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The Age of Infanticide: The Culture of Death Marches On

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In the name of humanity, we could have hoped that the twenty-first century would take a warning from the century just past, but a barrage of developments indicates that this century may bring moral horrors that would make the last century look pale by comparison.

Recent evidence comes in the form of testimony by a leading bioethicist before the British Parliament’s Commons Science and Technology Committee. Just a few days ago, Professor John Harris, a member of the British Medical Association’s ethics committee, declared that infanticide is morally justifiable in some cases. Stressing his point to the astonishment of the government’s committee, Harris said that it is not “plausible to think that there is any moral change that occurs during the journey down the birth canal,” suggesting that the moral status of the fetus and the human infant outside the womb should be seen as the same.

Professor Harris, who teaches bioethics and law at the University of Manchester, raised the issue in response to questions related to embryo ethics and issues related to new reproductive technologies. His candor—and the moral logic behind his statements—reveals that moral horrors lie very close at hand.

“I don’t think infanticide is always unjustifiable,” Harris stated. “I don’t think it is plausible to think that there is any moral change that occurs during the journey down the birth canal.”

Amazingly, Harris also serves as one of the founders of the International Association of Bioethics and as an official ethics consultant for British physicians. His statement—which advocates, after all, the murder of living human beings—draws attention to the fact that many of the leading thinkers in the field of bioethics are hostile to the very idea of life itself, and to any sane concept of human dignity.

One must credit professor Harris with addressing the issue directly. “People who think there is a difference between infanticide and late abortion have to ask the question: What has happened to the fetus in the time it takes to pass down the birth canal and into the world which changes its moral status? I don’t think anything has happened in that time.” Harris went on to claim that infanticide has become routine in many countries, where children born with serious abnormalities are simply killed or left without nourishment and support. “There is a very widespread and accepted practice of infanticide in most countries. We ought to be much more upfront about the ethics of all this and ask ourselves the serious question: What do we really think is different between newborns and late fetuses?”

“There is no obvious reason,” Harris asserted, “why one should think differently from an ethical point of view, about a fetus when its outside the womb rather than when its inside the womb.”

The response to Professor Harris' statements came with moral outrage. Julia Millington, political director of the ProLife Party, called Harris' statement "absolutely horrifying." She went on to state, "Infanticide is murder and is against the law. It is frightening to think university students are being educated by somebody who endorses the killing of newborn babies and equally worrying to discover that such a person is a member of the Ethics Committee of the British Medical Association." She referred to professor Harris as "the Establishment's preferred bioethicist," and identified him as a member of the government's Human Genetics Commission.

A spokesperson for the British Medical Association attempted to put distance between Harris' comments and the medical establishment. "These views of professor Harris are personal views and do not reflect the views of the committee nor the BMA, which is utterly opposed to the idea of infanticide." Of course, the very fact that Professor Harris serves as a member of the BMA's ethics committee makes this statement rather hard to take. Just how far can the BMA distance itself from its own committee member and advisor?

Two big lessons are to be learned from Professor Harris' statements and the aftermath. First, these statements draw attention to the fact that a growing number of "bioethicists" now openly defend the practice of infanticide. In the United States, the notorious Peter Singer of Princeton University argues that infanticide should be seen as a moral option and an essential part of a woman's reproductive choice. Singer even argues that parents may have a responsibility to terminate the life of a child born with serious genetic abnormalities or physical disabilities. According to Singer, human dignity is not inherent in every human individual, but is achieved when an individual demonstrates certain human abilities such as the capacity to communicate and to relate to others. This is the logic of the Culture of Death on public display. In a book co-authored by Singer in 1985, the argument comes in a truly chilling form: "We think that some infants with severe disability should be killed." That is the frightening verdict of a professor who holds one of the most respected chairs in bioethics at one of our leading universities.

In Great Britain, Professor Jonathan Glover of King's College, London, has argued that infanticide is morally justifiable and that the "sanctity of human life" is a fallacious concept. According to Glover, "questions about killing should be decided by considering the autonomy of the person whose life is at stake, the extent to which his life is worth living and the effects of any decision on other people." In *Causing Death and Saving Lives*, Glover argues that what is needed is a "coherent policy" that would begin with the idea that "infanticide is sometimes right."

Thus, Professor Harris, joined by his colleagues Peter Singer and Jonathan Glover, exposes the abhorrent reality that much of what is done in the name of bioethics is hostile to the very concept of human life as sacred and of worthy of protection.

Human dignity is not an achievement, but a gift of the Creator to every single human being, before and after birth. An argument in favor of infanticide is a corruption and rejection of the very ideal of bioethics—to speak and to contend on behalf of life itself. The diabolical vision put forth by these professors of bioethics is a warning of what is to come if the dignity and sanctity of human life are not reasserted as an inflexible principle of social policy.

Secondly, Professor Harris' comments also point to the basic irrational fallacy demonstrated by those who argue for the morality of abortion but declare that infanticide is morally unacceptable. The question he asks is telling. What has happened to the fetus in time it takes to pass down the birth canal? Most supporters of abortion rights argue that human rights should be granted to babies only at the moment of their birth. Pro-abortionists defend a woman's unrestricted right to abortion—right up to the moment of birth. Their ardent defense of late-term abortion, seen most clearly in opposition to the ban on partial birth abortions, is a central plank in their platform for abortion as public policy.

Professor Harris has stripped abortion rights supporters of their baseless argument and he has revealed the inherent contradiction in their position. His logic is invincible. If the unborn child is unworthy of legal protection, what difference will a trip a few inches down the birth canal make?

A culture that will tolerate abortion will surely come to accept infanticide as well. When human life and human dignity are granted only when an individual passes certain "tests," human dignity is put on the auction block for constant reevaluation.

Professor Harris' statements should have made the front pages of major newspapers around the world. Instead, the story was largely confined to Great Britain and was little noticed elsewhere. This is how the Culture of Death marches

steadily onward.

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