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Anne Lamott and Her Evangelical Audience

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Writer Anne Lamott is known for being plain spoken (an understatement) and controversial, and yet she has a readership among many evangelicals. They may well be shocked to read her recent op-ed piece in *The Los Angeles Times* on abortion. She minces no words in demanding an unrestricted right to abortion.

She was participating in a panel discussion on abortion with a couple of “progressive” ministers and a Roman Catholic moderator and these men had spoken of the abortion issue as “morally ambiguous.” This was too much for Lamott, who recalled how she responded to the moderator’s invitation to speak a word:

But then I announced that I needed to speak out on behalf of the many women present in the crowd, including myself, who had had abortions, and the women whose daughters might need one in the not-too-distant future — people who must know that teenage girls will have abortions, whether in clinics or dirty backrooms. Women whose lives had been righted and redeemed by Roe vs. Wade. My answer was met with some applause but mostly a shocked silence.

*More: And somehow, as I was answering, I got louder and maybe even more emphatic than I actually felt, and said it was not a morally ambiguous issue for me at all. I said that fetuses are not babies yet; that there was actually a real difference between pro-abortion people, like me, and Klaus Barbie. Then I said that a woman’s right to choose was nobody else’s ***** business. This got their attention.*

A cloud of misery fell over the room, and the stage. Finally, Jim said something unifying enough for us to proceed — that liberals must not treat people with opposing opinions on abortion with contempt and exclusion, partly because it’s tough material, and partly because it is so critical that we win these next big elections.

Finally: But as a Christian and a feminist, the most important message I can carry and fight for is the sacredness of each human life, and reproductive rights for all women is a crucial part of that: It is a moral necessity that we not be forced to bring children into the world for whom we cannot be responsible and adoring and present. We must not inflict life on children who will be resented; we must not inflict unwanted children on society.

During the reception, an old woman came up to me, and said, “If you hadn’t spoken out, I would have spit,” and then she raised her fist in the power salute. We huddled together for awhile, and ate M&Ms to give us strength. It was a kind of communion, for those of us who still believe that civil rights and equality and even common sense will somehow be sovereign, some day.

There is more, of course, but this gives the flavor of the article. What shocks is Lamott’s absolutely unconditional support for unrestricted abortion — her use of language about women “righted and redeemed” by *Roe v. Wade*, her statement about not being “forced” to bring babies into the world, her argument that we must not “inflict life on children who will be resented.” Her language is shocking as well, of course, and that is her gimmick to attract attention from those who enjoy rough language. Enough already.

Keep this in mind when you read about Anne Lamott’s appreciative audience among evangelicals. A writer in *Christianity Today* acknowledged that she is a “hard-core liberal,” but —

Yet, deeper within her than her loud liberalism is a reality that has won her many evangelical readers: a zany ardor

for Jesus. Lamott's fascination with all things Jesusy (a term she might as well have copyrighted) must be the reason why she is a mixed bag of hilariously antagonistic affections.

She is a very talented writer and she sees things in life that others miss. She is open about her abortions and her life as a single mom. She raises legitimate points about national priorities and the question of justice. But her advocacy of abortion in these terms, combined with other troubling elements of her thought, points to huge problems with her basic worldview and theological commitments. Read the article for yourself.

FEEDBACK: *Interesting debate on this post found at [Reformationary](#), [Stones Cry Out](#), and [Matt Crash](#). [Ars Theologica](#). Several good points raised. I agree that we can appreciate many aspects of a gifted writer's work without buying all of the author's ideas or worldview. That is a discipline of discernment that comes with experience and critical thinking. Anne Lamott's stridency and anger on this issue really concern me, though. The logic of her position is deeply troubling, and it must surely explain something about her larger project and her understanding of the Christian life. The political stuff is fair game (though her radicalism there is also a bit disconcerting, to say the least), but her projection of the autonomous self, seeking and demanding (and almost celebrating) an abortion is surely not consistent with the Gospel. In her writings, she may identify some of our inconsistencies as well, and we must be willing to look at these honestly, but this outburst should be of concern to evangelical Christians at many levels.*

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