

Are Abortion and the Holocaust Comparable?

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Steve Kellmeyer

Can we compare legal abortion to the Holocaust? Sadly, so many myths have arisen around the Holocaust, that it is difficult to see the merits, or lack thereof, in the comparison. Let's clear away a few of the myths.

Myth #1: The Holocaust was an expression of religious intolerance.

Fact: The Holocaust expressed the science of the day. The Franco-Prussian war, an exercise in social Darwinism, led directly to World War I which led directly to World War II. During this seventy-year period, intellectuals commonly spoke of the "French race," "German race" or "British race": nationality equaled genetics and genetics was about the "survival of the fittest." Germany led the world in science and technology. Eugenics, how to maintain a pure race, was cutting-edge science. Scientific journals devoted to eugenics were common throughout Europe and the U.S. In Germany, circumcision was not a crime - being of "Jewish race" was. Hitler himself insisted that Jews were "definitely a race and not a religious community."

Myth #2: Hitler's anti-Semitism was unique.

Fact: Every one of the great ideologies of Hitler's time, liberal, socialist, conservative, or Nazi, was anti-Semitic. Hitler consciously modeled his destructive work on United States law. The Nuremburg laws which forbade Jews and Gentiles from marrying imitated Virginia law which forbade blacks marrying whites. The German mass

sterilization of mental and physical defectives, Jews, and other “inferiors” modeled itself on U.S. state sterilization programs, upheld by the Supreme Court’s *Buck vs. Bell* (1927). Abortion, which had been illegal in Germany since 1870, was legalized under Hitler, but only for defectives and inferior races. Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, admired the Nuremburg laws for their improvement on U.S. law. Hitler simply followed U.S. practice and put scientific theory to work.

Myth #3: The Holocaust was illegal.

Fact: The Holocaust did not violate either German national law or international law. The British invented and used the concentration camp during the Boer War. The Germans simply adopted British practice. German courts carefully stripped victims of all legal rights prior to the Final Solution. By 1941, when the death camp system began operation, the Jews were non-persons, they had no rights. The Reich could legally treat them as it wished. Everyone recognized this. Indeed, a major Allied argument *against* holding the Nuremburg trials was precisely the fact that these trials attempted to enforce non-existent law.

Myth #4: The Holocaust killed Jews almost exclusively.

Fact: While Jews were certainly foremost among the victims, and six million died in the various camps, so did five million Gentiles, including at least three million Catholics. Auschwitz killed Catholics for twenty-five consecutive months before the first Jews were shipped there. Some demographers point out that on a per capita basis, the

Gypsies were killed at a greater rate than the Jews. Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals were also marked for destruction.

Myth #5: No important scientific experiments were really attempted.

Fact: Many of the death camp experiments were run by respected German scientists researching major health threats of the day, such as typhus and hypothermia. Much of the data was either captured and utilized by the Allies or was quietly published in German medical journals in the post-war years, sometimes by the very doctors who had assisted in the prison camp experiments. In fact, the saline abortion procedure used in the U.S. into the early 1980's was developed in the Nazi death camps for use on Jews, Slavs, and Poles. U.S. doctors simply lifted it from the Nazis.

So, how accurate is the legal abortion-Holocaust comparison? The Holocaust grew out of scientific work and legal precedent begun in England and the U.S. Eugenics expressed the science of the day, so legal abortion expresses today's economic and psychological sciences, which assume economic and psychological harm to women will be reduced if their children are killed. The rhetoric used by the advocates of legal abortion against the child in the womb ("a disease," "bacilli" "parasites") repeats the Nazi rhetoric against the Jews. Both German and U.S. courts stripped their victims of all rights prior to destroying them. In both cases, medical experimentation on living and dead victims grew as time went on and the number of deaths grew. In both cases, researchers support their work with the same rationales. Other parallels could be brought forward if space permitted.

An objective study of the Holocaust and legal abortion demonstrates striking similarities. There are differences. For instance, the Nazis felt they had to hide the death camps to avoid general outrage; nearly all such camps were in Poland or Byelorussia, not Germany. In contrast, Americans debate but largely accept abortion clinics in our midst. In terms of pure body count, Hitler did not match Stalin, Stalin did not match Mao Tse Tung, and Mao has nothing on the U.S. Supreme Court. The differences are not all to our benefit.

Steve Kellmeyer is a free-lance journalist with master's degrees in both modern European history and theology who frequently publishes on theological and life issues.

The above editorial was written in response to the following editorial exchange:

Nazi Comparison Offends Jan 17

From: Tim Potter, Omaha

State Sen. Chip Maxwell's comparison of doctors using fetal tissue from elective abortions in research to Nazis experimenting on Holocaust victims is reprehensible. Whether he realizes it or not, he is equating the University of Nebraska Medical Center with a Nazi concentration camp.

The residents of District 9 should be shocked at this sort of language coming from their representative in the Legislature. Mr. Maxwell is new in his position and seemingly hasn't yet learned that words have consequences, particularly when they come from an elected official. It is this sort of outrageous comparison that inflames passions on both sides of the issue.

