

## Commentary — From the Margins *The Sanctity of Life*

For weeks, the nation and a portion of the world watched as personhood was debated in State and Federal courts, in Congress, in commentaries by priests, pundits, and politicians. The nation watched as a middle-aged woman, Terri Schiavo, slowly died from dehydration. Her life could have been prolonged; i.e., bodily functions could have continued for additional months, or years, possibly even decades. But the legal determination had been made that “personhood” had ceased, that this woman was in a persistent vegetative state (PVS).

The merits of Terri Schiavo’s PVS determination cannot be well debated from a distance. What can be debated, however, is the sanctity of personhood, especially within the Christian community.

Personhood is not legally or culturally a state of biological existence. In the United States, personhood does not come with biological conception, for if it did, Constitutional protection of the person would end abortion. At the time of the nation’s founding, personhood did not even come with birth, for slaves were considered only six-tenths of a person for census figures, and had no standing in law as a person. Thus, personhood is assigned to an entity through the authoritarianism of culture. Police dogs are considered legal persons so that their actions occur under the color of law. The dramatic tension in the Greek play *Antigone* comes from ancient Greeks only recognizing peoples that bury their dead as human beings—to leave a corpse unburied removed from the corpse personhood. For Greeks, death didn’t end personhood. They believed the soul of the buried person continued to do those things that were characteristic of the person.

The early schism that developed between Greek converts to Christianity and Judaism allowed the continued assignment of Hellenistic personhood to the breath or *psuche* of every individual. It became a tenet of faith that believer’s breath or *psuche* returned to God, while the unbeliever’s breath or *psuche* descended into hell, where it was in everlasting torment. Death of the fleshly tabernacle [*soma*] didn’t end personhood, but caused the relocation of the person to either heaven or hell. Historic orthodox Christian dogma has two stand-alone entities comprising every individual, one the mortal flesh, the other the immortal soul, which contains the essence of the person. For Christian theologians to now assign personhood to the flesh is curious at best: this is the theological positioning of those Christians leaders who sought to extend Terri Schiavo’s life. Such assignment reveals a crisis of faith within the Roman and within the Evangelical churches.

Of course the near-universally accepted dogma that assigns immortality to a vapor—the breath of a person—reveals that the last Eve (the greater Christian Church) has, like the first, accepted the serpent’s lie that she will not die (Gen 3:4), that conscious life continues between death and the resurrection at Christ’s return. The first Eve, after accepting the serpent’s lie, saw that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was desirable for food, and took and ate, then gave some to the first Adam who also ate (*v.* 6). Both then realized that they were naked (*v.* 7). The last Adam, though, did not take to Himself knowledge of good and evil, but believed His God and

His Father (John 20:17) and was without sin. Such cannot be said of disciples (1 John 1:8) that comprise the last Eve. And the last Adam, to cover His naked wife, created from the wound in His side when He breathed on ten of His disciples (John 20:22), cloaked her in His righteousness (Gal 3:27); i.e., cloaked the Church in Grace. As the Lamb of God, He was sacrificed at Calvary to make His righteousness the reality of the skin clothing with which *Elohim* covered the first Adam and the first Eve's nakedness (Gen 3:21).

Therein lies the dilemma for the Christian community within the Western world: since personhood can be legally given to beasts, the criteria for assigning personhood rests with the political majority. To cause personhood to be assigned to unborn children, the Christian community must endeavor to affect the will of the majority; Christianity must engage in politics. But the engaging in politics causes the Christian to focus on those things that pertain to the flesh, to focus on the world that is passing away. And focusing on the flesh is the antithesis of focusing on the Jerusalem above.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the saints at Corinth,

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" [from Gen 1:3], has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (2 Cor 4:6-7)

For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. (2 Cor 5:1-2)

Thus Paul used two analogies—clay jars and fabric tents—to represent the flesh [*soma*] that constitutes human bodies. Again, the life that is in the flesh comes from its breath [*psuche*]. This is not the life that comes from being born again, or born-from-above, or born of spirit [*pneuma*]. Both *psuche* and *pneuma* are Greek icons that usually are assigned the linguistic object represented by "breath." The first is swallow breath; the latter is deep breath. As Paul used these icons in 1 Thess 5:23, the first, regardless of how translators have mangled the assignment of object to icon, means the breath of life that the first Adam received when *Elohim* breathed into his nostrils (Gen 2:7). The latter means the Holy Spirit [*Pneuma 'Agion*] that descended like a dove and settled on the last Adam so that all righteousness could be fulfilled (Matt 3:16). Disciples of Christ Jesus receive birth-from-above through receipt of the Holy Spirit, the Breath of God. Literally, disciples have a second birth and a second personhood or consciousness living within the same tabernacle of flesh in which the "old self" dwells or dwelt, this *old self* or *old man* now crucified with Christ Jesus. The essence of Christianity is the death of personhood, of who the disciple was when drawn by the Father (John 6:44) and chosen by Christ Jesus (John 15:16).

