

WAKE UP AMERICA

Jim Borgman

MORAL ACTION
IS THE TAKING OF MATTERS
INTO YOUR OWN HANDS WHEN
LAW AND GOVERNMENT FAIL IN
THEIR DUTY OF CORRECTING INJUSTICES



by Carl Lyle Jenkins

Contrary to what the preachers and politicians of the far right would have us all believe, Jesus Christ was not the founder of the Republican Party. Ronald Reagan cannot secretly walk on water. And the anti-abortion movement has far more to do with castration anxiety than it does with protecting the imaginary "rights of the unborn." For the so-called "pro-life" movement is really just the reactionary right's answer to the women's rights movement, to the Equal Rights Amendment and the uppity women who threaten traditional positions.

In short, the "pro-life" movement is a public relations con job aimed at keeping women in their place: barefoot, pregnant, chained to their stoves and (because the Bible says so) subservient and submissive to all males. And ('Oh, martha, he's just one of those secular humanist conspiracy nuts') the "pro-life" movement is part of a heavily financed network of ultra-conservative groups intent upon implementing a full agenda of (anti) social legislation which would make mincemeat out of civil rights and individual liberties in America.

A few weeks ago, in response to an ad in the Daily Astorian which I felt unfairly portrayed abortion as murder, I wrote letters to the Astorian and The Oregonian in which I connected the question of religious freedom with the abortion issue. Apparently my letters struck a raw nerve with the anti-abortionists. In the weeks following publication of those letters I was bombarded with abusive phone calls, hate mail, and disgusting propaganda from "pro-lifers" throughout the Pacific Northwest. Most revealingly, each and every anti-abortion letter vigorously denied that religious freedom had anything at all to do with abortion while simultaneously quoting the Bible chapter and verse and offering prayers for my misguided soul.

Of course all of the very expensive full color glossy anti-abortion brochures and posters of aborted fetuses in various stages of decomposition were bought and paid for by evangelical Christian organizations, as were the assorted fliers calling for an anti-abortion amendment

to the Constitution. Why, when the opposite is so obviously the truth, do "pro-lifers" deny that freedom of religion is at the very heart of the abortion issue? The reason is simple. "Pro-lifers" mistakenly believe in grand authoritarian tradition that religious freedom means that they are free to impose their beliefs with the force of law upon others who have the freedom to comply or else be punished.

Given that definition of religious freedom it is understandable that "pro-lifers" have an equal disdain for the principle of religious separation of church and state, an arrangement which thus far has successfully protected the rights of all Americans to worship or not worship as they please. Consider the following quotation from Reverend Joe Lutz, a Baptist minister who is running for U.S. Senator against Bob Packwood on the anti-abortion/pro-family agenda: Lutz said that he could find no basis for restricting the church's involvement in matters of state. The nation's founding fathers only wanted to protect the church from government interference. "The separation of church and state is unquestionably a farce," he said. Compare his statement with what George Washington had to say: "The Government of the United States is in no sense founded upon the Christian religion." Or John Adams: "This would be the best of all possible worlds if there were no religion in it." Or Benjamin Franklin: "Revealed religion has no weight with me." Or James Madison: "In no instances have churches been the guardians of the liberties of the people." Or Thomas Jefferson: "I do not find in Christianity one redeeming feature." Perhaps I am a thick-skulled intellectual but it seems to me that the separation of church and state was intended by the founding fathers to protect us from religious zealots. If you wish to witness how far out of hand

the mixture of reactionary authoritarian politics and religious fanaticism has reached, tune into one of the Christian broadcasting networks. At the same time these conservative politician/preachers push their anti-freedom evangelism, the Reagan-appointed head of the Federal Trade Commission is attempting to overturn the Fairness Doctrine which promises equal time for opposing political viewpoints, and Pat Robertson, who is the head of the Christian Broadcasting Network, is campaigning for President.

In addition to the many insulting letters I received, the anti-abortion propaganda was also very enlightening. For example, did you know that the Democratic Party, the American Medical Association, the American Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood, Zero Population Growth, The National Organization for Women, Senator Bob Packwood, Rose Bird, Norman Lear, and all liberals are, in fact, bloodthirsty neo-Nazi fascists and accomplices to more than fifteen million murders? In no uncertain terms the "pro-life" literature names innumerable individuals and groups who have participated in this "slaughter of innocents", which they unflinchingly compare with the Jewish Holocaust. There is even an organization, the Center for the Documentation of the American Holocaust, which is dedicated to documenting all abortion related activity in the United States. It would seem that after fierce and fearless fundamentalists have taken control of the U.S. government they will one day hold a Nuremberg-style trial in which all of those who have either had abortions or supported the "pre-choice" position will be brought to justice.

Aside from the reactionary rhetoric contained in the anti-abortion literature, the attack upon women's rights is the most blatant imaginable. Virtually all of the letters to the editor in response to my own were written by men with rigidly authoritarian, paternalistic religious convictions, and the few personal letters from women were either from guilt-ridden born agains or adoptive mothers. One ridiculously obvious example of the sexism inherent in the "pro-life" movement is contained in the credits of a glossy, full color, twenty-five page anti-abortion magazine called "Abortion in America," by Gary Bergel. In glowing terms Bergel thanks eleven males for their spiritual insights, professional contributions, leadership and editing abilities. He thanks the two women involved for secretarial and research assistance and his wife for support on the home front, women properly positioned in their traditional roles. The male dominant, paternalistic religious convictions of the pro-family, pro-life, traditional values movement is vividly portrayed in the following quotation from the same booklet: "The family structure in America is rapidly deteriorating. Abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, artificial insemination, single parenthood, the gay rights movement and the radical women's rights movement are all anti-family. Unless we wake up, America, we are all doomed. . . ."

While I agree with Bergel that we must wake up, I think that what we should wake up to is what is being done by religious fanatics to undermine civil rights and individual liberties in this country. All of you apathetic peace-love-and-brother(sister)hood, live-and-let-live types out there better start paying attention or soon the only reading you will find in bookstores and libraries will be copies of the Bible personally autographed by Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell and that MTV you like so much will be replaced by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. And if you wonder why a male is standing up in defense of women's rights, the answer is simple. The threat posed to freedom by the religious rightwing is not simply a threat to women's rights. All of our freedoms are being endangered by these bigoted fanatics, and if we do not begin to oppose them by voting, by writing letters to the editor, and by contributing time and money to reasonable political candidates, we are in deep, deep trouble. The America we love might one day more closely resemble the Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran.

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