliverance in a fashion similar to the two accounts cited above. But not all of our friends and loved ones have had their difficult circumstances removed by this type of divine intervention. Many times a deliverance came in the form of being able to cope patiently with a trial. Physical weakness and an attitude of longsuffering became a means to spiritual empowerment.⁵⁹ Others experienced a release from their trial through the sleep of death.⁶⁰

God does put us to the test! And it is not at all unusual during our beginnings and endings for him to reach down and shake us through difficult circumstances in order to awaken us from spiritual stupor. Why does the Eternal One do this? Does he hate us? Not at all. He seeks to draw us to him because he loves us.

The God who made the universe and everything in it, and who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in man-made temples; nor is he served by human hands, as if he lacked something; since it is he himself who gives life and breath and everything to everyone.... God did this so that people would look for him and perhaps reach out and find him—although in fact, he is not far from each one of us, “for in him we live and move and exist.” Indeed, as some of the poets among you have said, “We are actually his children.”⁶¹

When Rebecca and I were married, we assumed that we would have children. We took it for granted. For the first four years of our marriage we weren’t financially ready

⁵⁹ “Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecution, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong,” Second Corinthians 12:8-10, NKJV.

⁶⁰ First Corinthians 15:6, 20

⁶¹ Acts 17:24-25, 27-28, Jewish New Testament

for kids, so with the help of contraceptives, we didn't have to be. But when we approached our thirties, Rebecca, especially, wanted to begin having children. I agreed with at least some enthusiasm. So the contraceptives went out the window.

To begin with, trying was fun. Yet nothing happened. Years went by. Trying became less fun and much more desperate. What was wrong? We took what physical measures we could. Still no results. Twice we called for the elders of the congregation to come and pray for us.⁶² Rebecca's belly stayed flat, her womb empty. She became depressed and despondent.

I, Isaac, began to take the situation seriously in a way I had not before, envisioning the reality of how empty our lives would be without children. I remembered the stories in the Scriptures about how Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel, matriarchs of the children of Israel, had been barren for many long years until something had happened to change the circumstances. I decided to humble myself by regular fasting, and pray to the LORD with all my heart for my wife, Rebecca. Six months passed and still nothing.

Meanwhile the health problems that seemed to be keeping Rebecca from conceiving were intensifying. We called again for an elder to come to pray for us and anoint my wife. We didn't personally know the man who came to our house, but his prayer was strong and heartfelt. We were encouraged and took heart. Rebecca missed her next period. She had conceived!

What made the difference? I believe it was a change in my attitude and a growth in my faith so that God heard my prayers: "According to your faith let it be to you."⁶³

Recently my mother-in-law had a tragic fall down the stairs, which left her with injuries similar to those sustained by the actor Christopher Reeves. She is paralyzed from the neck down and dependent upon a ventilator for every breath. Mum is a wonderful person who for many years has been a remarkable, active example of giving, loving, serving and helping others. She has also been my wife's best friend. To say we were devastated is no understatement. And our Mum's friends and acquaintances by the scores have expressed amazement that such an awful thing could happen to such a precious person.

I, Isaac, was the one who found her at the bottom of the stairs turning blue, unable to breath. Remembering my boy scout training from some 30 years ago I started mouth to mouth. I had only practiced before on dummies, but this was someone I loved. I have never been so close, face to face, mouth to mouth with death.

We have cried rivers of tears and prayed many a prayer along with perhaps hundreds of others. At times Mum seems to be slowly fading away, yet often she is still a very active participant in our family ministering to our need for comfort and encouragement and reaching out as only she is able. She has some discomfort, but is not suffering severe pain. On her 46th wedding anniversary she was her perky self, but other days she's just so tired that Dad can barely encourage her to swallow five or six mouthfuls of dinner. We visit often and comfort her the best we can. We learn not to take physical life for granted, not to make assumptions about what can happen to any of us. We grow in appreciation of those promises of real, permanent life made by the Scriptures.

