



The Heart and the abyss: preventing abortion

[img align=right id=130]The heart and the abyss[/img] *Connor Court, februari 2016*

Pater Ward Biemans SJ zet in een nieuw bij Connor Court uitgegeven boek uiteen waarom abortus in Nederland en Het Verenigd Koninkrijk heroverwogen moet worden. Hij maakt gebruik van een filosofisch raamwerk zoals uiteen gezet door Paul Ricoeur in zijn essay "Het probleem van de grondslagen van de moraal".

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From the Preface:

At the heart of the abortion debate is a seemingly simple proposition: given the basic biology that the fertilised human egg is scientifically speaking a living human being the orthodox Catholic understanding that the ethical rule against killing should apply before as well as after birth seems self-evident. Understandably, however, the abortion debate in practice becomes far more complex. Legalising abortion has implications far beyond the unborn baby: for the mother who have to face the agonising choice of whether or not to terminate the life of her developing baby, for the father who may have no legal role in the decision but whose influence, for good or ill, is hard to ignore, for doctors who face pressure to collaborate in the taking of life itself and for a society which increasingly sees abortion as a necessary consequence of the desire to separate the sexual act from reproduction.

Given this complexity, it is not enough for those who wish to promote the Gospel of Life within the Church to restrict themselves to ethics or moral theology. Rather, it is necessary to take seriously the insights provided by medicine and the broad range of social sciences. Examples of such an integrated approach are all too rare and this is precisely why I was so pleased to read Ward Biemans' work presented in this volume. Biemans' text is particularly welcome given how successfully he has drawn together so many different academic perspectives.

The context for Biemans' work is the development of law and practice on abortion in the United Kingdom and The Netherlands. The choice of these two countries is apposite. The UK (with the exception of Northern Ireland) was one of the earliest western countries to legalise abortion and the UK law provided a template for many other countries with similar legal frameworks, most particularly across the Commonwealth. Whether or not the reality matches the theory, the Netherlands has come to be seen as the ultimate liberal country in which abortion is (relatively) rare but almost always legal. Thankfully, the Western European context provides a basis for a much more complete discussion of the issues and arguments surrounding abortion which will be of immense value right across the world.

Biemans draws together insights from the fields of medicine, economics, psychology, politics, law, theology and ethics. He engages effectively with the most recent empirical work on the practical impact of abortion law and uses this to provide fresh insight into the key ethical debates. Integrating such disparate fields is no easy task and it is to his great credit that he has managed to find a balance between rigor and accessibility which will enable this work to be of use to a broad range of users. The importance of caring for both the mother and baby have been understood and put into practice by the pro-life movement for many years, as has the recognition that women need care and reconciliation rather than condemnation after abortion. This understanding is central to Biemans' work, as is his conclusion that rights and needs of the mother and the unborn baby are not only of paramount importance but complementary to each other rather than in opposition.



Given Biemans' understanding of theology and Church history, this volume will surely become a standard source of reference within Catholic institutions. However, I am confident its reach will be much greater than that. The approach is balanced and scholarly, but it is hard for the reader to avoid the conclusion that the right to life of the unborn, the rights of women and the social consequences of abortion should not be seen as standing in opposition to each other and requiring of compromise. Rather, laws which protect the vulnerable unborn, also protect mothers and society as a whole. Of course this has been the wisdom of the Catholic Church for centuries, but it is wonderful to see such a clear-sighted presentation of the logic and evidence in their entirety.

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Chapters

- 1: The abortion legislation in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands
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- 3: Mental and physical risks and effects of induced abortion on women
- 4: The human embryo, its rights and its dignity
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- 6: A historical search for a universalization of the ethics of abortion
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About the Author

Fr Ward Biemans SJ, is a priest of the Society of Jesus based in the Netherlands.