

CMDA Statement on Abortion with references

Abortion

1. We oppose the practice of abortion and urge the active development and employment of alternatives.
2. The practice of abortion is contrary to:
 - The revealed, written Word of God.
 - Respect for the sanctity of human life.
 - Traditional, historical, and Judeo-Christian medical ethics.
3. We believe that biblical Christianity affirms certain basic principles which dictate against interruption of human gestation; namely:
 - The ultimate sovereignty of a loving God, the Creator of all life.
 - The great value of human life transcending that of the quality of life.
 - The moral responsibility of human sexuality.
4. While we recognize the right of physicians and patients to follow the dictates of individual conscience before God, we affirm the final authority of Scripture, which teaches the sanctity of human life.

*Christian Medical and Dental Associations
Approved by the House of Delegates Passed
with 59 approvals, 3 opposed, 1 abstention
May 4, 1985. San Diego, California.*

Explanation

Abortion, although widely practiced, was considered immoral and illegal in most western societies until this generation. In the United States, state laws, hospital policies, and professional codes clearly prohibited the practice because it destroyed a developing human being. The social ferment of the 1960's brought about increased emphasis on individual rights, including women's rights. Many women's rights activists sought legalization of abortion, initially to help women who were victims of rape or incest and women who were carrying deformed babies, as well as to eliminate the dangers of illegal abortion. Later, the goal of the advocates became abortion-on-demand for any reason at all. The U.S. Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision in 1973 struck down all state laws that restricted abortion. With time, the issue has become increasingly contentious and even violent, and positions have become polarized. The designations have changed from pro-abortion vs. anti-abortion to pro-choice vs. pro-life, but the issue refuses to go away.

Early Christian response to the pro-abortion (or pro-choice) activism was mixed. Roman Catholics were consistent and steadfast in their opposition to abortion for any reason except to save the life of the mother. Protestants were divided. Most liberal denominations and individuals were in favor of lessening restrictions on abortion and took strong pro-choice positions. Some have recently retreated somewhat and decry casual abortion, but most still believe it is a woman's right to terminate an early unwanted pregnancy. Early in the debate, evangelicals tended to ignore the issue, fearing that it was part of the "social gospel" which would detract from their primary goal of sharing the gospel. Following the lead of several prominent conservative Christian voices, most have subsequently adopted a position very close to that of the Roman Catholic Church. Many have become involved in abortion alternatives (e.g., Crisis Pregnancy Centers), some have become involved in abortion protests (e.g., Operation Rescue), and some have become involved in legislative activism.

Abortion was the first issue tackled by the Ethics Commission of the C.M.S. After several drafts and revisions, the position statement on Abortion was passed by the House of Delegates in 1985 following major debate by the delegates. Subsequent statements were passed regarding the Use of Fetal Tissue for Experimentation and Transplantation (1989) and the use of Anti-Progestational Agents: RU-486 (1991).

The wording of these statements reflects a strong sanctity of life perspective. This perspective is based on scripture which indicates that the fetus was created by God and seen by Him (Psalm 139:13-16), considered worthy to be called by name (Isaiah 49:1, 5), and set apart for specific tasks (Jeremiah 1:4-5). Other Old Testament passages which affirm the personhood of the unborn include Job 3:3-4; Psalm 95:6-7, 100:3, 119:73; Isaiah 44:2,24. The encounter between Mary and Elizabeth recorded in Luke 1:41-45 implies that even three months before birth John was fulfilling his prophetic role, and early in gestation Jesus was already a person worthy of honor.

There is, however, some variety of interpretation by conservative Christians of how this clear scriptural principle of the sanctity of life should be applied today. While most are close to the absolute stance of the Roman Catholic Church, a few would not forbid abortion in all situations. For instance the positions taken by Jones and Almquist in CMDS Journal articles abstracted in this resource find some instances of abortion less problematic than others. Others believe strongly that abortion is always wrong for the Christian, but are unwilling to seek legislative or judicial measures which proscribe the procedure for the nation as a whole. Unfortunately, some who firmly believe that scripture absolutely forbids all abortion use the stance taken by others on abortion as a litmus test of orthodoxy.

In 1991, the CMDS Ethics Commission considered a recommendation to re-write the current statement on Abortion because scripture does not explicitly prohibit abortion as is suggested in item 2 (a). It was felt by some members that the current wording might cause non- Christians to question the credibility of the CMDS statement. After long discussion, and because of the difficulty reaching consensus on the original statement, it was decided to leave the statement intact.

The secular and Christian literature on abortion is voluminous. The suggested readings which follow are not meant to be exhaustive, but were chosen in an attempt to support the CMDS position, although some do display a broader perspective.

