

THE ABORTION ISSUE
THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

Whether abortions occur in the hundreds, thousands, millions, or tens of millions, the church has a responsibility to speak out against the murder of unborn children, murder being any unwarranted taking of a human life. The fact that such an act is condoned by the highest court of our land as a procedure to which every woman has a right is all the more reason why a stand against this evil should be taken. However, so many children are being aborted today that immediate action is needed. The church must tell the world that God's Word forbids abortion as an alternative for any woman, especially one who professes faith in the Creator of all life, Jesus Christ the Lord.

The magnitude of the abortion problem is so great that it ought to compel every Christian to unremitting activity, seeking an end to this travesty of human rights. This information on the extent of the problem is given for your thoughtful and prayerful consideration. However, if it does no more than lead to a shocked disapproval with no action following, you are disobeying the Scriptural command in Proverbs 24:11,12: "Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back. If you say, 'See, we did not know this,' does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work?" (NASB)

In 1980, the last year for which complete statistics are available, there were 1,553,900 legal abortions in the United States. This figure is supplied by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), the research arm of Planned Parenthood, one of the

most aggressive and well-financed advocates and providers of abortions in the world.

To obtain their statistics, AGI researchers contact as many providers of abortions as possible in an effort to obtain an accurate perspective of where abortions are being performed. Even then they do not get complete data. According to AGI there is a three to six percent underreporting in 1980.

This 1980 figure represents a 109 percent increase in legal abortions since 1973, when the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion on demand. According to AGI's annual report, there have been 9,634,570 abortions since January, 1973.

Correcting for a reporting error of three to six percent, the total for the eight year period may range as high as 10,212,644. Compare this with the estimated 5,821,000 Jews killed in Hitler's holocaust, or the 1,178,000 total U. S. deaths in all of its wars, and you will begin to see that we are not talking about a trivial problem.

Of the seven things which Solomon says are an abomination to God, the shedding of innocent blood is one of them (Proverbs 6:16, 17). What a river of innocent blood has been shed since 1973; it flows yet today.

This committee, commissioned by Annual Conference to study the problem of abortion, has attempted to ask and answer some crucial questions about this issue which we trust will shed light on it. It is our desire that this report will move every Bible Fellowship Church to act responsibly on what can only be decried as a national sin. To read this report and do nothing is to invite the judgment of God on our nation. To some degree that judgment has already begun. May God have mercy upon us and continue in His longsuffering.

THE ABORTION ISSUE
A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

The following arguments are a condensed revision of the "Report of the Committee to Study the Matter of Abortion," presented to the 38th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Concerning the matter of abortion, we believe Scripture gives these answers to the following questions:

1. Can a decision in favor of abortion (in general or in a particular situation) ever be an act of love? The greatest of the commandments is the law of love (Matthew 22:36-40 and parallels; John 13:34f.; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14).

Therefore, our first obligation in any ethical decision is to manifest genuine love for God and for other people.

2. What is the unborn child, according to the Scriptures? He is, first of all, a creature of God.
 - a. Ultimately, the unborn child belongs not to his parents, nor to human society in general, nor to government, but to God. No created thing is man's simply to use as he pleases, disregarding God's will. Man has dominion over the earth, to be sure. Yet this dominion was not intended to usurp God's authority; rather it was intended to be a stewardship under it.
 - b. To say that the unborn child is ours to treat as we please is to give less consideration to the child than God

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demands we give to rivers and rocks, snail darters and whales. God says we are to subdue the rivers and rocks (the inanimate creation); we are to rule over snail darters and whales (the animate creation); we are not to destroy them.

3. Does some magic occur at birth, or at some point between conception and birth, when the child develops uniquely human characteristics in the place of uniquely subhuman ones?
 - a. From the moment of conception, every child is a human child whose humanity is verifiable in every cell of his body. From the point of conception, he has a full complement of human chromosomes and is in that respect different from every subhuman embryo or fetus.
 - b. As a necessary consequence, every child from the point of conception is more than a merely "living" creature: he is a human being and therefore a bearer of the image of God.
4. In what case, if ever, is it legitimate for us to destroy divine image bearers? Are we not attempting to thwart God's activity in the conception of children?
 - a. The faith of Eve is demonstrated particularly in connection with her child-bearing with the help of God (Genesis 4:1, 25).
 - b. The Abrahamic (Genesis 15:1-5) and the Davidic (2 Samuel 7:12-16) covenants contain divine promises of seed, and the other Old Testament covenants presuppose such promises.
 - c. The Old Testament abounds in genealogies, demonstrating the historical development

of the "seed of the promise" through the birth of children, a development which reaches its culmination in the birth of Christ (Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-28).

