

Introduction

Ethical Dilemma of Abortion in Francine Rivers' *The Atonement Child*

Francine Rivers is an American Christian novelist. Her 1997 novel *The Atonement Child* deals with serious ethical questions surrounding the justification of abortion, and demonstrates its moral-psychological effects upon the individual and their family. Dynah Carey, the protagonist, is a young beautiful girl who comes from a sincere Christian family and is brought up with good Christian education. She is engaged to Ethan, a brilliant student and future Pastor. All these characters strongly believe that abortion is wrong, that it is against God's laws, and therefore, is a sin. But one fateful night Dynah is raped and soon after becomes pregnant. Now, all of a sudden, the secured moral walls surrounding her and her family crumbles and Dynah is hard pressed to abort the unborn as the safest option before her. As the events unfold, it is revealed that Dynah's mother and grandmother too had done abortion faced with their own situations, and had ever since lived with fear and sense of guilt. Finally, Dynah decides to give birth to the child and nurture it herself.

When faced with unwanted pregnancy due to rape, even a devout Christian family gets trapped into a dilemmatic condition whether to abort the child or not, and though one may try to resolve it according to Christian ethics, the dilemma continues to remain unresolved in true practical sense. In the novel, Dynah, a true Christian girl, after her unwanted pregnancy due to rape, has become a victim of ethical dilemma of abortion. She is in fact the mouthpiece of the author. In a way to resolve the dilemma of abortion, Rivers eventually makes Dynah decide to give birth to the baby and keep it herself as demanded by the Christian ethics. But by doing so, she has unconsciously fallen victim of the dilemma herself. To prove this, I have first analyzed the dilemma through two different views of consequentialism and Christianity as provided by

Michael Banner in his book *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*. Then, to show how Rivers fails to resolve the dilemma as she is in dilemma herself, I have employed Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "Third Space".

Dynah Carey is the central character of the novel *The Atonement Child*. She comes from an American Christian family that consists of her loving parents, Hannah Carey and Douglas Carey, and her strong-willed grandmother, Evie Daniels, who lives by herself. She has been brought up well in Christian beliefs and ethics. Her mother Hannah is deeply religious. She has always taught Dynah that abortion is wrong and forbidden by God, and this knowledge has ingrained deep in Dynah's consciousness. In the beginning of the novel she is a young girl studying at a Bible college, and working in a local manor house during evenings as a part time job. She is beautiful, disciplined, obedient to her parents and faithful to her God. She is also engaged to a wonderful Christian guy, Ethan Goodson Turner, who is studying in senior class at the same college and is training himself to be a Pastor in near future. Dynah's life seems happy and her future very promising. But then, all of a sudden, her perfect life gets shattered one night when Dynah gets raped by an unidentified man while returning from her job. The resulting pregnancy and reactions from her family and friends try to shatter her faith in Christian ideals too. Abortion that she and the people around her hated so much now seems to be the only available solution out of the problem. Her pro-life fiancé Ethan suddenly finds abortion acceptable as the only way out of the mess, her pro-life college threatens to expel her unless she gets rid of her pregnancy, and her family gets divided between her parents forcing an abortion and her grandmother strongly resisting it.

In the course of growing tension and attempts to resolve it, Dynah's mother Hannah is known to have had abortion herself that made her incapable of having

children for several years until Dynah was born finally. She had to abort her baby to escape from social shame after her lover left her impregnating her. Dynah's grandmother, Evie, also reveals that she was forced to have an abortion for health reasons. She had had therapeutic abortion. According to her, she was suffering from tuberculosis during her pregnancy and the doctor told her husband, Frank, that she wouldn't survive another child. So, in order to save Evie's life Frank pressed her to have abortion. Evie was already five months along and the baby was a boy. Reluctantly, she aborted the baby.

Dynah finally leaves her home in order to keep her family away from further tension, and find the solution to her problem on her own. Though Joseph Gullierno, a good friend of her, tries to come to her aid, she chooses to struggle all alone, and slowly finds rest and peace in 'God's Words', the Holy Bible, and prayer. Consoled and guided by the Words of the Bible, she eventually decides to give birth to the baby and then give it up for adoption. But, once she sees and holds the baby in her hand, she cannot give her up, and instead, feels that God wants her to keep the baby.

The Abortion dilemma is not limited to simply yes or no question, i.e., whether abortion is right or wrong. The issue is very complex since there is a wide range of conditions when and why abortion becomes (or seems to be) desirable or necessary. As Lynn Vavreck reports in his article published in *New York Times*, the 2012 survey of public opinion on legality of abortion conducted by American National Election Studies fielded four options to choose from:

- (1) By law, abortion should never be permitted;
- (2) The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger;
- (3) The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest or danger to the woman's life but only after the need for

the abortion has been clearly established; and (4) by law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice. (n. pag.)

