

The Terri Schiavo Case: A Personal Perspective

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F.H. Knelman, Ph.D.: It is incredible that the Terri Schiavo case became the news story that monopolized the media for such a long time, to the exclusion of major world events. But what was revealing was that the Christian Fundamentalists politicized the debate to an unbelievable level. For them it was part of the anti-abortion so-called "right to life" issue. Surprising was that the political opposition did not respond in kind. They never even went so far as to reveal politicalization of the issue by the Religious Right. For me the issue was not whether or not to remove the feeding tube from Terri Schiavo, I would have accepted either decision. But lacking any Living Will, there was no choice but to rely on her husband's decision to have the tube removed. What amazed me was the position of the Reverend Jesse Jackson, who sided with the Religious Right, without attacking their politicalization of the case. He had the opportunity to justify his position on continuing to keep Terri Schiavo alive while exposing the reality that the right-wing Christian Fundamentalists in political power in America have absolutely no concern for the living poor, the homeless and hopeless millions who cannot be said to have a meaningful life. The Religious Right fight to protect the rights of a fetus but abandon all concern about its future life, while denying a woman's fundamental rights. The thought of Jesse Jackson sharing a political platform with the extreme right-wing Tom Delay, as well as George Bush, appears to this writer as astounding, given the fact that he did not clarify this aspect of his position. Certainly Living Wills are an important aspect of such issues.

The very term "right to life" does not discriminate between a life of intolerable pain or hopeless conditions and a life of quality. Nor does it discriminate between the life of a conscious person and a vegetative state. By making the "right to life" a fundamental issue, the Religious Right totally fails to take into account the above differences. Finally, Tom Delay in his typical bullying behaviour has threatened revenge and it would be difficult to find a more incompatible ally on any issue than Jesse Jackson.