Abortion and Self Defense: Catholic and Protestant views

Michael Griffin: Making Logical & Theological Sense

by Gerald Garno

The response to Michael Griffin's action has revealed some inconsistencies in the pro-life movement that leave many confused. Why is it that most pro-life Christians—including Randall Terry, Jack Willke, etc.— insist that it must be permissible to kill the unborn child to preserve the physical life of the mother? And yet what about preserving the physical life of the baby? I heard one pro-life leader give an explanation of the "physical life of the mother" exception. She said the justification was the "life for a life" principle found in Exodus 21:23. She said that throughout the Christian era in history, abortions were done only in this exceptional case. But let's look closely at this passage. It refers to the taking of the life of the one that cause the death of the unborn baby, not the baby himself!

Nevertheless, most Christians see here the justification of abortion to preserve the physical life of the mother. It seems obvious that most Christians are not treating the unborn as if they are fully human and as much persons as the mother or any other born person. Otherwise, they would allow for the taking of the life of a murderous aggressor in defense of the physical life of the little boy or girl; but they do not.

Surely if there were a group of born children being attacked, then anyone who took the life of the murderer who was preparing to kill them would be proclaimed a hero! Christians would probably look to Exodus 22:2 as the basis for taking the life of an aggressor in order to protect and defend innocent life or property. But not the unborn! Does this make theological or logical sense?

"But we are pro-life," you say, "we don't believe a life should ever be taken." However, should we be pro-life in every situation? Christians should be pro-God, pro-Bible, and pro-biblical justice. The Bible supports the taking of a human life in cases of just war (1 Samuel 15:1-19, Revelation 19:11), capital punishment (Genesis 9:6, Exodus 21:12, Romans 1:32, Matthew 15:4, Acts 25:11), or in defense of ourselves, our property or other innocent people (Proverbs 24:11, Exodus 22:2, Luke 22:36-38). We fight against abortion because it is the unjust taking of a human life. The one possible exception might be when the physical life the mother is in imminent danger. However, since the child is an innocent non-aggressor, it could be argued that it would still be wrong to take his or her life. Abortion is wrong because it is a serious violation of the fundamental laws of God (Genesis 9:6, Exodus 20:13, Romans 13:9). To arbitrarily say "I am pro-life" can be just as bad as saying "I am pro-choice," if they are both based on humanism (the subjective opinions and standards of sinful man). We try to save babies because it is a law of God to rescue innocent people (Proverbs 24:11, Psalm 82:3-4, Proverbs 31:9) not because it seems so awful or bloody or distasteful. If the other is the basis for your pro-life efforts, you may at some point find yourself doing a rescue with the animal rights activists down at the local slaughterhouse.

The word of God is Truth (John 17:17) and it lights our path (Psalm 119:105). All of our actions must have a biblical basis. We must look to the Word for guidance in all areas of life. In this case especially, we must look clearly at the issues involved. Is a Christian to execute God's justice, to bring His wrath on evildoers? Absolutely not! This responsibility has been delegated to the civil magistrates in the New Testament era (Romans 13:4). We are not to take revenge (Romans 12:19). We have not been given any authority to execute civil penalties, especially not the death penalty.

But Michael Griffin's action does not fall into this category. He was not motivated by wrath or punishment. Punishment is entirely different from using force to defend a person from imminent death, especially when to not do so would mean preserving the aggressor and allowing the innocent victims to die.

Michael Griffin shot the doctor as he was attempting to kill several children at an abortion mill. Even Operation Rescue has not been able to stop the killers in many cases. If the Bible allows the use of force, even killing another person, in order to defend property (Exodus 22:2), how much more must this apply to innocent little boys and girls! Even our civil laws allow for the taking of a life in defense of ourselves or another. No one would condemn the defender of born human life, so why has Mike Griffin been condemned? Does God condemn him?

I acknowledge that the use of force (the sword) to defend the innocent is a hard doctrinal question for Christians in the New Testament era—except, it seems, when we are talking about those who are recognized by man's laws as being legitimate persons. One could argue for or against Michael Griffin's actions based on an orthodox interpretation of the Scriptures. It is a little bit troublesome, then, that in this doctrinal "gray area" most of us would rather give the benefit of the doubt to the murderous aggressor and allow the children to die.

If we are going to err, shouldn't it be on the side of the innocent?

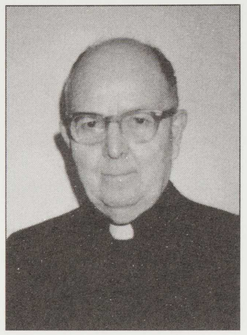
Is what Michael Griffin did wrong? The magnitude of the injustice of child-murder cries out to be addressed. The letter and the spirit of the Word of God, from cover to cover, supports the use of force as a last and necessary option to defend innocent boys and girls. The spirit of the Pharisees would condemn their defender, preferring that the children die than to have a violation of a strict and subjective understanding of the rules.

