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Child Sacrifice in the Western World

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Abstract

In my recent studies of history and anthropology I have found reference in many cultures to child sacrifice. These cultures include many far-flung groups that are distinct in geography, worldview, and mythology. A few examples include the Mayans, Incas, and Aztecs of South America. On the other side of the world, examples are found in several cultures of the Middle East, such as the Canaanites, the Edomites, and occasionally the Hebrews. These cultures performed child sacrifice to placate or pacify a deity in exchange for continued services, such as keeping the sun in the sky or bringing rain for the coming growing season. The common factor is that the society sacrificed children for the sake of individual and communal health and wealth. I intend to show that the majority of abortion decisions today are made for these same reasons, and that abortion is morally equivalent to child sacrifice.

Keywords

Ethics, abortion, child sacrifice

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In my recent studies of history and anthropology I have found reference in many cultures to child sacrifice. These cultures include many far-flung groups that are distinct in geography, worldview, and mythology. A few examples include the Mayans, Incas, and Aztecs of South America. On the other side of the world, examples are found in several cultures of the Middle East, such as the Canaanites, the Edomites, and occasionally the Hebrews. These cultures performed child sacrifice to placate or pacify a deity in exchange for continued services, such as keeping the sun in the sky or bringing rain for the coming growing season. The common factor is that the society sacrificed children for the sake of individual and communal health and wealth. I intend to show that the majority of abortion decisions today are made for these same reasons, and that abortion is morally equivalent to child sacrifice.

In order to understand the nature of the ancient practices, one must understand the mindset of those tribes that participated in these acts. As many people know, several South American cultures held ritual games to determine who would be sacrificed. What many do *not* know is that, in at least half of the cultures, it was the *winners* of the games who won the right to be sacrificed. In short, these peoples viewed it as an honor to become a sacrifice; furthermore, it was a great privilege to give up one's children for this cause. In some South American cultures the sacrifices were annual, whereas the details in certain Middle-Eastern cultures varied. Some gods, such as Molech, required child sacrifice on a frequent (almost daily) basis, whereas others (such as Baal) required this annually. This was the people's worship to their gods, and they expected to be rewarded. The cultures were convinced that by sacrificing their children "their lives would be better." (Haviland, et al, 2005).

At the time of Columbus and the early Spanish colonization, the ritual practice of human sacrifice had almost completely disappeared from Western European society. This was arguably associated with the rise of Christianity, which consistently finds such practices abominable. So when explorers arrived in the lower Americas, the practice of human sacrifice (particularly child sacrifice) horrified them. It so offended Western sensibility that the reaction by the Spaniards was to forcibly root it out of native society. It was the practice of slaughtering innocent children that was most anathema to the European mentality. Strangely, it seems that these practices might not have been so offensive if they had been confined to a group's enemies, or even to the adults within a group that would consent to their own sacrifice. Additionally, these were not antinomian societies. In fact, the societies were highly organized, and established severe punishment for crimes such as murder. Yet they faithfully performed and volunteered for the ritual sacrifices (Haviland, et al, 2005).

What is it that our Western mentality finds repugnant about sacrifice? Is it simply that one is killing a human being? It would seem that if one values a lesser being, then one should value a greater being with at least equal fervor. Perhaps we can demonstrate what we *should* value by demonstrating what we *actually* value. Consider certain animals that we all know and tolerate: most people find it understandable to kill a tiger in self defense, and would not frown upon

killing a feral cat. Yet slaughtering a house cat is grounds for skepticism about the morality of the perpetrator, and the torture and slaughter of kittens is punishable by jail time. There is a progression from the killing of an immediate threat to one's life (the tiger) to the killing of something that is helpless and dependant on others (the kittens). Sanctions imposed on a person are proportional to the offense committed. Thus the slaughter of kittens is seen as a far greater offense than the slaying of a dangerous animal (after Kreeft, 1983).

The same logical progression seems true for higher beings, up to and including humans. If it is questionable to kill a guilty human being, then it is worse to kill an innocent human being. It is even more detestable to kill a powerless human being, and simply reprehensible to kill a human that is totally dependant upon others, as with an infant.

Peter Singer points out, along with Joseph Fletcher, that there is nothing that distinguishes a fetus in the womb from a child outside of it (Singer, 1986). Thus, since the fetus is of the same moral significance as the infant, and since infanticide is wrong, it follows that abortion must be wrong as well. Thus the abortion of a fetus is morally indistinguishable from the murder of an infant. Singer uses this logic as proof that infanticide is justifiable whereas Fletcher uses it as evidence that abortion is wrong.

Many do not recognize the moral equality of the born and the unborn. Yet if mothers could pay to have their little infants brutally torn into pieces, with the promise that the destruction would improve their lives, the people of this nation would cry out in horror. But the fact remains: nothing is said about the same brutal sacrifice actually being made of the unborn. In fact, this gets to the heart of why abortions are performed. That is, most abortions are performed, not because of serious medical need, or even out of concern for quality of life of the baby. Instead, it is considered good that the fetus be sacrificed for the "well being" of the mother or for the "sake of society" as a whole. This is nearly identical to the reason for ritual child sacrifice that set forward in the beginning of this discussion. The child is killed with the promise that the killer will have an increased quality of life.

Therefore, I propose that abortion is morally indistinguishable from child sacrifice. Both involve the destruction of an innocent, dependant human life for the benefit of the killers. Furthermore, I assert that abortion done for the benefit of society is indistinguishable from genocide, and is the same brand of lunacy that has been the hallmark of every maniacal dictator in history (Childers, 1998).

That the practice of child sacrifice has not significantly changed in the passage of time. The only difference is that we ourselves (our needs, our appetites) have become the object of our worship. We must see abortion for what it really is. At best, it is akin to child sacrifice to the most depraved and malicious kind of deity – ourselves.

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