

ABORTION: AN UNCOMFORTABLE EVIL

By Ashby L. Camp

Copyright © 2010 by Ashby L. Camp. All rights reserved.

In the infamous 1973 case of *Roe v. Wade*, the U. S. Supreme Court in effect amended the U. S. Constitution by ruling that it prohibited states from forbidding a woman from procuring an abortion during the first six months of pregnancy for any reason she deemed fit. Though the ruling permitted states to forbid abortions during the last three months of pregnancy, even then the states could not do so where the abortion was necessary to preserve "the life or health of the mother." In the companion case of *Doe v. Bolton*, the court defined "health" so broadly that the practical effect was to legalize abortion up until the time of birth. Thus, the U. S. Senate Judiciary Committee in 1983, after thoroughly investigating the state of the law, concluded that "no significant legal barriers of any kind whatsoever exist today in the United States for a woman to obtain an abortion for any reason during any stage of her pregnancy."¹ In granting to women the absolute right of life and death over their unborn children our society has given them a power that rightly belongs only to God.

From 1973 through 2005, more than 45 million legal abortions were performed in the United States.² That's more than 3,852 abortions per day for those 32 years, and millions more were performed in the years since 2005. The leading reasons given by women for having an abortion are (a) having a baby would interfere with work, school, or other responsibilities, (b) they cannot afford a child, and (c) they do not want to be a single parent or are having problems with their husband or partner.

I will spare you the gruesome details of how these children are crushed, burned, and dismembered, but certainly the God in whose image they were created (Gen. 1:26-27, 5:1, 9:6) and who knew them and knit them together in the womb (Isa. 44:24; Jer. 1:5; Job 10:8-10, 31:15; Ps. 139:13) is displeased by their willful destruction. He is the champion of the weak and powerless (Ps. 12:5, 41:1, 72:1-4), and he does not look favorably on efforts to narrow the scope of our moral obligations by means of self-serving definitions (Lk. 10:25-37).

Exodus 21:22-25 provides no support for the claim that a fetus is not fully human. In fact, it shows the opposite. That text regulates the case of a pregnant woman who intervenes in a fight between two men and is struck so as to give birth prematurely. If both she and the child survive the experience without injury, "[t]he only compensation allowed, . . . as sanctioned and approved by the judges, is the husband's request for a fine

¹ Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18-21.

² See http://www.abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_statistics and http://www.nrlc.org/factsheets/fs03_abortionintheus.pdf (accessed on 6/2/10).

because of the scare that this premature birth has brought to that household."³ But if she or the child sustains an injury, the law of *lex talionis* comes into effect. Thus, "taking the life of a human fetus is considered homicide, just as is taking the life of the mother."⁴

The early church was unanimous in its condemnation of abortion. As noted by Orthodox scholar Alexander Webster, "It is one of only several moral issues on which not one dissenting opinion has ever been expressed by the Church Fathers." He adds, "Even a cursory reading of the patristic literature reveals a relentless campaign against the inhuman sin of abortion."⁵ For example, both the *Didache* and the *Epistle of Barnabas*, Christian writings from the late first or early second century, expressly denounce the practice of abortion.⁶ This condemnation was repeated by Christian theologians throughout the centuries.⁷ But the church in the late 20th and early 21st centuries seems oddly passive about the matter. We are in the midst of an obscene slaughter, and yet we rarely mention it.

I think our reluctance to speak out on the issue is due in part to our desire not to burden members of our congregations who may have committed this sin. That sensitivity is in some ways admirable, but if we cease preaching against sins the members of our congregations have committed, we will cease to preach against sin at all. Such timidity not only dims a light that our culture sorely needs, it also weakens the resolve of those facing temptation. Rather than going silent, we should reassure the faithful of their forgiveness while speaking clearly and lovingly against all forms of evil.

To the extent our reluctance to speak out is because we fear upsetting those who deny that abortion is sinful, we could learn from the example of the late Roman Catholic

³ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *What Does the Lord Require?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 114.

⁴ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 497. For detailed support of this interpretation, see Jack W. Cottrell, "Abortion and the Mosaic Law," *Christianity Today* 17 (March 16, 1973): 6-9; H. Wayne House, "Miscarriage or Premature Birth: Additional Thoughts on Exodus 21:22-25," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1978): 105-123; Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 247-248; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 323-324; James K. Hoffmeier, "Abortion and the Old Testament Law" in James K. Hoffmeier, ed., *Abortion: A Christian Understanding and Response* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 57-62; Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 79-80; John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 64-65; Donal P. O'Mathuna, "Bodily Injuries, Murder, Manslaughter" in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Barker, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 93-94; Davidson, 493-497; and Kaiser, 112-114.

⁵ Quoted in Terry Schlossberg and Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Not My Own: Abortion and the Marks of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 4.

⁶ Michael J. Gorman, *Abortion & the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 49-50.

⁷ Schlossberg and Achtemeier, 4-6.

nun Teresa of Calcutta. In 1994, she was the keynote speaker at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. With a pro-abortion U. S. president and vice president at her side, she declared:

But I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child, murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another? . . . Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love but to use any violence to get what they want.⁸

⁸ Transcript available at <http://www.famousquotes.me.uk/speeches/Mother-Teresa-Speech/index.htm>.