

## Were the Witch Hunts Moral by Today's Standards?

"Death and scabs!" he said. "You'd make a man mad. Anyone'd think it was *your* daughter they were giving to the Brute. ... No one seems to remember whose girl she is. She's mine; fruit of my own body. My loss. It's I who have a right to rage and blubber if anyone has. What did I beget her for if I can't do what I think best with my own? What is it to you? ... Yes," he said, more quietly now. "It's I who should be pitied. It's I who am asked to give up a part of myself. ... It has happened before. I'm sorry for the girl. ... What's one girl-why, what would one man be-against the safety of us all? ... It happens in every battle."

-Trom (the King), after his slave and eldest daughter beg him not to sacrifice his youngest daughter to a monster -- *Til We Have Faces* by C.S. Lewis, Chapter 6

I believe many confuse "morality" with "ethics." Many people are also very quick to hide behind a "don't judge me" attitude. Like most attitudes in our culture, I can appreciate these concerns in one sense, but I feel they are too simplistic to accept completely. Life is complicated and I believe a healthy outlook on life needs to be flexible enough to accept these complexities while firm enough to be meaningful and therefore be worth holding on to.

Now, in my outlook in life, morality is the foundation of how to determine what is right or wrong. Ethics is the system or code derived *from* morality that tells one how to behave in a given set of circumstances. I do not believe one has the right to force a set of morals on others. In this sense, I agree that one should not judge another. But when it comes to ethics, I think we not only *can* judge others, but that we have many good reasons to do so. I can judge if I want to be a part of their morality, I can judge if their ethics are consistent with their morality, and I can judge if their ethics are a threat to myself or others.

I am not against the idea that women should be treated with the same dignity that men are (based on my belief that all humans are made in the image of God). In this respect, I agree with feminist efforts. But if and when feminists seek to minimize the dignity of others, then I part ways with them. In other words, I am not a feminist *per se*, but as one who believes in human dignity, I will support them whenever their efforts are consistent with human dignity. But if their efforts are directed to marginalizing the dignity of others, then I will defend the oppressed. This attitude of mine is not limited to feminism, but I will be focusing on them in this paper. I do not call feminism itself morally wrong, but I won't ignore any ethical inconsistencies of its adherents, nor will I disregard ethical behavior that I find repugnant. Finally, I will do what I can to protect myself and the helpless should I feel improper attacks have been made on our dignities because of such ethics.

For many feminists, the witch hunts of history are, understandably but not necessarily factually, looked at as a political move by men to scare women into submission. Now, just to be clear, I do agree that any effort to coerce another group of people into behaving a certain way is wrong. And if the coercion is a credible threat of a horrific death, then we are dealing with coercion on a particularly heinous level. At this point, I believe I am in full agreement with feminism, BLM, the alphabet soup of the LGBT+ community, and any other so-called "social justice" group. But where I draw a line, and at

which point I invariably separate from these groups, is that I believe justice means *all* human dignity has to be respected, not just the dignity of a certain group. To promote one group's dignity over that of others is not really "social justice;" it is replacing one tyrant with another. Furthermore, so long as one group is attempting to intimidate another group, I believe the other group has the right of self defense. And if the first group is unwilling to accept the dignity of the other group under any circumstances, then self defense allows for the removal of the first group from their lives, as peaceful solutions are not possible in this scenario.

The excesses of BLM and LGBT+ have been obvious to anyone who can look at the facts objectively, and the popular support of these groups appears to be dropping off rather sharply. They appear to me to be more of a fad than a true revolutionary movement, and I expect them to be an anachronism shortly. But the extreme feminists who claim (in whatever context is politically correct at the time) that being pregnant is an assault on the female body have proven to not be a fad, as it has been going on for about 100 years now. And it has massive political power, as currently the three most powerful people in the United States (president, vice-president and speaker of the house) are all extremely pro-abortion. To add insult to this grievous injury, two of them have publicly claimed to be "good Catholics," something the Catechism of the Catholic Church unequivocally contradicts (para 2270-2275, with para 2272 explicitly stating that excommunication is the penalty for doing so).