- d. It is in this context that we should understand the Biblical regulation of sexual activity and also the profound conviction of the Biblical saints that conception was a precious gift of God while barrenness was a curse (Genesis 4:1,25; 29:31-35; 1 Samuel 1:1-20; Ruth 4:13; Psalm 127:3-5; 128:1-6).
5. When, if ever does man have the right to interrupt the marvelous exhibition of God's wisdom and concern that is demonstrated in the growth of the child between conception and birth? This gestation period is ruled throughout by God's providence and care.
 - a. In Psalm 139:13-16, David reflects on the amazing knowledge and wisdom by which God formed his body in the womb of his mother. (Note that verse 16 contains the only occurrence in Scripture of the Hebrew term golem, embryo or fetus.)
 - b. In Jeremiah 1:5, the prophet is said to be "formed in the belly" of his mother by God (compare in this connection Job 31:15; Psalm 119:73; Ecclesiastes 11:5).
 6. When, if ever, has man the right to destroy an unborn child, thereby cutting off the life of an individual who is being divinely prepared to play a particular role in God's world? Scripture assumes a significant personal continuity between pre-natal and post-natal human life.
 - a. In Psalm 139:13, David sees himself as

existing in his mother's womb.

- b. In Isaiah 44:2 and 24, similar language is used, this time with God Himself as the speaker.
- c. In the New Testament we learn that John the Baptist, while still in his mother's womb (in the sixth month of her pregnancy or late -- cf. Luke 1:24,26) responded to the salutation of Mary in a way befitting the character of his later ministry (Luke 1:41, 44).
 - (1) This event should not, of course, be construed as the natural, usual course of events: clearly the incident is an extraordinary sign of Jesus' Lordship. Yet it presupposes the sort of continuity between pre-natal and post-natal life that we have noted above.
 - (2) John in the womb is called brephos, a babe, and is said to have expressed emotion, leaping "for joy." Such is indeed the general pattern of Scriptural usage: for those in the womb are commonly referred to in Scripture by the same language used of persons already born (cf. Genesis 25:22; Job 3:11-16; Hosea 12:3).
- d. At the very least, this continuity indicates that God is not only forming and caring for the unborn child; He is forming him as a specific individual, to fit him specifically for his post-natal calling. This continuity is a warning against distinguishing with unwarranted sharpness between fetal and infant life.

e. In fact, personal continuity extends back in time to the point of conception.

- (1) Psalm 51:5 clearly and strikingly presses this continuity back to the point of conception. In this passage David is reflecting on the sin in his heart that had recently taken the form of adultery and murder. He recognizes that the sin of his heart is not itself a recent phenomenon, but goes back to the point of his conception in the womb of his mother: "and in sin did my mother conceive me."
- (2) The personal continuity between David's fetal life and his adult life goes back as far as conception, and extends even to his ethical relation to God.

7. Inasmuch as the unborn child is an individual God is preparing for life, who will dare to take upon himself the responsibility of ending that life? There is a continuity in the mind of God which extends backwards in time even before conception into eternity.

a. This truth is expressed in several passages.

- (1) God knew Jeremiah not only after his conception, but even before it (Jeremiah 1:5).
- (2) The incarnate Son of God was given His name by the angel before His actual incarnation (Luke 2:21).
- (3) Levi is said to have paid tithes to Melchizedek while still "in the loins of" his great-grandfather Abraham (Hebrews 7:9f.).

b. All of these assertions are true because of

the sovereignty of God who works all things after the counsel of His own will (Ephesians 1:11). Even before their conception, therefore, Scripture speaks of people in the language used of persons already born.