The four options fielded by ANES shows the range of variation between abortion as always permissible and abortion as never permissible. According to Vavreck, roughly 12 percent respondents believed abortion should never be legal under any circumstance, while much greater percentage believed abortion should always be legal. Majority of opinions were conditional. But, rather interesting thing is people were found changing their views when subjected to specific conditions. Vavreck writes, "It turns out that when you ask people about specific conditions - the details about abortion decisions - support for abortion erodes . . . , even among those who previously said abortion should be legal under all circumstances. And the opposite is true, too - in some cases, opposition fades and leniency is extended"(n. pag.). So, there's no clear-cut division between abortion as right and abortion as wrong, which creates the dilemma.

Talking about this dilemma, Michael A. Grisanti divides the scale "into three general camps: abortion is acceptable sometimes (risk to life of the mother, in the wake of rape or incest), rarely (ectopic pregnancies), or never" (23). He explains that ectopic pregnancy is an exceptionally difficult case when "the doctor has only two options", either to abort the baby "by surgically removing the fetus from the fallopian tube and save the mother's life," or "to do nothing and let both mother and baby die" (10). Grisanti further observes that at the foundation of the dilemma lies the question, "Does a woman have the right to do whatever she wishes with her body (choice), or is it the human responsibility to preserve life at all times (life)?"(3). Hence, the people

supporting abortion tend to become pro-choice while those against it tend to become pro-life.

According to David Boonin, opponents of abortion believe “the fetus is a human being, killing human beings is morally wrong, abortion causes the death of the fetus, therefore abortion is morally wrong,” (xiii) whereas, supporters of abortion believe “it’s the woman’s body, so it’s her choice” (xiii). He further informs, “The most familiar argument against abortion rests on the claim that the human fetus, or at least the typical human fetus, has a right to life” (14). Boonin, in fact, tries to refute this and other similar claims made by critics of abortion “on their own terms” in his famous book *A Defense of Abortion*. In the words of Judith Jarvis Thomson, the pro-life supporters argue “. . . a person's [fetus's] right to life is stronger and more stringent than the mother's right to decide what happens in and to her body, and outweighs it. So the fetus may not be killed; an abortion may not be performed” (qtd. in Boonin 135). But Thomson is a defender of abortion and has tried to show that there's no conflict between the fetus's right to life and woman's right to control her body: “. . . the fetus's right to life does not include or entail the right to be provided with the use or the continued use of whatever is needed in order for it to go on living” (Boonin 137). For her, the fetus's right to life does not necessarily demand that the mother should provide it her body to develop fully and enter the world. It doesn't sound convincing, but Boonin thinks her argument is successful at least “in a case of pregnancy due to rape” where consent is missing and so “the mother has not given the unborn person a right to the use of her body for food and shelter” (148).

Christopher Koczor in his book *The Ethics of Abortion* analyzes the hard cases for both the critics and the defenders of abortion. Difficult circumstances like fetal deformity, rape, incest, and concern for the life of the mother are explained as hard

cases for the critics of abortion, whereas, murder of pregnant woman, sex selection abortion and abortion for frivolous reasons are explained as hard cases for the defenders of abortion (177). He finally proposes a hypothetical solution that he thinks would satisfy both the critics and the defenders of abortion - a presently non-existent technology, 'an artificial womb' (215).

In case of rape, he writes, “. . . justification is sought not in an appeal to the good of the child involved but rather in an appeal to the good of the mother” (184). Koczor admits that “pregnancy due to rape is horrendously difficult” and “the just rage felt by those who have been sexually assaulted needs to be fittingly discharged.” But then he questions, “Is abortion a proper outlet?” and goes on to answer, “Abortion cannot undo what has been done in a rape. Abortion doesn't even punish the rapist for what he did. Instead it harms an innocent human being, and, given the health and psychological risks involved in abortion . . . , puts the woman again in harm's way” (184). Koczor, finally, explains how giving birth to a child conceived by rape could be a heroic deed:

In rape, a man assaults an innocent human being; in nurturing life, a woman protects an innocent human being. In rape, a man undermines the freedom of another; in nurturing life, a woman grants freedom to another. In rape, a man imposes himself to the great detriment of another; in nurturing life, a woman makes a gift of herself to the great benefit of another. (184)

Thus, according to Koczor, by giving birth to the child a woman can transform the horrible crime of rape into an act of high moral standard and immense generosity.

Tony Fitzpatrick in his book *Applied Ethics and Social Problems: Moral questions of birth, society and death* tries to find out in his own words “a pragmatic

consensus, or a broad field of opinion in which most of those who think about the issue probably stand” (159). He writes, “It is this that has arguably enabled abortion to become embedded as an accepted practice in many countries and which therefore deserves consideration for that reason if no other” (159). To this end, he explores two questions: “should there be abortion on demand and what should the upper time limit for abortion be?” (159).