So, with all that being said, let us briefly discuss the feminist claim concerning the witch hunts. Certainly, history shows us cases where the political accusation is true. The most famous of the *politically* motivated witch burnings was the execution of the leaders of the Knights Templar, who were all men. Perhaps the most famous witch hunt of all was the Salem Witch Trials. While women were disproportionately persecuted, the facts don't support the theory that the motivation was merely to intimidate women. Over 200 were tried, but only 30 were found guilty. This suggests there was at least some concern for truth and justice. Of the 30 who were found guilty, only 20 were executed (fourteen women and five men were hanged, plus a sixth man was pressed for refusing to plead on his behalf). Again, there is no question that women were disproportionately persecuted. But the number of persecuted men (30%) is high enough that it is not credible to believe that the sole motivation was to "keep women in their place." And finally, the witch hunts in Salem were an anomaly. These trials took place over a mere 14 months at the end of the 17th century. For the rest of the 17th century, there were only sixteen other witch killings (14 women and 2 men) in the colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut. These low numbers (about one every six years between the two colonies) discredits the idea that there was a systematic effort to degrade women by executing them. Furthermore, when I read the histories and the literary greats of those times and of other centuries associated with witch hunts (including, but by no means limited to, William Shakespeare and Geoffrey Chaucer), far from seeing women living in perpetual fear, we see powerful women who make the most of what the patriarchal society allows them to do. There are women who use men to do what being a woman prevented them from doing. We even see some who simply ignored societal norms and claimed the roles that were supposedly reserved for men (Queen Elizabeth stands out among this group). We also can't blame Christianity. From Eve giving the forbidden fruit to Adam, to Jael and Judith killing generals who threatened their people, to Mary Magdalene braving public scorn to bathe the feet of Jesus with her tears, to the women who risked financial ruin and possibly even stoning to help Saint Paul, to dozens and dozens of other examples (of both evil and virtuous acts), I can only find one woman in the whole Bible who could be considered powerless: the woman accused of adultery in John 8:3-11. Even then, this was not an attempt to victimize women, but an attempt to entrap Jesus. So, if there was neither a political, systematic, nor religious effort to intimidate women, what would cause the witch hunts?

Perhaps this is a case where we should not attempt to look for a conspiracy, but rather accept the idea that most people at the time genuinely believed there were witches among them who would harm the children. I point this out because witch stories usually show the witch being left alone until harm starts coming to children. In the few legends that do not include children, the witch is sometimes even shown as a hero of sorts. Now, I ask the gentle reader to bear with me for a minute. If it *is* possible for someone to sell their soul to the devil with the intent of harming their community, and particularly if those so threatened are predominately children, then we have a case of someone refusing to respect the dignity of others. And this attack on dignity is both extreme and horrific based on the nature of demonic supernatural power. Furthermore, because of the nature of selling one's soul, this refusal to accept others dignity is absolute; there is no common ground to be found on the matter. Based on my self defense argument earlier, the community now has the right, even a moral obligation, to remove this individual from their lives. And with this said, the patience I asked for earlier has run its course and we can continue.

Now, the only questionable part of my argument above involves the alleged demonic power of the witch. I am sure that many will respond to what I just said with "How can you say that? They should have known better." I did not live during those times, so I cannot say for certain what they should or should not have known. I do agree that if someone knew another was innocent and yet persecuted this other person anyway, then the first has committed a horrible crime against the dignity of both the victim and society at large. But while I do not object to one taking a "know better" argument in accusing another of *demonic* power, I do object when such an argument is being used inconsistently. If we should "know better" about the supernatural, then how much more so should we know better about the natural?

The pro-abortionist argument, when stripped of emotions, basically has two foundations. The first is medical reasons (either the life of the mother is at stake or the child will live a life of pain from genetic diseases), and the second is by denying the personhood of the fetus. I will start with the first foundation.

The medical foundation is a smoke screen in the extreme sense. In the United States, only one in 9,000 pregnancies carried to full term result in the death of the would-be mother. One in five pregnancies end in abortion. All other things being equal, it is hideously absurd to endorse the killing of about 2,000 people for the sake of one life. And since no Western culture has ever denied life saving medical procedures to a pregnant woman (including the Catholic Church), this is outright deceit (more on this later). They should "know better."

I have been unable to find statistical data on how many abortions are done due to the fetus having a genetic disease that would lead to a painful life. The Guttmacher Institute claims 5% of abortions are based on "medical conditions" of the fetus, but this is an extremely vague term, as I will soon get to. While it may indeed be out there somewhere, I find it disturbing that it is so hard to find because cases like Gretchen Voss' late-term abortion decision (her child had the Zika virus) are popular. As it is, while the Zika virus and its ilk get the publicity, cases of Down's Syndrome, club feet, missing fingers and such are inflating the pro-abortion argument here. Furthermore, unless a state specifically denied such abortions, unwanted hair color, eye color and gender could arguably be a "medical condition" in a manner consistent with calling cosmetic surgery a "medical procedure." So, at least with the way abortion laws are now, any reasonable argument falls entirely on the personhood (or, more accurately, the lack thereof) of the unborn child.