⁶² James 5:14-15

⁶³ Matthew 9:29, NKJV

What keeps Mum going and enables her to greet people with a bright smile is her faith that God will deliver her, in *his* time and in *his* way. She is confident in the promise her Creator has made: “No temptation has ever held you in its grip but such as is the common lot of man. No, God is true to his word, and so he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to endure. Instead, he will provide, along with the temptation, the way of escape, that you may be able to bear up under it.”⁶⁴

Everyone has faith in something. For many today that faith is in themselves, what they can achieve or what their money can buy. They feel they have “the right to define their own concept of existence and meaning.” This they hold as a major tenet of their faith. Yet our beginnings and endings have a way of revealing to us that we have no power in the ultimate, real sense over the mystery of life and the purpose of human existence. The moral logic of the universe can teach us much through our beginnings and endings— if we are willing to listen.

Life can only come from life. It cannot come from the inert and the dead. This is a physical and a spiritual reality. Only death can come from choosing death. If you spend your whole life affirming a way contrary to the moral logic of the universe, choosing to ignore, erode or destroy the sanctity and purpose of life, don’t be surprised if you reap the natural consequences of your decisions. Instead of the way of death, choose life so that you and those you love may live together forever in happiness! Choose the straight path through this crooked world. It is, after all, life’s true adventure.

ⁱ *The Economist*, “Idealists v Realists,” January 24, 1998, p. 24.

ⁱⁱ Ezekiel Emanuel, “Whose Right to Die?” *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1997, pp. 74-75.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dale Carnegie, *Lincoln The Unknown*, Dale Carnegie Publishers, Inc., 1932, pp. 102-103.

^{iv} *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 1967 ed., The World Publishing Co., p. 1139.

^v Henry Weinstein, “Assisted Deaths Ruled Legal,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1996.

^{vi} *The Economist*, “Judges, Suicide, and the Resurgence of the States,” July 5, 1997, p. 26.

^{vii} *British Columbia Report*, “The Slavery-Abortion Parallel,” November 17, 1997, p. 27.

^{viii} *Ibid.*

^{ix} Carnegie, p. 164.

^x Waldman, Ackerman and Rubin, “Abortions in America,” *U.S. News & World Report*, January 19, 1998, p. 22.

^{xi} *The Economist*, “Idealists v Realists,” *Ibid.*

^{xii} Dennis Bueckert, “Aging Population Slows Growth in Abortion Rate,” *Times Colonist*, November 6, 1997.

^{xiii} David Whitman, “Was It Good for Us?” *U.S. News & World Report*, May 19, 1997, p. 59.

^{xiv} Waldman, et al., *Ibid.*, p. 29.

^{xv} Waldman, et al., *Ibid.*, p. 25

^{xvi} *Ibid.*

^{xvii} John Horgan, “Seeking a Better Way to Die,” *Scientific American*, May 1997, p. 100.

^{xviii} *Ibid.*

^{xix} Henry Weinstein, “Assisted Deaths Ruled Legal,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1996.

^{xx} Emanuel, *Ibid.*, 76.

^{xxi} *Ibid.*, p. 75.

^{xxii} Horgan, p. 104.

^{xxiii} *Times Colonist*, “Six Percent of Doctors Help Patients End Life,” April 24, 1998.

^{xxiv} Horgan, p. 103.

^{xxv} Paul Baumann, “The Pope vs. the Culture of Death,” *The New York Times*, October 8, 1995.

^{xxvi} Carnegie, p. 113.

⁶⁴ First Corinthians 10:13, Cassirer

^{xxvii}Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1987, p. 274.

^{xxviii} *Ibid.*, p. 273.

^{xxix} John Garraty, *The Young Reader's Companion to American History*, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1994., p. 165.

^{xxx} Frank Legras, "Killing Motivated by Mercy Isn't Murder," *Times Colonist*, September 15, 1997.

^{xxxi} J. David Bleich, "Life as an Intrinsic Rather Than Instrumental Good," *Issues in Law & Medicine*, vol. 9, no. 2, Fall 1993.

^{xxxii} Cassuto, pp. 246-247, 269.