- (1) All of us, even before we "exist," have a kind of "personal existence" as ideas in the mind of God.
 - (2) Let us note a positive implication: human life in the womb is a certain stage in the realization of an eternal plan. Even before conception, God sees as it were the "finished product"--the complete man with all his gifts and characteristics, in His belief, fitted for blessing or destruction.
8. Is there anything in Scripture which suggests that the unborn child is anything less than a human person from the moment of conception? The only passage which has been alleged to make such a suggestion is Exodus 21:22-25 which we will now discuss in some detail.

According to the NASB (italics are theirs):

22. And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him; and he shall pay as the judges decide.
23. But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life,
24. eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
25. burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

A common interpretation of this passage is seen in the translation above, where the woman is viewed as having a miscarriage ("the premature birth of a fetus, so that it does not live; abortion", Webster's New World Dictionary: College Edition (1955)). Two cases are considered: (1) there is no further injury (presumably to the mother, the child being dead, v. 22); and (2) there is further injury (vv. 23-25). This passage has been used to argue that Scripture does not view the fetus as fully human--since its destruction is only fined--and therefore abortion is not murder. We will comment on the validity of this translation presently.

Assuming for the moment that the translation is correct, notice that it says even accidental abortion (due to negligence) is a crime which may be fined as the husband demands. This seems to be as severe a penalty as for accidental homicide (see Ex. 21:12-14; Num. 35:10-34; Deut. 19:1-13), where even a negligent homicide (Deut. 19:5) is protected from vengeance and apparently not even fined. If accidental abortion is so punished, how shall we find warrant here for intentional abortion?

Yet it appears that the translation above is inaccurate. To properly reflect the Hebrew, it should read:

- 22. And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him; and he shall pay as the judges decide.
- 23. But if there is injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life . . .

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"injury" in verses 22 and 23, as nothing corresponding to this word appears in the Hebrew (the NASB has so indicated by using italics). We have also replaced "she has a miscarriage"-- which implies death of the child--by the more ambiguous "she gives birth", since the Hebrew literally reads "her children come out".

According to this more accurate translation, the striking of the pregnant woman produces a premature birth (the death or survival of the child is not specified). Two cases are distinguished: (1) there is no injury (presumably either to mother or child); (2) there is injury, which may vary in severity up to death.

The first case is penalized financially, perhaps to compensate for the danger and trauma involved (cp. the restoration penalties for stealing, Ex. 22:1,4,7). The latter case is penalized in a way proportional to the harm done, just as in the cases of intentional injury (Lev. 24:17-22) and false witness (Deut. 19:16-21). This interpretation preserves the original ambiguity of the Hebrew, which does not specify (1) that the child dies at birth, (2) that the injury is "further", or (3) that the injury is confined to the mother.

According to this interpretation, the pregnant mother and her child are equally human and equally protected--in agreement with other Scriptures that touch on this matter. The sanctity of pregnancy is such that pregnant women are to receive special consideration before the law to protect them even from accidental injury. Intentional abortion is obviously precluded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We urge pastors to preach on the subject of abortion and the sexual immorality which often leads to it.
2. We urge Christians to become informed on both the extent of abortion and legislation before the state legislatures and Congress, and to write their representatives to vote for abolition or at least restriction of abortion. To obtain such information, a subscription to the NATIONAL RIGHT TO LIFE NEWS can be purchased for \$12.00 per year for a bimonthly copy. The address for subscribing is National Right to Life News, Suite 402, 419 - 7th St., N. W., Washington, D. C. 20004.
3. We urge local congregations to show films on abortion and/or have a Sunday School series on the subject. We recommend (a) the Schaeffer-Koop film series "Whatever Happened to the Human Race", and (b) "Assignment Life". Your Christian film distributor should be able to obtain both films for your use.

Recommended books for the Sunday School are (a) C. Everett Koop, THE RIGHT TO LIVE; THE RIGHT TO DIE (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1976); (b) William Brennan, MEDICAL HOLOCAUSTS I: EXTERMINATIVE MEDICINE IN NAZI GERMANY AND CONTEMPORAY AMERICA (Boston: Nordland Publishing International, Inc., 1980); (c) Duane T. Gish and Clifford Wilson, MANIPULATING LIFE: WHERE DOES IT STOP? (San Diego, California: Master Books, 1981); (d) Dr. & Mrs. J. C. Willke, HANDBOOK ON ABORTION (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hayes Publishing Co., Inc., 1971).