I would hope that in the future Mr. Maxwell will think more carefully about the words he uses and would try to be a more responsible, constructive participant in the debate on the issue of fetal-tissue research. I also hope he comes forth with an apology to the medical center.

Research Morally Wrong Jan 10

From: Chip Maxwell, Omaha

Nebraska state senator, District 9

An observation as the fetal-tissue research debate begins again in the Legislature: I am no friend of Metro Omaha Right to Life (which did not endorse me). But as a pro-life advocate, I take issue with an opinion that The World-Herald seemed to present as fact in its Jan. 5 editorial, ". "

The World-Herald accused Metro Right to Life of getting the facts wrong in its attack on Dr. Gendelman, then presented bullet points to, in the newspaper's view, set the record straight. One point was: "This isn't (directly) about abortion anyway. Given that abortions take place, it's about the morality of using fetal tissue for the common good, rather than discarding it."

Imagine a German researcher in Berlin in 1942 saying: "Consider the suffering we might alleviate by experimenting with the remains of Holocaust victims. This isn't about the Holocaust. Given that the Holocaust is happening, it's about the morality of using the victims' remains for the common good, rather than discarding them."

I hope I would have replied that it was about the Holocaust, that it was impossible to separate the use of the remains from the morally intolerable act that produced them. The end does not automatically justify the means. The end can be contaminated by the means.

Please understand why I assert that fetal-tissue research is directly connected to abortion. I believe abortion is denying innocent people their inalienable right to life, which means I believe abortion is the Holocaust times six - nearly 40 million victims since Roe vs. Wade. That's why a chill runs through me when someone says: "Once they're dead, why not experiment with their remains to benefit the rest of us?"

I don't want to die from Alzheimer's or any other hideous disease, nor do I want that fate for my loved ones, or anyone. I want cures - but not at any price. We violate the victim's dignity and dangerously degrade ourselves when we exploit the remains of a wrongly slaughtered human being for medical research

Jan 14 Editorial

The liberal wing of the Democratic Party and its assorted galleries of activists put their anti-democratic foot forward when they dismiss competing points of view as being on the far fringes of American politics.

It isn't only the left, by the way, that employs such tactics. In Nebraska, State Sen. Chip Maxwell's use, in a Public Pulse letter, of Holocaust symbolism in the debate over fetal cell research is likely only to inflame a debate over academic freedom, the integrity of scientific exploration and, yes, the broader implications of abortion.

Research Carries Hope

From: Sanford M. Goodman, Lincoln

Executive director, Nebraskans for Research State Sen. Chip Maxwell (Jan. 10 Pulse) has attempted to place the debate over fetal-tissue research in Nebraska in the context of the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany. This analogy is unfair and inapt.

The argument was made best in 1988 by three distinguished members of a 21-member, NIH-sponsored panel that overwhelmingly recommended federal funding for fetal-tissue-related research. I offer excerpts below.

"Perhaps such a speculative analogy requires no comment. However, since it neglects the root causes which inspired and unleashed the atrocities of the Holocaust, this analogy not only is invalid, but is ethically repugnant. The attempt to bracket (fetal-tissue) transplantation research in one context with the Nazi dictatorship's crusade to exterminate a people because of religion or creed is shockingly misleading: It closes its eyes to the 'ideological' dogmas that, by denying human rights to one class of citizens, unlocked oppression and provided the warrant for genocide; and it exploits deeply lacerated memories and emotions.

"The Holocaust was not a medical research project to help Parkinson's patients and rescue infants from fatal diseases. It was not scrutinized by peer reviews, examined by NIH panels, publicized by news media, open to public questioning, debated in Congress, challenged by the Administration.

"The 'experimental' cruelties (of the Holocaust) were not a main objective of the annihilation enterprise; they were just an incidental, opportunistic sideline of an obsessive 'ideology' that denied human freedom and enslaved it to medieval hatreds in the name of world conquest. It was this unshakable 'ideology,' spawned of dogmatic religious intolerance, tribal feuds and dark prejudices against one class of people, that was the root cause and the sanction for the 'final solution.' This 'ideology,' above all the unspeakable deeds which followed, is the never-again-to-be-forgotten lesson and legacy of the Holocaust.

"Women do not choose abortion in the cause of racial extermination and fanatical nationalistic dogmas."

So if anyone accuses Senator Maxwell of Nazi-like complicity should he choose to join those such as former Sen. Bob Dole and Sen. John McCain in furthering the hopes of millions of people, both in Nebraska and around the world, by supporting potentially life-saving medical research programs, they are wrong.

Maxwell Merits Praise

From: Greg Kroeker, Omaha

As a resident of District 9, I am proud of the stance State Sen. Chip Maxwell has taken about fetal-cell research at the NU Medical Center. It is high time that someone of prominence takes a stand against what is taking place.