Fitzpatrick raises the issue of “abortion on demand” that is when the abortion becomes reasonably a necessity. He does not warrant abortion for frivolous reasons. “Wouldn’t it encourage women to seek abortion on frivolous grounds? What if some used it as a form of contraception? For many, such doubts represent an insurmountable problem. So where might an ethical justification lie? On what basis could abortion on demand be permissible? (159). He tries to find out the reasonable ground on which both the critics and the defenders of abortion could agree, which could also then be the basis for government laws. Since critics of abortion have raised the issue of personhood of fetus, what marks the point at which the personhood of fetus begins? For Fitzpatrick sentience marks the beginning of the personhood of fetus. According to him, sentience is “the capacity to experience and have sensations (no matter how primitive); it means possessing some consciousness of yourself, awareness of your surroundings and the capacity to feel pain” (166). Citing several writers he says that sentience is “often thought to indicate when a fetus starts possessing rights that counterbalance and, in some cases, limit the mother’s. Fitzpatrick further explains:

In terms of sentience, what seems to matter is the development of the brain, brainstem and central nervous system. We are not simply talking about reactions to external stimuli - which can begin a matter of

weeks after conception - since what matters is the conscious experience of stimuli, which, in the womb, denotes a stage when we have not yet acquired a cognitive distance from our surroundings but neither do we remain indistinguishable from them. . . . a period beginning about 25 weeks after conception. (167)

Here, Fitzpatrick says that sentience implies sufficient development of brain which enables the baby inside the womb have conscious experience of stimuli, hence, can feel the pain if aborted, and this capacity develops from about 25 weeks after conception. Thus, he questions, “Does sentience therefore dictate the upper limit for abortion?” and answers, “Almost” (167). He then cautiously suggests to “place the upper time limit at 20 weeks with carefully designed exception, that is assuming that sentience, defined neither too weakly nor strongly, begins at around 24 weeks” (168). It means abortion can be done within 20 weeks after conception. After 20 weeks, the possibility of development of sentience renders abortion morally wrong, since killing a sentient being would be killing a person.

All these scholars help understand the current debate surrounding abortion extensively but none of them recognize and explain the influence of religious beliefs upon these debates. The Western society is largely a Christian society too, and in such societies Christian principles and values can be a cause of the ethical dilemma regarding abortion. So, it would be right to question - how does a Christian family perceive and deal with the issue of abortion? What form of ethical dilemma might be experienced by a deeply religious person in a Christian society and how shall he or she try to resolve it? In order to find out the answers to these questions and to understand the ethical dilemma of abortion in the light of these answers, I have

employed the ideas of Michael Banner presented in his book *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*.

Michael Banner is Dean, Fellow and Director of studies in Theology and Religious Studies at Trinity College, Cambridge. In his aforementioned book, he tries to analyze the issue of abortion from the perspective of Christian ethics. But before that, he explains the view of consequentialism in contrast to which he then sheds light upon the Christian view. According to him, consequentialism is “the doctrine that the ends justify the means” and “the theory that actions are good or right, bad or wrong, in virtue, and solely in virtue, of their consequences” and so “the morally best action in any situation is just that one which promises to maximize good consequences” (Banner 89). Consequentialism rejects the notion of goodness or badness of action in itself. He writes, “the consistent consequentialist will not entertain complaints which are based on the thought that there are some things which really ought not to be done no matter the good which may result” like that which a great Christian scholar Augustine makes “when he argues that it is wrong to tell lies even for the sake of detecting heretics” (89-90). Banner then applying this consequentialist view to abortion, says, “the teenager who has been raped, the hard-pressed mother of an already large family expecting a handicapped child and so on will be deemed by a consequentialist analysis to be cases where abortion are warranted” because “just to take the first example, the already severely traumatized young girl, probably and understandably harboring no feelings of love for the child she never wished for, will likely be said to have but a small chance of making a good mother or of giving the child a good start in life” (91) So, according to Banner, consequentialism can be easily seen to favor abortion in most difficult cases such as unwanted pregnancy due to rape. But consequentialism doesn’t favor abortion in any cases. It favors abortion

only if abortion can be proved to bring better consequences than having a baby. He explains:

A couple find themselves pregnant a few years before they intended to start a family. Or alternatively, they find themselves expecting a child with a minor handicap (such as hare-lip). Or, to take a third case, they find the child is not of the sex they wanted (meaning, in most cases, that it is a girl and not a boy). In none of these cases does it seem likely, *prima facie*, that the calculation would favor abortion But, to believe, even from a consequentialist viewpoint, that abortions are morally required in these cases, one would have to believe that the good which is likely to come on the child from his or her existence, however inauspicious its beginnings, and in addition the good which will come to anyone else who might care for the child in the place of the parents, are genuinely outweighed by any negative features of the case, so that, on balance, it would be better that the child should not be born. (91)

Here, Banner means that abortion on frivolous reasons such as unplanned pregnancy and unwanted sex of the child can be warranted only if it can be proved that the consequences of child birth will be worse than the consequences of abortion.