There may never be a consensus in the Christian community about the rightness of what Michael Griffin did. However, there is one aspect that we should be able to agree abou, it is the fact that he made the supreme sacrifice (the prosecutor is calling for the death penalty) in order to fulfill the biblical mandate to love his neighbor as himself. Have any of us been executed or received a life sentence for our efforts to save children? No one else has been willing to pay so high a price for the life of a child, and in that respect we should all agree that he is a hero, whether or no we agree with his tactics.

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (Spoken by Jesus in John 15:13.)

"If only one little baby is saved, it is worth anything they can do to me, including taking my life." (Michael Griffin, in a letter from jail.) ■

"Moral Theology" speaks in defense of babies



by Father Lucian Pulvermacher

I feel obligated to deal with abortion and self defense. I do this because some of our brethren need this explanation in order to think correctly about the killing of an abortionist in the State of Florida.

First, all abortions are cold-blooded murders. God's church directs that when a miscarriage occurs and the fetus is alive, it must be baptized. If there is doubt that it is alive, it is to be baptized conditionally (If thou art alive, I baptize thee...etc.). Hence, the "day-after-intercourse" pill is a murder pill.

Just who are the murderers? The consenting mother and anyone who cooperates in the abortion is a murderer. The doctor and his medical staff clearly are murderers.

As an aside, the Church adds its own punishment to an abortion — that is excommunication to all those involved in the abortion. If the fetus is killed one minute before birth, the added penalty is excommunication. If the child is murdered one minute after birth, we have a murder minus the excommunication. Hence, the Church extends its special protection to the unborn child.

It is obvious that the unborn child cannot defend itself. However, those who can defend it have a right to do so according to the rules of self defense. The reason is this: What one may do for himself, he may do for another. If one sees a murderer trying to kill another person, he has the right to use his right of self defense in regard to his neighbor. The same is true in regard to the unborn child.

God made it so that, ordinarily, the civil government defends the life and property of its citizens. Only when the arm of the law is not present may the individual step forward in self defense where one may go to the extreme (when necessary) of taking the murderer's life.

I shall quote *An Introduction to Moral Theology* by Karl Hormann (Newman Press, 1958, page 252): "It is lawful for anyone to protect his own life and the lives of others even by killing the unjust attacker, but only so far as this is necessary for reasonable self-defense."

I know that modern man, blinded by stupid liberalism, will call me a crackpot if I do not quote the other side in this most delicate matter.

The inept American Bishops Conference quoted by Ralph Reed in *American Family Association Journal* reads, "Mainstream pro-life organizations recoiled in horror at the murder in Pensacola. 'The violence of killing in the name of pro-life makes a mockery of the pro-life cause,' claimed the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference. The bishops are right. Murder committed in the name of life is hypocrisy, pure and simple." However, here is a very difficult moral principle to apply, in just when may one do the act of stopping the unjust killer. The Church quoted by Fr. Dominic Pruemmer, O.P. in *Handbook of Moral Theology*, 1957, in number 278, says "Therefore, one is not allowed to kill the aggressor, a) if his attack is not presently but only remotely imminent."

Father Pruemmer gives no explanation of this test, so we go to *Moral Theology*, by Callan and McHugh 1958 from numbers 1826 to 1844. In number 1843, we read, "(Pope) Innocent XI rejected the proposition that it is lawful to kill the aggressor who gave one a blow and then fled. It is only when the aggressor is continuing his attack, and imperiling the innocent party in life and limb, that the latter may repel the extreme force by extreme force."

Friends and enemies, I am joyful when I can bring doctrine to you from books that all Catholics should accept. Once again, you may not force the concept of "proximate to the offense" to the point that self defense becomes a moot point. If one says you cannot kill the aggressor until you see his finger pulling the trigger, that is too late to be of any use. You may not kill a medical student who is learning how to perform abortion. He is too far from abortion-murders.

Let us take an example. Let us say a killer came to a school ground under police protection and killed, say, 20 innocent first graders, then he left to go to another school to kill 20 more. Once he was away from police protection would you say it would be wrong to kill that child-killer just because the law from the Supreme Court down said he is an honorable killer? That is our case in question in Pensacola, Florida.

You see how stupid it is for such men as the U.S. Bishops to call an act of self defense in favor of unborn infants, murder?

What I am telling you is God's law. When St. Peter was told by civil authorities not to preach as Christ commanded him to do he said it is better to obey God than man. It is obvious to those who have the Catholic faith that our laws in regard to abortion in the U.S. are against God's laws, and God will punish both the State and the individuals. The U.S. Bishops should have condemned the abortions that the doctor performed and praised the heroic act of self defense (for the infants) by the pro-life man.

I must come to the defense of the unborn children, and I must come to the defense of the man who used his God-given right to use self-defense on behalf of the unborn citizens of our country. ■