Unfortunately, personhood is a very equivocal word, and is invariably defined as best suits the

needs of the speaker. I don't have a problem with defining words *per se* (I will do as much here), although (again) I will hold one accountable for being consistent in their definition. It is one thing to define a word to express a specific concept; it is a different matter to change definitions mid argument when the old one no longer suits one's purpose.

As a Christian, I define personhood as the essence of our beings, given to us by God when He made us in His image. This is most clearly seen through our imagination. As our personhood is dependent on being made in the image of God, we are persons at the moment we are made: conception. Killing an unborn child is not only murder, but blasphemy against God. And it's a murder of the most despicable kind, as none is more helpless than when in the mother's womb. Any who claim to believe in Jehovah are being inconsistent in their beliefs if they claim a fetus is not human. They should "know better."

But not everyone is a Jew or Christian, so this definition will not work for them. The problem is, personhood is a complex matter and people invariably seek simple solutions. I won't go into all theories of personhood, as none of them are consistent by themselves. But I will talk briefly on the more popular ones. To suggest that personhood is a matter of DNA (actually, this is a pro-life argument, but it still needs to be addressed in the name of consistency) is unworkable, because that would suggest that the hair on the floor of the barber's shop is a person. This definition of personhood is *inherently* inconsistent. But here are some theories that are not inherently inconsistent, yet are *used* inconsistently.

To base personhood on having memories is also unworkable, as we constantly forget things. If one uses this argument, then one has no grounds for being mad at someone who forgot an important appointment, as that person is not the same person who made the promise one was counting on. To base personhood on our ability to reason means that we are not persons until at least four years of age, and not fully a person until age twenty five! To base personhood on being able to competently make life decisions is even worse, as this means one is not a person until mid-teens. In order to be consistent with any of these theories, abortion should be allowed after birth, possibly even after they are old enough to drive, drink, vote, join the military or own a gun. And there is more.

To base personhood on self-awareness means either one is not a person while asleep (a strict interpretation of this), or that nearly every animal known to man is a person (a loose interpretation of this). In the strictest interpretation, one can be aborted at any age because we all must sleep sometime. In the looser sense, personhood becomes so vaguely defined that it is useless for the pro-abortionist (and everyone else as well). For the awareness argument to be beneficial for the pro-abortionist, it has to be carefully defined as "a human who has not yet been born." This is obviously an arbitrary line to draw, as it begs the question: why is personhood defined this way? We find it becomes a circular argument: we can abort because they are not old enough to be persons, and they are not old enough to be persons because we can abort them.

When all is said and done, the obvious privilege postnatal children have over prenatal ones comes to the unspoken but very real idea that "I know personhood when I see it." The previous arguments are only made to pretend that the issue was thought over. Not seeing personhood, I think, is what denying personhood to fetuses really comes down to. Once a child is born, it is seen. Being seen, personhood is easily recognized in the child. Fetuses, however, are not seen. Therefore personhood is not recognized in them. In summary, except for the obviously faulty DNA definition of personhood, every other popular definition has periods postnatal when a living human is not a person. The inconsistencies with theories that claim fetuses lack personhood are quite obvious. Those who defend

these theories should have "known better."

While I believe this answers any logical pro-abortion argument, I feel there are four specific cases that should be addressed because of their popularity. The first is to call the fetus "part of the woman's body." Science is pretty clear on this matter, as the fetus has a different DNA than the mother. It may seem I am being inconsistent concerning DNA, as I previously denied that it justifies personhood. But I am not using DNA here to justify personhood, I am showing that a fetus is not an organ or a "benign" tumor of the mother. It is a separate and distinct entity. The child is not *part* of the woman, the child is *in* the woman. To use an everyday example, when I sit *in* a car, I do not become *part* of the car. If the car is totaled in a wreck with me in it, society does not euthanize me so I die with the car, nor does society "salvage" me for use in another car. Those who claim the fetus is part of the woman's body should "know better."

The second is a deceptive secular concept argument that seeks to bypass the "personhood" dilemma by calling the fetus non-human. Again, while I deny that DNA is grounds for personhood, having human DNA is a necessary requirement for being human. The fetus in a human female will, if allowed to do so, certainly *not* grow into a dog, cat, fish, plant, or any other living thing except a human. Those who call the fetus "non-human" should "know better."