Consequentialism can be seen very prominently in Francine Rivers' novel *The Atonement Child*. Dynah was always against abortion before her rape, but after rape, for the first time she comes to face abortion, and not just face it but is forced to have it herself. Once talking to her college roommate, Janet Wells, she says, "I've been against abortion since I first knew what it was, and now I'm supposed to have one? How can I?" (Rivers 66). Dynah's ordeal is such that her family and friends who were

anti-abortion before happen to suggest, even force, her to abort the baby now. For them giving birth to the baby would invite far worse consequences than the damage that has already been done by rape. Doing abortion is also not right, everybody agrees. But when the consequences are weighed in a balance, the consequences of having a baby are found far worse than the consequences of aborting it. Hence, abortion is judged right in this case. That's why the moment Janet knows Dynah is pregnant, she opines that Dynah must have abortion. When Dynah says that she thinks she should have the baby, Janet reasons, "And then what? Who'd want a baby conceived that way? You'd be stuck with it for the rest of your life. It's not fair, Dynah. It's not right, either. Why should you have to suffer for what someone did to you? You've never done anything to deserve this" (Rivers 73-74). Here, Janet also reasons that Dynah doesn't need to bear the consequences of the action that she didn't cause. We are responsible only for what we do, not for what other does to us.

Similarly, seeing from consequentialist view, Dynah's mother, Hannah, sees no other option than abortion. The narrator comments, ". . . she [Hannah] and Dynah would have the day to talk about options. Options? Abortion. That's what she was going to have to talk about. What other way was there out of this terrible mess?" (140). During their talk, Hannah asks, "Have you thought very much about what you want to do?" Dynah replies, "Yes. No. I don't know. I'm so confused, Mom." Then Hannah proposes her option. "Dynah, there isn't a soul who'd speak against you if you decided to have an abortion. Under these circumstances, who would dare?" When Dynah reminds her mother that she had always said how wrong abortion was, Hannah explains, "When it's used for convenience or birth control or a way of getting out of responsibility, yes, it's wrong. None of those reasons apply in this situation, Dynah. You didn't bring this upon yourself. You didn't make a choice" (150-51). Little later

in the conversation, Hannah adds, “I know abortion is a horrible thing, Dynah. I know. And I know how I’ve spoken against it. Only what other way is there for you to get your life back?” (152). Thus, Hannah sees abortion as the only way out of the problem.

If Dynah didn’t agree to abortion, the suffering would not be upon her alone; the whole family would suffer, thus making the consequences much worse. Talking to his wife Hannah, angry Douglas says:

Who do you think will have to take responsibility if she does decide to have it [baby]? Me! How’s she going to finish school or get a job with a baby? You’re going to be baby-sitting. You like that idea? You want to give up all your community work? I’m going to be paying the bills. Well, no thanks. I’m retiring in a few years. I’m not going to spend the rest of my life taking responsibility for a child forced on my daughter by rape. And neither is she! It might be different if it had been someone she loved.” (156)

Here Douglas is practically absolutely right. if Dynah decides to have the baby, her life would be ruined first. She would be spending her time taking care of the baby for years, which means she wouldn't be able to finish her school, and she wouldn't be able to do any full time good-earning job either. But if she were to be allowed to continue with her studies and career, her parents would have to take entire responsibility of rearing the child. Douglas, at his near-retired age, would have to bear the financial burden in raising his grandchild. And Hannah would have to leave her job and all community works and do the baby-sitting instead. Definitely, Douglas and Hannah would have to pay a huge price in accepting the baby and taking it under their care. This poor couple might happily pay the price however big if it were the legitimate

child or at least if it were the fruit of love, but since it was conceived in rape, how could they raise the child without shame and sadness?

Since Dynah was raped by an unidentified man, Douglas adds, “. . . What if he was black? What if he had AIDS? What sort of human being is it going to be? Who in their right mind would want it?” (157). Here Douglas's argument is in no way dismissible. He hints at absolute possibility. Dynah's rapist hasn't been identified. The night he raped Dynah, he had used a mask and the night was very dark. Dynah couldn't identify the man. So, he could be of any race or colour. That means, there was as much possibility of him in being black as it was in being white. If the rapist were a black, there's a high chance the baby would also be black or of some mixed colour. Dynah and her family are White people. If the baby born were to resemble the colour and some facial features of a Black, then it would be a very horrible thing for the Carey family as Blacks are looked down upon in White society.

