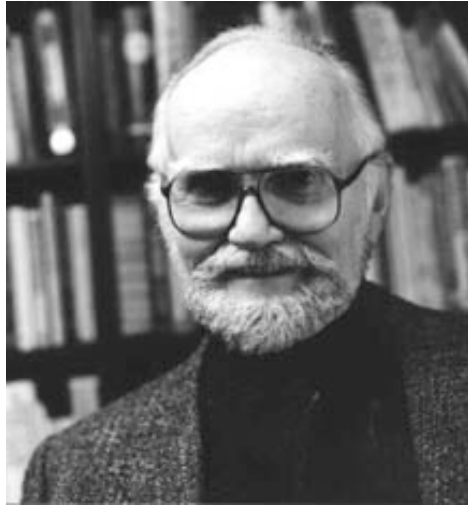


Resurrection and the Crisis of Faith



By Dennis M. Howard

The first reaction of the apostles to the Easter news that Christ was missing from His tomb was more like that of a modern skeptic than what you would expect from men who had spent three years in Christ's company. Their reaction was one of doubt, fear and disbelief, rather than joy and celebration.

Despite hearing Him promise that He would rise from the dead in three days, they still had trouble believing that Jesus was serious about this rising-from-the-dead stuff. Thomas wouldn't believe it even after seeing the risen Christ. He had to put his hand in Jesus' side before he was convinced.

How can we explain such behavior? Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, tried to make sense of it in a 2004 sermon. It seems that the very idea of anyone rising from the dead three days after being crucified was a terrifying idea in those days, much like a child's first reaction to Halloween hobgoblins today. *Those ghosts might really be out to get you!*

"When the dead did appear in vision or dream in the ancient world," Williams said, "it was often to denounce their killers, and the ancient empires specialized in mass slaughter . . . An executed criminal, instead of disappearing into oblivion, is brought back into the world and his friends are told to preach in his name to his killers . . ."

But that wasn't all, said Williams. "His rising from death guaranteed that all would be raised, that no life would be forgotten . . . sobering news for an empire with blood on its hands!"

It certainly would be bad news for anyone guilty of genocidal slaughter today.

Williams catalogued a whole litany of such violence . . . *the Nazi Holocaust . . . the Soviet Union . . . China . . . Cambodia . . . Rwanda . . . Uganda . . . Darfur . . .* Add in all of the other threats of mass destruction today and it's clear that holocausts are unlikely to end anytime soon.

Ironically, Williams remained silent about the greatest slaughter in all of human history – the 1.5 billion babies whose lives have been terminated in the biggest holocaust of them all -- the world-wide abortion epidemic of the last 50 years.

In the U.S. alone, the toll already exceeds 54 million, and that only counts reported surgical abortions. Add in the use of medical and chemical abortifacients, and the real number could be 20% higher. And these are not somebody else's babies. They are our own.

Imagine all of these innocents rising up to point accusing fingers at those who killed them in what unquestionably has been the bloodiest century in history!

Yet these are deaths that, strangely, even the Archbishop of Canterbury fails to remember on his list of holocausts. Why is that? Why did he avoid mentioning abortion at all -- as if it were something meant to be kept secret from the whole world, and if at all possible, even from God?

What was he afraid of? The same thing the pagans feared? That these unborn dead whose names are known only to God might right rise up and accuse us? We – the indifferent, the apathetic, the “it’s-none-of-my-business” people who have watched the whole thing happen and barely lifted a finger?

Or is he afraid of something else? He acknowledges this when he reminds us:

“When deaths like this are forgotten, the Gospel of the Resurrection should come as a sharp word of judgment as well as of hope . . . We may and we should feel the reproach of the risen Christ as we recognize how easily we let ourselves forget.”

His omission is all the more strange in view of his comment that Christ's “rising from death guaranteed that . . . no life would be forgotten.” Without the Resurrection, there would be no such thing as a right to life. Without the hope of an afterlife, humans would be no more than bipedal mammals who could be killed at will whenever it served our needs and our convenience.

