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Left To Drown: For Brittany

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> A preliminary autopsy shows a seven-year-old girl drowned after being beaten and sexually abused. Noble County Sheriff Landon Smith says Brittany Hendrickson drowned in the well where she was found Wednesday, about a mile from her home in the eastern Ohio town of Lebanon. Her mother's boyfriend has been charged with aggravated murder. *(Ohio News Network, 12 March 2004)*"You'll see fires and phantoms on the road. The breakdown of the ancient Western code." *(Leonard Cohen)*

The stories are legion, apparently without end, and so brutal that we often turn our eyes away. Yet such is the culture in which we live. A seven-year-old girl left to drown in a well thirty miles south of Dayton, Ohio, in the town of Lebanon, population about 19,000. I first heard this story while listening to the Fare & Bounced News the other night. My first thought was not a thought, but an emotion. Quick and visceral anger.

Several days went by, as I grappled with the necessities of everyday life. Then one morning I awoke and realised that I didn't even know the name of the seven-year-old girl.

“Why are we swimming upstream against the tide of immorality? There can be only one answer: Because we have built a culture of immorality.”

I do now. Her name is Brittany Hendrickson.

The website for Lebanon claims that Lebanon is "an ideal place to live, thrive, and raise a family." Perhaps so, but not for Brittany. And not for the thousands like her.

So how did we get here? Why is it that Brittany had to die, and in such a cruel manner? In theology the term for the study of Good and Evil, or, more specifically, The Problem of Evil, is called theodicy. But we mortals are not permitted a definitive theodical answer. Evil remains Evil, and forever shall. All we are to know is that God's perfect will remains His and not ours. In short, our anguished *Why?* has no answer for us on this earth.

“I know that little seven-year-old's name now, and may I not forget it.”

But we do have answers to why human beings allow such atrocities to occur and continue. To say otherwise is to say that we have no will. But God has given us will (which is always free by definition).

Like all problems in life, the issue is not one of complexity, but merely of details, and the Devil is, ontologically, in the details.

Did Brittany die by accident? No.

That Brittany did not die by accident is given in the nature of the case. In a created world, like ours, the Creator, we must assume, knows what He is doing. Just as Jesus did not die "by accident" nor his martyred disciples, so Brittany did not die "by accident". It is, however, not given to us to know the mind of our Creator. All theories of Evil are doomed from the beginning for this reason, whether they be arguments like the famous "privatio boni" (absence of Good) or any other. As the created, we must bow down before our Creator and accept His will. On this level we can but weep (or rejoice).

Equally, though, it is given to us to know the mind of our fellow man. We have a considerable body of facts and evidence at our disposal. For example, in the case of pedophiles, there is evidence that there is no cure for it. There is ample evidence, likewise, to suggest that broken homes contribute to crime. (Though one must be careful, for most who come from broken homes do not commit atrocities.) Child abuse, in its generic sense, certainly adds to the mountain of immorality surrounding us.

Ah, the magic word. Morality. Is Brittany's murder immoral? Of course it is. Immorality is not bound to vanish any time soon, but why the abundance of it in our culture? Why are we swimming upstream against the tide of immorality? There can be only one answer: Because we have built a culture of immorality.

Another magic word: Culture. You may have noticed the ubiquitous use of the phrase "culture war" of late. The phrase is on the lips of the media talk-talkers, in conversations over supper, at the grocery store. And for good reason. We find ourselves headlong in a fairly defined "culture war" whose basic motif is morality (or the lack of it).

On the one side, it seems, is the secular, "progressive" army, whose battle cry is perfectly summed up in the character of people like Hilary Clinton (and let us not forget Billy Boy), John Kerry the Moral Relativist, legislative judges, and their ilk. Suddenly, we find that "gay" marriage is an issue we "need to debate". It is not. Suddenly, we find that pornography (in the sense of the objectification of human sexuality for immoral ends) is "up for debate". It is not.

The phrase "culture war" is simply another way of saying "the breakdown of the ancient Western code". We are on the front lines of this war, and we must do something about it, for Brittany's sake. But what can we do? We live in a seemingly complex world where easy answers are not forthcoming.

“The idea that nothing is simple is itself a simple idea and adequately contradicts itself.”

But easy answers are not what we need anyway. What we need is to stop the madness first. We do not need another Brittany Hendrickson at the bottom of another well, tortured and left to die.

If you are like me, you also want an end to the madness that produced Brittany's death. But what to do?

The answer to that question is relatively simple. I am aware that sociologists, psychiatrists, social workers, lawyers, and other witch doctors do not agree, but I am not concerned with them. The idea that nothing is simple is itself a simple idea and adequately contradicts itself.

The simple answer is just this: We must live moral lives and fight back against the culture of immorality around us. We must speak up. We must do. We must write our songs, our poetry, our novels, our laws so that immorality is not an easy option.

It is time to take sides in the culture war. And if we do not, then little Brittany's fate lies heavy upon us.

Homosexual marriage is immoral. Moral relativism is immoral. Progress for progress' sake is immoral. Broken families is immoral.

Child abuse is immoral. The list is long, but the fight is clear at least. It may be that we will lose the fight (as we are currently). Nonetheless, we must fight anyway, for our Creator did not endow us with will for no reason. We are called upon to choose sides now. Choose wisely, for your soul is at stake.

I know that little seven-year-old's name now, and may I not forget it. May I not forget Waco. May I not forget the violent subjugation of the South. May I not forget, most important, my own moral life, for all immorality starts and ends with individual people. And may you (and I) remember that your anger is a gift, to quote from a popular song. For anger leads to introspection, and introspection leads to choice.

I am not perfect, nor are you. I have sinned, as you have. But those facts are not reason enough either to ignore the battle ahead or to change our own lives toward the Good and away from Evil.

Choose the moral life or choose the immoral life. But let the battle be joined once and for all. If indeed, as I believe, we are in the midst of a culture war, let us don our uniforms, take up our weapons and our positions, and fight back.

And may the Lord God hold little Brittany in the peace of His hands.