Next serious possibility Douglas raises is of having AIDS. It is totally logical to think that the rapist might be some lustful man keeping or forcing sexual relations with several women. If so, then, it is again logical to assume that he might be a victim of AIDS. And if the rapist really had AIDS, then undoubtedly, the child conceived would also have AIDS. If it is the case, then there's no point in having the baby with AIDS as it would die soon. More worrying thing is the mother would be affected by AIDS first as this disease transmits through sexual contact. If the rapist were really the man with AIDS, it is certain that Dynah also got AIDS in her that would put a complete fullstop upon her promising future life. Thus, the consequences of having the baby would be immeasurably worse. If abortion prevents it, then abortion is right.

The immediate and greatest effect of rape and pregnancy seem to be upon Ethan, Dynah's fiancé. He faces confusions beyond his senses. He loves Dynah very

much. He is engaged with her and is going to marry her soon. He is also a brilliant student and a future Pastor. He has a very bright future ahead. But now all of a sudden he finds himself amidst a great crisis. First, his fiancé is raped by some guy. It's enough to embitter his life and vex him exceedingly. He has lost the virginity of Dynah to some evil person, which was to be the wedding night's gift to him from her. She has been defiled; her purity has been lost. She can now never be fully his and his alone. But Ethan doesn't give up his love that easily; he is a responsible person. He can't blame Dynah for being raped. He tries to take the situation under his control. But when he knows that Dynah has become pregnant, he can't bear it any more. He seems to hold Dynah somehow responsible for not being careful enough and letting herself be pregnant. But the thread of love and relationship still doesn't rip right there. It does only when Ethan suggests abortion which Dynah hesitates to comply with.

We might haste to conclude that Ethan is selfish, but the truth is there's more than selfishness; upon close observation and deep contemplation we come to realize how serious his trouble is. Ethan is a man of great responsibilities. He has the responsibility to love, care for and protect the girl he loves and whom he is marrying soon. And also avenge her if someone hurts her badly. Ethan is very angry at what happened to Dynah but is unable to appease his anger by taking revenge since Dynah can't identify the rapist. When Dynah tells Ethan that he is angry, Ethan bites, "Yes. I'm angry. I'd like to kill the guy. I think about what I'd like to do if I ever got my hands on him" (35). Anger seems natural here. If he keeps his cool, someone might even interpret that he doesn't love Dynah enough or doesn't realize the enormosity of the harm done to him and Dynah. When Dynah informs Ethan about her pregnancy, and then asks in her confusion, "What are we going to do?," Ethan suggests abortion. When Dynah says that it's wrong, he insists, "Of course it's wrong – when girls are

using it for birth control or women are doing it because having a baby is an inconvenience or a financial burden or a guy doesn't want to take responsibility. But under these circumstances? How can it be wrong? Is it your fault you're pregnant? Am I supposed to be a father to something so despicable?" (57).

We can understand Ethan's situation more clearly by contrasting his to that of Joseph Gulliermo. When Joe shows the kind of concern and care for Dynah that she expected from Ethan, she wonders, "Why did it have to be Joe asking? Ethan should be the one to want to know. Ethan should be listening and comforting, but then Ethan was personally involved, wasn't he? He has lost the most, hadn't he? (41) Ethan later confirms these thoughts when he says, "Joe isn't emotionally involved. He can play the cool head. He can have all the pat answers. He can tell you to wait and think about it" (59). When Dynah points that Joe was only trying to help, Ethan counters, ". . . it's none of his business. It doesn't ruin his life" (59). Ethan's life would be ruined if Dynah didn't agree to do abortion.

Hence, by consequentialist calculus, the right thing for Dynah to do now is to abort the baby as soon as possible, otherwise, not just her but whole of her people would have to bear worse consequences. She may be willing to suffer, but how can it be right for her to cause other people to suffer tremendously because of her decision.

Because of this, Dynah is not just suggested but forced by her family and friends to abort the baby. All these people were anti-abortion before this case turned up; in normal cases they are still anti-abortion. But in this particularly most difficult case, they naturally came to judge the matter by virtue of consequentialism, according to which, no good would come at all out of the pregnancy due to rape but only worse consequences. So, they put great pressure upon Dynah to go for abortion, but she doesn't yield easily. She has a tough conflict in her mind, ". . . a chorus of voices

inside her head carried on a screaming debate. Those on the side of abortion were the loudest, the most logical, the most appealing to her bruised and battered spirit. And yet there was another voice, quiet, calm, almost imperceptible, that said NO, THERE'S ANOTHER WAY" (67). Which way is the another way she couldn't know it clearly.