Sadly, Williams is hardly alone in his resistance to going deeper. Christian psychiatrist M. Scott Peck did the same thing in his book *“People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil.”*

Peck defined evil *“as the use of power to destroy the spiritual growth of others for the purpose of defending and preserving the integrity of our own sick selves. In short, it is scapegoating. We scapegoat not the strong but the weak. For the evil to so misuse their power, they must have the power to use in the first place. They must have some kind of dominion over their victims.”*

I can't imagine a more apt description of abortion. An abusive, narcissistic culture addicted to its own convenience has little room for the demands made by the unborn for unconditional love, and precious little room for belief in the Resurrection.

We don't hesitate to label the unborn as “unwanted” or to demean them as doomed to a future of “welfare dependency.” We talk as if they threaten our very existence. And so we insist that our weaker, more vulnerable members – expectant mothers -- get rid of the one thing that threatens our narcissism – the terribly inconvenient truth of unborn human life.

What possesses those among us who comply with the conspiracy of silence that perpetuates this violence? Like the famous 1964 case when neighbors failed to call 911 while Kitty Genovese was raped and murdered under their very windows?

Or the Virginia Tech officials who “couldn't do anything” about the psychopath in their midst because of concern for his “privacy?” Whose privacy? No doubt their own privacy had a lot to do with it.

“Basically, it is fear,” writes Peck. “They are terrified that their pretense will break down and they will be exposed to the world and to themselves. They are continually frightened that they will come face to face with their own evil.”

The media and the courts would rather pretend that abortion in all its horrifying varieties is just another polarizing “social” issue rather than admit that there is something inherently evil in abortion itself.

Women who support abortion for “health” reasons are complicit in the same pretense. It is their narcissism that is in command as well, “always . . . whipping them into maintaining their pretense of health and wholeness.”

This explains their willingness to subject themselves to painful, high risk procedures like egg transplants, in vitro fertilization, exposure to cancer-producing forms of birth control, and horrific rates of cosmetic surgery – all to become more appealing to the narcissistic males around them.

Hugh Hefner built a business empire on that concept. He found an endless stream of such willing victims and opened the way to legions of imitators. “Women as sex objects” were his stock in trade, and the men who would exploit them were his market.

Yet despite Peck's clear recognition of such narcissism, he – like Williams -- dared not cross the politically correct line that defines the great wall of denial surrounding abortion.

A great many other “ministers to souls” reflect the same lack of daring, as William McGurn pointed out in *The Wall Street Journal* some time ago. It seems that the same widespread denial of abortion that is evident in society has crept into far too many pulpits, including many that tacitly condemn it.

“My non-Catholic friends seem to labor under the impression that Catholics spend their Sundays enduring thundering homilies on abortion and the pill,” McGurn wrote. “But in forty years of fairly regular church attendance -- including eight years of Catholic grade school and four years of Catholic university - - I can count on one hand the sermons I've heard on abortion.

“About contraception, in vitro fertilization, and stem cell research,” he adds, “barely a peep, much less anything suggesting the linkage they all have to a culture of life.”

In the years since, there has been some modest improvement including quite a few courageous pro-life statements from Catholic bishops, as well as the well-intentioned “Pastoral Plan for the Life Issue.” published by the USCCB in 2001.

But few such efforts are headlined beyond the safe environment of the local diocesan newspaper, and fewer still get more than passing mention in the average Catholic pulpit. There are still far more “Jesus loves you” sermons than thoughtful preachments on the meaning of Christian marriage, parenting, and human sexuality, let alone abortion.

The first question asked in a recent parish survey was whether my attendance at Saint X's made me feel “comfortable.” I replied, “I didn't come here to feel comfortable. I came to be spiritually awakened.”

Meanwhile, I see priests puzzling over why so few Catholics feel a need for the healing and forgiveness to be gained from the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Why are they wondering? After the pop psychology movement explained away sin and guilt in the '60's and '70's, why would a steady diet of sermons dipped in sugar-coated spirituality awaken anyone's conscience to a sense of sin? If abortion and birth control no longer merit honest instruction from the pulpit, what can be left of the average Catholic's sense of sin?

Sadly, McGurn's column barely raised a hackle among the clergy or the bishops. Although it appeared in one of the world's most powerful newspapers, it fizzled like a match on a pile of wet newspapers. If McGurn couldn't get the bishops' attention, what else possibly could?

It's certainly time someone woke Catholics up from being “one, holy, Catholic . . . and half asleep.”

