

# Abortion is a blessing and abortionists are doing holy work, says Anglican priest

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The new Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has given a sermon describing abortions as a "blessing" for the women who undergo them. The Rev Katherine Hancock Ragsdale also thinks that the people who run abortion clinics are "heroes" and even "saints".

Ms Ragsdale, speaking in Birmingham, Alabama, said that "when a woman becomes pregnant within a loving, supportive, respectful relationship; has every option open to her; decides she does not wish to bear a child; and has access to a safe, affordable abortion - there is not a tragedy in sight - only blessing."

Here is the full text of her sermon. Do not, please, make the mistake of assuming that she is an unrepresentative extremist: liberal Anglicans in America are among the most fervent supporters of abortion in the world, outstripping even atheists in their enthusiasm for this gruesome procedure. Over to you, Ms Ragsdale:

Well, Operation Save America came, they saw, they harassed, and they annoyed; but they did not close the clinic. The clinic stayed open, no patients were turned away, and the doors never closed. We remain victorious. And that victory is a good thing - but, make no mistake, even though OSA has gone home; our work is not done.

If we were to leave this park and discover that clinic violence had become a thing of the past, never to plague us again, that would be a very good thing, indeed; but, still, our work would not be done.

If we were to find that, while we were here, Congress had acted to insure that abortion would always be legal, that would be a very good thing; but our work would not be done.

If we were suddenly to find a host of trained providers, insuring access in every city, town, village, and military base throughout the world, that would be a very good thing; but our work would not be done.

When every woman has everything she needs to make an informed, thoughtful choice, and to act upon it, we will be very close; but, still, our work will not be done.

As long as women, acting as responsible moral agents, taking responsibility for their own lives and for those who depend on them, have to contend with guilt and shame, have judgment and contempt heaped upon them, rather than the support and respect they deserve, our work is not done.

How will we know when our work is done? I suspect we'll know it when we see it. But let me give you some sure indicators that it isn't done yet:

When doctors and pharmacists try to opt out of providing medical care, claiming it's an act of conscience, our work is not done.

Let me say a bit more about that, because the religious community has long been an advocate of taking principled stands of conscience - even when such stands require civil disobedience. We've supported conscientious objectors, the Underground Railroad, freedom riders, sanctuary seekers, and anti-apartheid protestors. We support people who put their freedom and safety at risk for principles they believe in.

But let's be clear, there's a world of difference between those who engage in such civil disobedience, and pay the price, and doctors and pharmacists who insist that the rest of the world reorder itself to protect their consciences - that others pay the price for their principles.

This isn't particularly complicated. If your conscience forbids you to carry arms, don't join the military or become a police officer. If you have qualms about animal experimentation, think hard before choosing to go into medical research. And, if you're not prepared to provide the full range of reproductive health care (or prescriptions) to any woman who needs it then don't go into obstetrics and gynecology, or internal or emergency medicine, or pharmacology. Choose another field! We'll respect your consciences when you begin to take responsibility for them.

Here's another sign. Did you notice the arguments that were being shouted at us in front of the clinic? They've been trying for years, and seem to be pushing especially hard now, to position themselves as feminists - supporters of women. You heard them - yelling that they understand that it's all men's fault. That men must do better at supporting women and children so that women, presumably, won't feel the need to abort. They yelled that they understood that the women going into the clinic had been hurt by men and were reacting to that pain and betrayal. They pledged to help men be more responsible so that women wouldn't want abortions.

Let me tell you something. Any argument that puts men alone at the center - for good or for bad -- any discussion of women's reproductive health that ends up being all about men, is not feminism. Nor, for that matter, is it Christian, or reflective of any God I recognize. And as long as anyone can even imagine such an argument, our work is not done.

And while we're at it, as long as a Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States can argue, as Justice Kennedy recently did, that women are not capable of making our own informed moral decisions, that we need men to help us so that we won't make mistakes that we later regret; as long as a Supreme Court Justice can deny the moral agency of women simply because we are women - and can do it without being laughed off the public stage forever - our work is not done. What has happened to us that he could even think he could get away with publishing such an opinion? Our work most certainly is not done.

Finally, the last sign I want to identify relates to my fellow clergy. Too often even those who support us can be heard talking about abortion as a tragedy. Let's be very clear about this:

When a woman finds herself pregnant due to violence and chooses an abortion, it is the violence that is the tragedy; the abortion is a blessing.

When a woman finds that the fetus she is carrying has anomalies incompatible with life, that it will not live and that she requires an abortion - often a late-term abortion - to protect her life, her health, or her fertility, it is the shattering of her hopes and dreams for that pregnancy that is the tragedy; the abortion is a blessing.

When a woman wants a child but can't afford one because she hasn't the education necessary for a sustainable job, or access to health care, or day care, or adequate food, it is the abysmal priorities of our nation, the lack of social supports, the absence of justice that are the tragedies; the abortion is a blessing.

And when a woman becomes pregnant within a loving, supportive, respectful relationship; has every option open to her; decides she does not wish to bear a child; and has access to a safe, affordable abortion - there is not a tragedy in sight -- only blessing. The ability to enjoy God's good gift of sexuality without compromising one's education, life's work, or ability to put to use God's gifts and call is simply blessing.

These are the two things I want you, please, to remember - abortion is a blessing and our work is not done. Let me hear you say it: abortion is a blessing and our work is not done. Abortion is a blessing and our work is not done. Abortion is a blessing and our work is not done.

I want to thank all of you who protect this blessing - who do this work every day: the health care providers, doctors, nurses, technicians, receptionists, who put your lives on the line to care for others (you are heroes -- in my eyes, you are saints); the escorts and the activists; the lobbyists and the clinic defenders; all of you. You're engaged in holy work.

Thank you for allowing me to join you in that work for a few days here in Alabama. God bless you all.

[http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/damian\\_thompson/blog/2009/04/02/abortion\\_is\\_a\\_blessing\\_and\\_abortionists\\_are\\_doing\\_holy\\_work\\_says\\_ar](http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/damian_thompson/blog/2009/04/02/abortion_is_a_blessing_and_abortionists_are_doing_holy_work_says_ar)