The two of her own people who advised Dynah another way, i.e., to give birth to the baby were her grandmother Evie and her trusted friend Joe. Joe was once a bad guy, but now he has become a true Christian. Because of his carelessness and wrongful means of life in past, he had caused his girl friend to abort the child, for which he is not able to forgive himself yet. He wants to stop any more incidents of abortion now. Evie opposes abortion because of the deep moral-psychological effect she thinks it will have upon the person for her whole life afterwards, i.e., guilty feeling. Evie draws Hannah and Doug's attention to this possibility. ". . . Do you honestly think she could have an abortion and not suffer for it for the rest of her life?" (224) Confessing that she had a therapeutic abortion, she reveals she "was angry and hurt for several years afterward" (223). She informs that her husband Frank also went through the similar experience. Then she says, ". . . Gradually, we buried thoughts of what we had done and went on with our lives," (223). But before one could conclude that ultimately the things were forgotten, Evie continues, "Some things can't be buried no matter how hard or how long you try. . ." (223). Later in the novel the narrator comments on Dynah's reflection: "Dynah thought of her mother and grandmother. How many others suffered in silence, too ashamed and too afraid to speak about their pain? The world wouldn't let them grieve for children they had aborted" (248). So, the long-lasting feeling of guilt for having done abortion, which is

the effect of Christian condemnation of abortion, suggests abortion to be morally wrong.

Banner differentiates Christian worldview from the view of the secular world. He quotes apostle Paul from Romans 12:2 in the Bible: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds” (93), and then goes on to say, “this renewal of our minds, which comes about as we understand ourselves and the world in the light of the gospel of creation, reconciliation and redemption which has concerned Paul in the previous chapters of his letter, reorders our beliefs and with that reordering, reorders our attitudes, affections and desires” (93-94). So, the Christian beliefs and attitudes are not shaped by the physics, economics, or politics of this world but by the worldview of the Bible.

Similarly, bringing an early Christian scholar Augustine into discussion, Banner shows wrong is wrong however good result it may produce. According to Augustine, Banner explains:

. . . to hold that it is sometimes right to lie is to hold that one may do evil that good may come; but this is to hold that if of the ‘number of lewd Priscillianists [the heretics in question], some woman should cast her eye upon a catholic Joseph, and promise him she will betray their hidden retreats if she obtain from him that he lie with her, and it be certain that if he consent unto her she will make good her promise’, we would be obliged to conclude that he should ‘lie with her’, so that there would be ‘chaste adulteries’, or thefts, or blasphemies, or whatever may be necessary to achieve the good end. But this, thinks Augustine, is absurd. Though ‘It does indeed make very much difference, for what cause, with what end, with what intention a thing be done . . . those

things which are clearly sins, are upon no plea of a good cause, with no seeming good end, no alleged good intention, to be done.’ (96)

So, for Augustine, wrong is by nature wrong, and should never be done in justification of good cause, good end or good intention. Banner concludes, “. . . so Augustine and his modern allies claim, the belief that rape, racial discrimination and torturing children are always and ever wrong, is more certain than any claim about actions being justified by their consequences” (97-98). Banner also informs that according to the traditional Roman Catholic teaching, abortion is always wrong no matter whether it is intended or unintended or whether it is resulted as a means or as an end. He says it is reaffirmed by Pope John Paul II’s statement from “his recent Encyclical letter *Evangelium*” that “direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder”(118).

Explaining the Christian view, Banner tells that “. . . life is . . . the gift of the Lord in whose service life is properly spent” (117). It means a human life is given by Him and for Him, so we can’t do whatever we like with our life. Hence, Banner says, “Suicide is wrong just because it refuses to spend life in the service of God. Martyrdom is right just because it is willing to spend life, in a different sense, in the service of God” (117). It implies that “what is crucial to a Christian understanding of life is not that life must always and ever be protected and served, but rather that life must always and ever be regarded not as our own, but as belonging to God” (117). Banner further informs that, “a community which knows human life to be created, reconciled and redeemed in Jesus Christ will be a community which, in its acceptance of children, gives expression to its characteristic virtues of faith, hope and love” (118) and “such a community would welcome children . . . with faith in the goodness of

God's creation, a hope in his providential dealings with it, and a love appropriate to his regard for it" (118).

Banner quotes a current Christian writer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "It is in Jesus Christ that God's relation to the world is defined. We know of no relation of God to the world other than through Jesus Christ" (qtd. in Banner 135). Then he goes on to explain what it is to see reality through Jesus Christ:

A church which saw reality through Jesus Christ would witness to the world through a way of life which would express those truths about human existence, its origin and its destiny, which are known in him. This way of life, in what is done as much as in what is said, would be welcoming of children, female as well as male, handicapped as well as unhandicapped, planned as well as unplanned. (135)

Hence, the people who see reality through Jesus Christ would welcome children unconditionally and not abort it for any sorts of inconvenience. In the life of such people "there would be nothing of the despising of human existence, the despair in its course, and the estrangement of one from another, which presently characterize our dealings with the unborn, but not only the unborn" (135). Since such life would be characterized by "faith, hope and love," there would be "a life of joy in which abortion would not first of all be thought wrong, but would be quite simply . . . unthinkable" (135). Thus, according to Christian view, as Banner explains, every life conceived ought to be respected and accepted as it is not our own but a creation and gift of God no matter what human instrument caused it whether intentionally or accidentally, and, therefore, abortion which kills it is always wrong no matter what goodness it may bring about.

