

AlbertMohler.com

America's Aborted Conscience -The Sin of Moral Indifference

"Indifference in questions of importance is no amiable quality," observed the inimitable Samuel Johnson. Always given to eloquent understatement, Johnson understood the deadly danger of moral indifference. Sharing his concern, we should now ask: Have Americans grown indifferent to abortion?

Thursday, December 2, 2004

"Indifference in questions of importance is no amiable quality," observed the inimitable Samuel Johnson. Always given to eloquent understatement, Johnson understood the deadly danger of moral indifference. Sharing his concern, we should now ask: Have Americans grown indifferent to abortion?

The "right" to kill unborn human beings has been the law of the land for more than a generation, for the infamous Roe v. Wade decision was handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court over thirty years ago. Its anniversary each year passes with little notice from most Americans—and that is itself part of the decision's legacy. The nation's conscience is no longer seared by the scandal of abortion, and abortion on demand has become a routine part of everyday life. The Culture of Death has an address just down the street.

Great civilizational shifts usually require decades or centuries of development and struggle. The tragic shift in American culture symbolized by the Roe v. Wade compressed that span into just a few years. For centuries, abortion had been almost universally condemned as a form of murder. Abortionists lurked in dark corners, accessible only through dark passages, hiding their death work from public scrutiny and law enforcement.

No longer. Abortion is now big business in America. Abortion clinics have been transformed into profit centers for the Culture of Death and its ghoulish professionals. Commercial abortion mills offer death for convenience. Organizations supporting abortion rights offer escort services and other enticements. Every single American is complicit in a web of tax-supported organizations that support abortion. There is no escape.

America's rejection of a revealed morality set the stage for this cultural revolution. Once God no longer dominated the moral horizon, personal autonomy and individual choice became the twin pillars of a debased moral worldview. Once human life and human dignity rested on nothing more than our secular consensus, the culture of death was inevitable. Human beings display a readiness to discard human dignity for something so small as convenience. If we can decide the relative value or non-value of a human life, we will eventually grow comfortable making these decisions to our own convenience.

The abruptness of the Roe v. Wade decision is a graphic illustration of moral confusion. One day, abortion was illegal in most jurisdictions—the next day it was legal. An entire structure of moral reasoning, legal precedent, and cultural conscience was discarded by a court that rested its judicial decision on a legal contrivance. How can an act be criminal murder one day and a woman's "right" the next?

By the action of the Supreme Court, abortion was simply declared to be a legal right. A 'right to privacy' was contrived and contorted in order to reverse millennia of moral knowledge and legal precedent. The Supreme Court of the United States may have the constitutional power to reverse legal precedent, but it does not have the authority to reverse moral truth. Though abortion may have been illegal one day and legal the next, it was not morally wrong on one day and morally right the next. The moral horror of abortion is unchanged. Abortion remains a blight upon the nation's character—a graphic symbol of moral rebellion cast in a cry for individual rights.

Harvard professor Mary Ann Glendon warns that our ability even to think in moral terms is undermined by the 'rights talk' that has replaced genuine moral conversation. If individual or group rights are the greatest possible good, morality itself disappears. All that remains is a series of skirmishes over competing rights and interests. Human dignity is simply lost in the confusion.

It was perhaps inevitable that the reasoning behind the abortion revolution would come down to something as morally slender as 'choice.' A 'right to choose' becomes the highest moral and political good. Choice becomes the idol and the act of choosing becomes the liturgy. Even life itself—preborn and precious—is willingly sacrificed on the altar of choice. I choose therefore I am—this may be the limit of self-knowledge in the Culture of Death.

Once human life is reduced to an accidental product of blind naturalistic mechanisms, human dignity is destroyed and the Culture of Death is inevitable. *Roe v. Wade* did not emerge from a vacuum. The inheritors of Christian civilization had been ransacking the culture for decades. Sexuality was celebrated as the driving force of entertainment and popular culture. A spirit of moral rebellion undermined the integrity of marriage and the family. A spirit opposed to all authority suffused the culture with a rebellion against any law that would inhibit personal choice, personal convenience, or personal fulfillment.

The *Roe v. Wade* decision and the popular acceptance of abortion were produced by this cultural erosion. The decision would have been unimaginable if the nation had not already decided to cast aside a cultural inheritance shaped by the Christian conscience. We knew what we were doing. We are not innocent.

More than three decades later, can we rebuild and recover? The signs are not hopeful. Three decades of routine abortion reveal a downward spiral from abortion to euthanasia, from embryo research to human cloning, from assisted suicide to advocated infanticide. What is left? Only a thin veneer of moral reticence separates us from future horrors of unthinkable magnitude.

The believing Church is now perhaps the last outpost of moral sanity in the culture of death. If recovery is to come, it must arise in a new generation who sees through the moral insanity and possesses the courage to reverse course before all moral knowledge is lost. We need a generation resistant to moral indifference and determined to make a difference. Let us pray that God will give us that generation—before it is too late.