In her book, *“Saving those Damned Catholics,”* Judie Brown, President of the American Life League, certainly tried to do that. She wrote: “Over the last 45 years, the basic problem has been the same: the message is watered down or completely avoided by priests and bishops who prefer to make people feel good. The price Catholics have paid is enormous.”

Every chapter of Brown's book is packed with verbal blasts loud enough to wake the dead, yet the book failed to awaken very many sleeping bishops. When she sent a survey to a list priests and bishops, only a few responded.

She wrote: “Many priests simply do not hold the Church's position on contraception. Others don't want to moralize on the subject out of fear. . . fear that people will not come to church and therefore the collection will go down.”

Ironically, collection losses for this reason are miniscule compared to the demographic impact left by 40+ years of abortion and birth control. Even the clergy sex abuse scandal – with its estimated \$2 billion cost to date – is far from being the costliest scandal in the Catholic Church today.

Just look at the enormous leakage problem. Some 79% of post-Vatican II Catholics no longer attend church regularly, while age has dramatically reduced the number of older pre-Vatican II folks. Only 27% of the nation's 67 million Catholics attend Mass on Sunday. Yet the average pastor is still frightened that he might lose a few “paschal lambs” if he risked honest preaching on abortion and birth control.

If just half of these inactive Catholics went to the church every Sunday, collections would be up nationally by over \$200 million a week, or roughly \$10 billion a year. That's enough to bring back the Catholic education system that was once the church's crowning glory.

One bishop told me that bishops are under instruction from Rome "to act more like friendly elder brothers than like doctrinal police." That at least partially explains why only a handful of American bishops have denounced errant Catholic politicians who actively support abortion on demand.

Politics may be a better explanation. These very same politicians regularly vote for subsidies for church agencies like Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services, among others. Estimates of such aid ranges in the billions each year, putting the bishops in a bit of a conflict between help for the needy and looking the other way at errant politicians. Throw in federal aid to Catholic hospitals and universities, and the reasons become clearer for Catholic reluctance to openly oppose pro-abortion politicians.

The bishops also illustrate another major characteristic of the social revolution of the 'sixties: the abandonment of the "executive function" by people in leadership roles. Far too many want to be "pals" with those they serve, rather than leaders and mentors. Meanwhile, most of the young are left adrift with no clear lines of moral, social, and civic authority to guide them.

The result is a crisis of faith. Vague "politically correct values" have become the new absolutes while the old order is abandoned. Submission of one's will to a higher authority has become an option. However, when Resurrection Day rolls around, we must all still answer for our actions.

During one of our local abortion clinic vigils, I had to walk past some pro-abortion protestors. Something prompted me to stop and ask them the Resurrection question: "Tell me, what happens to the souls of the babies who are aborted?"

I was greeted by stunned silence. Apparently I had hit a nerve. That encouraged me to ask a followup: "Tell me, do all those souls simply disappear? Or do they all show up on Judgment Day to point accusing fingers at those who denied them their right to life?"

We all need to answer that question. Especially those who still claim to believe in the Resurrection.

Do you believe in the Resurrection?

For those who believe in an afterlife, death is a transition, not an end. Even after an abortion, the life of the soul continues. Yes, that child was denied the right to breathe its first breath, cry its first cry, see the light of its very first day. But nothing can take away its hope for resurrection and redemption.

How will we answer them when they show up to face the rest of us on the Last Day and say, "J'accuse!"
How many of us will beg off: "Oh, I never had an abortion. Don't look at me!"

The proper answer is to pray for repentance and forgiveness for a faithless age, and – while we can still do something about it – to work to change a culture that has lost its way. Like Jeremiah, we need to listen when the Lord speaks: "If you repent, I will restore you. . . . If you speak the truth, you will be my prophet again." *Jeremiah 15: 19-21*. That's a prayer we say daily at Movement for a Better America.

Lets face it, human life is the central issue of our time. The signs of an end to an age are all around us. Abortion challenges our deepest values. In the words of the late Cardinal O'Connor, "We will either be a free people without abortion, or we will be a slave people, slaves to this violence against human life."

So, yes, the time to choose is now. Politics changes by the minute, so this is not just a political fight. Changing hearts and minds is far more permanent than that. When minds change, they usually stay changed. That's why our first priority is changing hearts and minds. But we need your help. To join us, send your donation today to: **Movement for a Better America, PO Box 472, Mt Freedom, NJ 07970**