Dynah is a true Christian girl. In her indecisiveness whether to abort the baby or not, she turns to her God and waits on him for the answer to her problem. Resisting her mother's admonition for abortion, she says, "I've laid it all before him, and he hasn't given me an answer. I keep praying, but he won't talk to me. So I have to wait. I have to wait on him" (153).

Dynah once goes to consult a Pastor, Tom Whitehall, thinking that he would advise her on behalf of God since who knows God better than a Pastor. But Pastor Whitehall refuses to provide any advice on the case. She pleads him, "Please. I need to know if abortion is all right under these circumstances" (87) to which Pastor Whitehall simply responds, "It's legal" (88). The question of legality of abortion is not the problem for Dynah; it's the morality of abortion. So, she says, "I know that. I need to know if God will understand," but Pastor Whitehall gives a very casual answer, "God understands everything" (88). She makes one last try, "Would you advise me according to Scripture? Could you do that much?" (89). Pastor Whitehall answers flatly, "I can tell you that the word *abortion* is never mentioned in the Bible" (89). Dynah ultimately leaves her home, and away from her family and friends seeks herself the peace of mind and answer from God reading the Bible and praying fervently all the time. In a hotel room, "Dynah sat on the edge of her bed and picked up her Bible. She had been reading the Psalms, taking what comfort she could in David's anguish and frustration" (234)

Dynah slowly begins to understand what she ought to do. Ethan had once expressed his hatred of the child while talking to Joe, "It's not a child. Don't tell me it is! This thing she carries is an abomination before God. It's a sucking parasite! The sooner she gets rid of it, the better" (82). Dynah speaks to Joe one day completely out of love for the child, "I choose life. I choose to believe God's Word. I choose to

believe in his presence and his promises. I choose to have this child. I choose to believe that God is the Father of the Father of the fatherless” (251). She continues, “However this child was conceived, God will be the Father. My baby won’t enter the world unloved or unwanted. If I can’t feel a full measure of joy, I know the Lord will” (251-52). At first, Dynah had thought to give birth to the baby and then give it up for adoption. But after she sees her baby, her mind changes and she decides to keep the baby herself, and then silently utters these words of praise to her God: “Oh, Lord, you formed my baby’s inward parts; you wove her in my womb. I give thanks to you, for she is fearfully and wonderfully made . . . She is beautiful as you are beautiful, perfect in every way” (364). Hence, a true devotee of Biblical God, Dynah, after a long struggle, eventually decides to give birth to the baby and keep it herself as a beautiful gift from God. Thus, the ethical dilemma of abortion gets resolved in the way it is approved by Christian principles and ethics.

English Oxford Dictionary defines “dilemma” as “a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially equally undesirable ones.” Dynah is in a serious dilemma. She has to choose between Christian ethics which says abortion is forbidden by God and, hence, morally wrong and consequentialist principle which says she has to abort the baby for doing so will only rescue her from her peril and bring about best consequences in the present situation. In her case, both alternatives are equally undesirable ones for Dynah. But then she finally chooses Christian ethics, and in choosing it, the novelist Rivers tries to bring about some good and happy consequences too. Dynah has given birth to a healthy beautiful daughter. And there is her true lover and faithful Christian friend, Joe by her side to support her and her baby for rest of her life. The black shadow looming over Dynah’s fate has been removed, and instead, a very pleasant atmosphere

spreads in the hospital room. Dynah is completely at peace, happy and thankful to God.

According to postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha's theory of "Third Space," when two different cultures, one strong and another weak, interact, it produces a new culture which is different from the original cultures but has something of the both cultures, thus, giving way to a kind of "hybrid" culture. And such hybrid culture is characterized by "ambivalence", "ambiguity" and "paradoxes" (1-39). In the resolution of the dilemma of abortion that Rivers provides at the end of the novel, she has tried to reconcile the Christian ethics with consequentialism. Christian ethics has been made dominant and finally victorious, akin to the colonial power, whereas, consequentialism has been weakened and overpowered, akin to colonized power. The baby is given birth and is placed in the good care of her own mother, whereas, Dynah is shown to be happy finally with a healthy and beautiful daughter and a true love and faithful support of her friend Joe. It seems all is well at the end. However, it is not the resolution in true sense, but just a kind of hybrid resolution wherein lies ambivalence, ambiguity and paradoxes which are the characteristics of a dilemmatic condition too.