The third is when the woman's life is at stake. There is a lot of legalese involved in this matter and I do not wish to waste the gentle reader's time explaining it. For this paragraph, do not read anything special into it, as I am attempting to communicate a complex idea in clear everyday language. I already pointed out that this is an absurdly rare occurrence to justify abortion as was practiced before the Dobbs decision, but there is still a bigger issue that needs to be addressed. Justice says that the mother has as much right to live as the unborn baby. When there is an either/or situation, we have the one and only time when killing an unborn baby is consistent with a rational premise. And as was said before, no Western culture has ever legally denied a life-saving procedure to a woman, even if it meant killing the unborn baby. No state in the United States has passed or has announced the intent to pass such a bill. Even the Catholic Church accepts this with practical and workable conditions attached -- basically that the very life of the woman must be at stake (permanent but nonfatal harm to the woman does not meet this condition) and that no other option is available. Those who claim (unrestricted) abortion is necessary to protect a woman's life should "know better."

The final consideration I want to address is perhaps the most compelling argument *for* abortion because it is the only one that really challenges the concept of justice, and that is pregnancies conceived through rape. While justice demands that the child have a chance at life, it is extremely difficult to find justice in the mother having to relive that horrible experience every time she sees her child. Yet some women do, with the idea that they will not let that monster win a second time over them by turning themselves into a murderess on his behalf. This decision cannot be made from a position of weakness, it is only possible by having incredible strength. And even for those not strong enough for this (and I am not judging those for being honest here), there are other options. But even in this worst case scenario, we also see that the raped women are being used for political gain (itself something I find disgusting). According to the Guttmacher Institute (the world's largest and most influential pro-abortion agency), *less than 0.5%* of abortions were due to rape. The abortionist lobby has successfully killed over 200 children in the name of sparing one woman having to give birth to a child she did not consent to. Furthermore, the child is invaluable evidence that can be used against the monster, even if it is adopted out. To abort it greatly hinders legal justice being done to the rapist. The pro-abortionist lobby was not then nor is it now defending raped women, it is using their trauma for personal gain. In a very real sense, the lobby is raping them a second time. They should "know better."

So, after centuries of scientific and philosophical development in our culture since the witch trials in Salem, there is no consistent argument that justifies abortion as practiced in the United States before the Dobbs decision. Abortions performed solely on life saving medical grounds would reduce the practice to about 700 abortions a year instead of the one million a year that took place before the Dobbs decision (about one mother fatality to 1,400 dead babies). To kill a child on grounds that it is not a person either contradicts itself or ultimately grants privilege to those fortunate enough to be born (and privilege is something social warriors normally fight against, but they are inconsistent on this matter). There never was a legal or moral threat that left a woman to die for the sake of her unborn child. To defend abortion on rape is not only statistically irrelevant, but it is a horrific attack on women who already suffered. So we see hypocrisy after hypocrisy when it comes to this topic. Those who seek social justice should have "known better."

But I think the greatest, and saddest, irony is how the debates have come full circle. As mentioned above, the primary concern the common person of old had concerning witches was the threat witches posed to the children. To call them misguided is only truthful in the context of whether or not the guilty ones actually gained powers that were supernatural in nature. It is all too obvious today that there are people who otherwise meet the definition of the traditional witch. We have as many examples today as one could want of those seeking and gaining power for the explicit purpose of harming children. The CDC claims about 60 million abortions have taken place in the past 50 years, but the Guttmacher Institute claims the number is more like 75 million. The institute proudly presents this number as proof of how effective they are in promoting abortions. Between 60 and 75 million aborted children from a country whose population is about 330 million, we find close to 20% of our population has been murdered in the womb (not to mention children and grandchildren that otherwise would have been born by now). And those in power are not content to merely destroy children, as now we see efforts to encourage children as young as kindergarten to get permanent operations that will leave them sterile for life (and without parental knowledge), and more and more legislation being proposed to expand the "assisted suicide" market among the senior citizens of the country.

And many of those who promote and perform the killings claim to belong to a religion that teaches that their souls are in jeopardy for doing so. So, maybe those in times past actually did know best after all. There really are those who will sell their souls to attack the children of their community in exchange for power (even if it is political or economic instead of demonic). And not only were they killing more than a million children a year in the United States, they, like Trom in *Til We Have Faces*, are the ones claiming to be the victims.

Were those who killed witches in the past male chauvinists, or were they heroes protecting their children? I've no doubt one can find plenty of examples of both, as it's too large and complex a matter to give a simple yes or no answer to. But in the time it took you to read this, 20 children would have been aborted in this country before Dobbs. We need to separate the witches from those who just keep bad company, and then we need to have the moral courage of our ancestors to do the right thing by our young. I don't know that we need to put them on trial, and we certainly do not need to execute them. What we *do* need to do is remove the power they have by voting them out and by reaching out to those most vulnerable to the abortion syndicate.

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