4. We recommend that material on the abortion question be purchased for church libraries and

tract racks. Besides the books cited above, we recommend the following pamphlets and brochures:

- (a) "The Questions Most Peoples Ask About Abortion" by Melody Green
"Children - Things We Throw Away?" by Melody Green
Obtainable from Last Days Ministries, Tract Department, Box 40, Lindale, Texas 75771
- (b) "When You Were Formed In Secret" by Gary Bergel & C. Everett Koop. Obtainable from Intercessors for America, P.O. Box D, Elyria, Ohio 44036
- (c) "The Sanctity of Life" by Bruce Dunn, Th.D. Obtainable from The Grace Worship Hour, Box 3452, Peoria, Illinois 61614
- (d) "Abortion and Psalm 139" by Curtis J. Young
"Abortion on Demand?" by Harold O. J. Brown, Ph.D. Obtainable from Christian Action Council, 422 C Street N.E., Washington, D. C. 20002
- (e) "If just one person had told me that abortion is killing, I might have two living children today" - Author's name withheld Obtainable from Seashell Press, P.O. Box 3348, Lake Almanor Peninsula, Ca. 96137
- (f) "But Nobody Said 'Think'" by Audra Stevens Obtainable from Bithright Supplies, Sun Life, Thaxton, Va. 24174

5. We recommend that Christians help those contemplating abortion to consider alternatives. We would recommend each local congregation familiarize itself with crisis pregnancy services which do not advocate abortion. If there are none in your area, perhaps you should consider starting one in conjunction with other evangelical congregations in your area.

6. We recommend that the Church Government of the Bible Fellowship Church consider abortion as a grounds for church discipline.

7. We recommend that Christians consider carefully the implications of this study for their own personal actions even though they themselves may not be directly involved in abortion.
 - (a) Christian women should patronize only those members of the medical profession who do not perform or recommend abortions, or refer patients to abortion providers.
 - (b) Members of the medical profession should consider the possibility that their jobs may come to depend upon consent to or involvement in abortions, and be ready to make necessary sacrifices to stand for the truth.

SOURCE MATERIAL USED IN COMMITTEE

1. January/February, 1982 issue of FAMILY PLANNING PERSPECTIVES, published by the Alan Guttmacher Institute.
2. April 8, 1982 issue of NATIONAL RIGHT TO LIFE NEWS, published by the National Right to Life Committee, Washington, D. C.
3. "Report of the Committee to Study the Matter of Abortion" presented to the Thirty-Eighth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, May 24-29, 1971, published by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
4. Rousas John Rushdoony, THE INSTITUTES OF BIBLICAL LAW (The Craig Press, 1973).
5. "Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Abortion" adopted by the Sixth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, June 19-23, 1978, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Committee Members:

Charles J. McConnell, Chairman; Donald Kirkwood,
Robert Newman, Ph.D.; Jeffrey C. Stickler,
Robert Zentz

STEWARDSHIP STUDY COMMITTEE

The Ninety - Eighth Annual Conference formed a Stewardship Study Committee to continue to study the formation of a stewardship program for the Bible Fellowship Church, including delineation of a statement of philosophy and policy and a formulation of by-laws for such a program.

The committee met four times during the year. In addition to the seven men who had served on the earlier Ad Hoc Stewardship Committee, who were named to this committee, and the three at large members elected by the Ninety - Eighth Annual Conference, Dana E. Weller served on the committee, as chosen by the Board of Victory Valley Camp. Jansen E. Hartman served the committee as chairman, and Daniel G. Ziegler as secretary.

The committee adopted the following material, which it presents to the Ninety - Ninth Annual Conference, with its recommendation that it be adopted at first reading:

(The material presented by the Committee is found in the minutes of this yearbook.)

STEWARDSHIP STUDY COMMITTEE

Jansen E. Hartman, Chairman; Daniel G. Ziegler,
Secretary; James A. Beil, Bruce Ellingson,
Jay Fasnacht, Robert Gaugler, Roy A. Hertzog,
John H. Riggall, Clyde W. Snyder, Harold E. Snyder,
Dana E. Weller