Had Dynah given up the baby for abortion after giving it birth, the conflict could have been said to resolve in some way. She would have avoided the sin of committing abortion and then putting off the further consequences of having the baby she could have started a new life still supported by her family and good friend Joe. But by making Dynah decide to keep the baby herself, Rivers has made Christianity completely victorious, but then has lost the battle herself in doing so. Dynah is finally happy and convinced with her decision. But what if somebody asked her later in future who the father of the baby was? Will she be able to say that the baby was conceived in rape? Joe may marry Dynah and give her child his name as its

father, but when he shall have his own child someday, will not his love be biased? As Dynah will be engaged in rearing the child herself, will she be able to complete her studies now? What good earning job can she have yet now? Will Hannah also be able to accept the baby as her granddaughter and look after her? Douglas has already despised and disowned the baby. Will he change his mind now and be ready to support the upbringing of the child financially? All these questions remain unanswered.

Furthermore, has God really spoken to Dynah? Can't it be just her feelings incited by the reading of the Bible? Has God really answered her questions of anguish? Rivers implicitly suggests that Dynah's unbearable suffering was 'atonement' for the murder of the innocent babies committed by her mother and her grandmother in their own act of abortion. Hence, the very title of her novel is *The 'Atonement' Child*. Hannah is made to question her God, "Oh, Lord, why do you have to take it out on Dynah? It was my sin. What I did was of my doing . . . You're not being fair! Dynah's loved you since she was old enough to utter the name Jesus. She's never walked away from you like I did. Oh Lord, why does she have to suffer too?" (125). Evie raised the similar question, ". . . What I did all those years ago had nothing to do with Hannah. And yet she suffered. And now Dynah will suffer too. Oh, Lord God, it's like a curse that runs down through the family, the sins of the mother visited upon her children" (143-144). Even if God really spoke and said that he punished Dynah for Hannah's and Evie's sins, can it be accepted as fair judgement? Shouldn't God's judgement consider Dynah's innocence and faithfulness to Him? Why should she suffer her whole life for the sins committed by her parents? Doesn't it become gross injustice to her? So, how is the dilemma resolved here?

The practical consequences of the Dynah's decision to give birth to her baby and rear it herself will still be worse for all the characters involved even if Dynah and Joe could bear the thrashes of the society and remain happy. The idealist Dynah and Joe will either have to isolate themselves from the society and make world completely of their own, or move to a new society where they can start all over anew hiding their past.

Hence, Rivers' resolution is full of several ambiguous and paradoxical questions to which she has provided no answer at all. Or maybe she didn't even realize the possibility of these questions. This is so because in resolving the dilemma of abortion in her novel, Rivers has become unconsciously a victim of dilemma herself.

Rivers's dilemma is regarding *who* should be given justice: a victimized woman or an innocent child, and how? She sympathizes Dynah very much and seemingly tries to give her justice by allowing her to abort the child, but doesn't actually allow her to do so as it would do very injustice to the innocent child. So, in her dilemmatic condition she has tried to give justice to both by reconciling Christian ethics with consequentialism, but has failed to do so successfully, because what she gives to Dynah as justice – a beautiful daughter and a true lover – is nothing more than a beautiful appearance marred by ambiguities and paradoxes all inside. While she has been able to give justice to the innocent child by providing it its full term inside the womb, safe delivery and the right to care of its own mother, she has failed to give justice to Dynah - the rapist hasn't been identified and punished, Dynah lost her career and promising husband, and she will have to love and live with the fruit of rape rest of her life. In reality, Dynah has been made not just a victim of rape, but a victim of God's judgement too – a humble atonement for the sin of abortion

committed by others – and she has been made to happily accept it. In this way, though Rivers has tried to reconcile Christian ethics with consequentialist principles while providing resolution to the dilemma of abortion, she has failed to do so, in reality, leaving just ambivalence, ambiguity and paradoxes.

Hence, in the novel *The Atonement Child*, the Christian view that abortion is morally wrong has been challenged by the consequentialist view which judges an action through its consequences. From all practical judgments, it seems good and, hence, right for Dynah to abort the child and end her peril right there. But the Christian ethics with which she has been brought up pulls her back again and again. These two conflicting views create a serious ethical dilemma in the mind of Dynah, which the novelist Rivers tries to resolve ultimately by adhering to the Christian ethics, but in doing so, she has become herself a victim of the dilemma. Thus, Rivers outwardly tries to give justice to Dynah by allowing her to abort the child, but then, ultimately, prevents her from doing so as deep inside she is in dilemma herself and her dilemma comes from Christian ethics which values the right of life of the fetus than the “my body my right” of the mother.

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