

SCHIAVO CASE REVEALS MORAL PRIORITIES

The tragic case of Terri Schiavo will stain this country for years to come. There are so many permutations to this case—moral, religious, medicinal, legal, and political—that the books to be written on it will fill a town library.

Many so-called progressive Christians and feminists flinched at the mere mention of Terri's name. That's because they found it impossible to think about euthanasia without first thinking about abortion. And anything that might jeopardize their precious right to abort a child, they reasoned, must be resisted at all cost. Unfortunately, as this case revealed, even when the specter of domestic violence was raised, it was not enough to get the "pro-women" advocates to take Terri's side. Consider the following.

The most left-wing Catholic publications in the nation are the *National Catholic Reporter* and *Commonweal*. Neither was on Terri's side, and both took positions on euthanasia that were directly contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Similarly, Pax Christi, the nation's leading Catholic pacifist organization, is forever outraged over the condition of health care in America, but it had nothing to say about the condition of Terri's health.

Those who looked for wisdom about this issue from the Catholic Theological Society of America were out of luck: it was too busy defending the non-Catholic teachings of a so-called Catholic theologian whom the Vatican recently disciplined. Catholics Speak Out and Catholics for a Free Choice, a dissident group and an anti-Catholic group, respectively, had plenty of time to muse about women's ordination while the Schiavo case was all over the news, but neither had time to come to Terri's side. Among Protestants, the National Council

of Churches was predictably silent on this issue, preferring to opine on the “immorality” of the federal budget.

The Feminist Majority showed no curiosity wondering why the police didn’t pursue a homicide investigation against Michael Schiavo—even though a police report listed homicide the night they found Terri. That’s because they were too busy telling young girls that abstinence doesn’t work. Meanwhile, the National Organization for Women was so busy celebrating gay marriage that it had no time to spare worrying about a woman whose cheating husband allegedly asked Terri’s nurses, “When is that bitch gonna die?”

If all this was predictable, so was the way the Schiavo case was discussed in some quarters. The public conversation about Terri Schiavo got so debased that Steve Otto of the *Tampa Tribune* noted that one side speaks of “an already dead” woman. Indeed, consider James Kutkowski, Jordan Ross and Jim Seeber of the University of Mississippi, Oklahoma State University and Northern State University, respectively: they were confident that Terri was already dead. But no one was more cock-sure than Christopher Hitchens, a man whose comments are so obscene as to forever discredit him as a human-rights advocate for any cause.

On the MSNBC-TV show “Hardball,” Hitchens told William Donohue that “Mrs. Schiavo is dead and has been for some time.” He also spoke of her “nonlife,” only to contradict himself by saying, “I would just give her a morphine injection.” He did not say why it would be necessary to poison a corpse. Even after the debate, and before Terri’s death, Hitchens continued to write of “the late and long-dead Terri Schiavo.”

In our news release on this subject, we drew attention to what we’ve learned, or should have learned, from history:

“History has taught that deadly consequences follow when one segment of the human population declares another segment of

the human population to be less than human. At various times in history, American Indians, Jews, African Americans, Asians, the unborn and infants have been classified as subhuman. Terms like 'parasites,' 'lower animals,' 'primitive animals,' 'inferior race,' 'inferior class of beings,' 'untamable, carnivorous animals,' 'beasts of burden,' 'sicklers,' 'transit material,' 'raw material,' 'anthropological specimens,' 'article of property,' 'rubbish,' 'garbage,' 'refuse' and 'nonpersons' have frequently been employed. To this Hitchens adds, 'nonlife.'"

When Terri died, we issued a news release titled, "Terri Schiavo, R.I.P." Here are the remarks of William Donohue:

"The let-her-starve crowd has finally seen its death wish for Terri Schiavo become a reality. But they didn't walk away unscathed. For example, after the presidential election, many of those not associated with the pro-life community said they wanted to reach out to them. Well, they had their chance to speak up, but decided instead to run. Their silence will not be forgotten.

"The Schiavo case brought to the surface many questions that should long ago have been addressed. In this regard, the teachings of the Catholic Church on end-of-life issues is a model of clarity compared to that of all other religions. It's time that all world religions more forthrightly tackled these issues before it's too late. And by that I mean before the secular bioethicists rule the day, for many of them don't know the difference between a hamster and a human."

Finally, if the Schiavo case told us anything, it is the necessity of designating someone as our health proxy; living wills are no substitute.