Almost 17 years ago, my grandfather died after 10 years of suffering from Alzheimer's disease, and I am confident that he would be very upset if he knew that aborted babies were being used to find a cure for this terrible disease.

I hope Senator Maxwell doesn't apologize to UNMC. Sometimes, telling the truth has negative consequences to the one telling the truth, but that does nothing to change the truth.

Life Must Be Preserved

From: David P. Breuer, Auburn, Neb.

I put Sen. Chip Maxwell's letter ("Research Morally Wrong," Jan. 10 Pulse) up on my refrigerator. I thought his points were well made.

I'm sorry for Harold Andersen's frustration ("") with the ongoing fetal-tissue debate. But as long as he, State Sen. Ernie Chambers (who compared the unborn child to an acorn), the rabbis of the Omaha Jewish community, the NU Medical Center's Dr. Howard Gendelman and others refuse to grasp the sanctity of the life of the unborn child, then the comparison to the life of the Holocaust victim will be lost on them, and the argument must, and will, continue.

The reality that abortion is the wanton destruction of unborn human life seems too disturbing for them to contemplate. Therefore, they refuse to seriously consider the right-to-life viewpoint, and so here we are.

The innocent victims of the Holocaust and abortion had, and have, no choice in their destruction. To experiment on their remains then, and now, is wrong.

Holocaust Wasn't Legal

From: Terrence J. Ferguson, Omaha

State Sen. Chip Maxwell's equation of the Holocaust to abortion is factually inaccurate. Abortion is legal in the United States, and a majority of our citizens approve of abortion in at least some situations. In Germany, the Nazis never publicly acknowledged their systematic extermination of Jews and other people they didn't like. In fact, most extermination sites were located outside of Germany to avoid public knowledge. No sane person seriously argued then or now that genocide was or is a proper act.

Senator Maxwell's opposition to fetal-tissue research makes sense only if we accept as a basic premise that at the very instant of fertilization a complete human being (with a soul) comes into

being. Many people in good faith don't agree with that concept. Indeed, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine believed that a full human being was not present until a soul was infused into the body, some weeks or months after conception. The Catholic Church itself is inconsistent on the question of when a fertilized egg becomes a human being with a soul.

As for fetal-tissue research, so long as the law of the land allows abortions, and there is such split of opinion on the moral aspects of abortion, arguments equating fetal-tissue research to hypothetical medical research on Holocaust victims are dangerous and insulting.

Harold Andersen

Here we go again. As the Legislature heads toward renewed debate on the University of Nebraska Medical Center's use of fetal tissue, the Holocaust comparison is being voiced again.

Newly elected State Sen. Chip Maxwell of Omaha was among the first of the anti-abortion activists ("extremist" is an appropriate word in some cases) to play the Holocaust card this legislative session.

The far-fetched ("irresponsible" is another word that could apply) Holocaust comparison suggests that to support the research use of fetal tissue is the moral equivalent of experimenting with the remains of 6 million innocent victims who died as a result of Nazi Germany's genocidal policies more than half a century ago.

This leaves no room on the moral high ground for anyone who doesn't agree with the hard-line position taken by the likes of Senator Maxwell and Metro Life to Right President Bob Blank. No room for people like State Sen. Jennie Robak of Columbus, for example, who has long been opposed to abortion but was assailed by the anti-abortion hardliners when in the last legislative session she said she would oppose the proposed legislative ban on the research-use of fetal cells.

No room, for another example, for a lifelong Catholic who last year told Gov. Mike Johanns this story in a letter:

She was born and raised in South Omaha, "the product of a traditional Irish-Catholic family and traditional Catholic schools," then moved to outstate Nebraska with a husband who was also educated in Catholic schools and who, like her, is opposed to abortion.

"We are, however, able to distinguish the fetal tissue controversy from our strongly held beliefs on abortion. The UNMC research using fetal tissue in no way encourages abortions

"UNMC is an academic institution dedicated to training our future medical practitioners as well as an institution engaged in important medical research To deny UNMC the freedom to engage in medical research by somehow characterizing this vital research as a form of pro-choice activity is ludicrous, highly inflammatory and an effort to politicize the process. In fact, one could argue that to waste this tissue by not using this tissue for the greater good would be sinful."

Ironically if not ludicrously, the alleged Holocaust parallel would also leave no room on the moral high ground for three leaders of the Omaha Jewish community. Rabbis Howard Kutner, Aryeh Azriel and Paul Drazen have publicly supported the UNMC fetal tissue research.

Rabbi Kutner said Jewish law opposes elective abortions, "but the abortions are taking place nonetheless. At least we feel there should be some positive result. Let there be some benefit to the world as a result of these abortions."

It seems to me that neither Chip Maxwell nor Bob Blank nor any other anti-abortion activist is nearly as qualified as are spokesmen for the Jewish religious community when it comes to evaluating whether research use of fetal tissue can fairly be linked to the despicable level of immorality that characterized the Holocaust and took the lives of millions of Jews.