To understand Scripture and by extension, prophecy, a disciple must firmly grasp the concept that his or her flesh is nothing more than a tent plumbed in a particular fashion. The fleshly bodies of disciples compare directly to the houses in Egypt in which physically circumcised Israel dwelt while in bondage to Pharaoh, and to the tents or tabernacles in which the liberated nation dwelt while wandering through the Wilderness

of Sin. The doorposts and lintels on which blood of the Passover lamb was smeared so that the death angel would pass over Israel compares to the mouth of the disciple through which the [sacraments](#) of bread and wine, representing the body and blood of the Lamb of God, enter the disciple's body. The born-from-above son of God that lives in a tent of flesh is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, bond nor free (Gal 3:27). This son of God is a one-off creation just as the angels were, and just as the first Adam was. And this son of God spends the entirety of his infancy and his adolescence in the tabernacle of flesh that belongs or belonged to the *old self*.

Crucifixion doesn't kill quickly. It is an extremely slow means of death—it kills by taking away the breath, by suffocation, when the crucified person can no longer lift himself enough to allow his lungs to function. And if a strong man were crucified, the person could hang around for days before weakening and losing his breath, a reason for scourging or severely weakening the person before crucifixion. Likewise, if the old self is a strong character, this old self (though nailed to the cross with Christ Jesus) can live on long enough to corrupt the son of God born-from-above into the same tabernacle of flesh. This corruption by parents happened to physically circumcised Israel in the Wilderness of Sin. Quoting *YHWH*, the prophet Ezekiel writes, “And I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols....But the children rebelled against me. They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my Sabbaths” (Ezek 20:18, 21).

For a Christian to focus on the flesh and on those things of this world—regardless of what those things are—strengthens the crucified old self. Even if the intentions of the Christian's heart is to correct or set right the world, the Christian has missed in its entirety what it means to not love this world, consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32) for a season.

The spiritual infant's initial urging to share Christ with unconverted friends and family members (usually causing the alienation of both) grows into an almost overpowering urge to immediately correct the wrongs of this world. And it is here where most Christian growth ends, where the crucified old self cons the immature son of God into aiding the prince of the power of the air and his disguised ministers to make this world a better place. Spiritual growth is literally arrested for as long as the son of God engages in politics, in bass tournaments, in organic gardening, in health food seminars, in whatever good cause that catches the fancy of the spiritual child. Those things that pertain to the flesh, while needful, cannot become the focus of a spiritually growing Christian.

Many born-from-above disciples will want to argue, *How can I stand by and allow abortion, or the devaluing of human life?* The response is always, *What happens if disciples today achieved political success? Will Christ not still destroy this world?* He will, for human nature is itself a received nature, coming from the prince of the power of the air who has deceived all of humanity (Eph 2:2 & Rev 12:9). The desire to set this world right is part of the deception...this is not to say that Christians should not resist evil. However, this is to say that Christians should not seek out evil to root it from society. Sufficient evil will cross the path of every Christian to satisfy the growing son of God's desire to engage and defeat evil.

As easily as God caused King Nebuchadnezzar to receive the nature of a beast and to eat grass like an ox, the glorified Christ Jesus will cause all human beings to receive His nature once the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all flesh. The great predators will lie down with prey species, and all will graze. There will be no harm in all of God's holy mountain. And the personhood of the old self, its desires and its nature, will end with Satan being cast to the earth. Christ Jesus as Head of the Son of Man, as King of kings and Lord of lords will become the new king of the air—of breath [*pneuma*] given to all of humanity when the world is baptized in Spirit [*Pneuma 'Agion*].

The spiritually growing Christian must today back away from the evil of this present age, and let the dead bury the dead, an abused expression used for a generation within the Churches of God to justify doing nothing. It is difficult to justify doing nothing when the disciple is surrounded by evil, much of it within the Christian community. And that might be the key: the Christian community isn't *the dead*, but the living. Disciples are to first remove the beam from their own eyes before they attempt to remove slivers from their neighbors' eyes. Disciples in every denomination need to first individually, then collectively remove from their eyes the beams upon which their crucified old selves died. They need to correct and set right the Church.

For too long and happening far too many times, Christian leaders and teachers have abused the sheep they should be shepherding. Some abuse has been sexual, much abuse has been financial, and even more has been spiritual. The greater Christian community focuses on those things that are physical and are passing away. The world recognizes and honors Christian leaders who have most effected the world. The greater Church listens to those teachers who would have physical nations fulfilling endtime prophecies. In every case, disciples suffer spiritual abuse through an onslaught of messages about the things of the flesh. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that personhood is now theologically assigned to the flesh.

Again, the essence of the Christian message is death precedes life as night precedes day, as darkness precedes light. But the world, under the influence of the reigning prince of the power of the air, has inverted the message and most of Christianity.

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