Abstracts

Jones DG. Abortion: Thoughts on a perplexing issue. CMDS Journal Spring 1983; XIV(1):4-6

The author claims that both extreme "pro-life" and "pro-choice" positions are inadequate; they are both absolute, and they both fail to take account of all factors. He argues that the fetus is part of a continuum which commenced prior to fertilization and will not end at birth. He states, "Once a fetus has been conceived, that fetus must be regarded with seriousness and concern. Under normal circumstances, it has a right to full development." Wantedness and convenience are not morally relevant. However, he denies that the fetus has an absolute right to life. He argues that abortion may be justified (a) to preserve the physical health of the mother, (b) in extreme circumstances to preserve the mental health of the mother, (c) when pregnancy results from rape or incest, (d) when the fetus is so severely abnormal that non-existence might be considered a benefit to the fetus. He argues against the abortion of individuals with less severe anomalies, stating that the emotional or financial burden to others is not sufficient justification to deny life to genetically defective individuals. He closes by urging compassion for individuals confronted with such difficult decisions.

Shaw CT. The Death of Kleine. CMDS Journal, Summer 1983; XIV(2):29-31

The author narrates the fetal perspective of events in the womb, beginning as the fertilized egg tumbles down the fallopian tube. This is not a blob of tissue, but a distinct individual who grows and develops and at 12 weeks of gestation discovers that he has a twin occupying the womb with him. The narrative is interspersed with brief thoughts and emotions which might be experienced by parents who are overjoyed with the pregnancy, or those of parents who are greatly distressed by the prospect of having a baby. The narrative is suddenly and prematurely interrupted when abortion claims these two lives.

Hughes EM. The issue is life. CMDS Journal, Winter 1983; XIV(4):pp 18-23

The author laments that physicians have participated in millions of abortions and that abortion is considered to be immoral by a smaller percentage of physicians than the general public. While some decry the polarization of the issue, he declares that there can be no middle ground just as there was no compromise possible on the issue of slavery. He quotes numerous biblical passages and cites several biblical scholars to build a strong case for the sanctity of unborn life. He then discusses the meaning of "person" and the misuse of the concepts of "potentiality" and embryonic twinning. He makes a clear case for the individuality and personhood of the zygote and goes on to propose that the law should be changed to protect all innocent humans. He counters arguments made by those who would make exceptions for rape, incest or fetal abnormalities. Because health professionals are stewards of life, he urges us to become involved in education, legislative activity and crisis pregnancy centers.

Ney PG. We wrestle with death. CMDS Journal, Spring 1984; XV(1):25-27

The author begins by calling abortion "the greatest sin humanity has ever committed." He believes that anti-life forces have caused several distortions: (a) the hope of survival of the species has become a fear of over-population, (b) sex has been changed from source of species survival into a search for pleasure, (c) the parent/child bond is strained by the sequellae of unresolved grief following abortion, (d) some mothers likewise have an aversion to touching their healthy children, (e) the normal restraint of parental rage at their children has been lessened, (f) some parents have less sensitivity to their baby's needs because of their belief that the unborn is not a person, and (g) some fathers refuse to become attached to the unborn for fear that he or she might not survive. He believes that these distortions can lead to more child abuse, less inclination to conditioned child protection, and a fear of ridicule for speaking on behalf of the unborn. The net effect, according to the author, is an endangerment of the human species.

Schiedermaier DL. Abortion: Manasseh's legacy...and ours. CMDS Journal, Winter 1987;XVIII(1):5-9

The matter of first importance in the ongoing abortion debate, according to the author, is the status of the fetus rather than the procedure of abortion. He makes a strong scripture-based argument for the sanctity of fetal life. In tabular form as well in the text, he defines and characterizes five positions which attempt to balance fetal rights and maternal rights: total reproductive freedom, abortion on demand, balanced rights, the right to life, and the absolute right to life.

While a majority of U.S. citizens favor some form of legalized abortion, many (or most?) do not favor allowing abortion to be available under all circumstances. He then delineates several new medical developments which are likely to enhance the public recognition of the status of the fetus. He encourages Christians to focus on the status of the fetus in order to minimize some of the effects of Roe v. Wade.

Clark DK. Is the sanctity of life principle relevant today? CMDS Journal, Fall 1988; XIX(3):10-15

The "alleged inflexibility of the absolutistic Sanctity of Life view has intimidated some Christians into accepting a Quality of Life view." After this opening, the author quotes Joseph Fletcher's argument that the absolute view fails to resolve the extreme cases, particularly that of severely handicapped infants. He then cites Dan Brock's argument that the absolutist position fails in the killing/letting die distinction and "leads inevitably to a position where all life must be saved at all costs."

The author rebuts these claims by stating that evangelical ethicists (he quotes Charles Kraft and Arthur Holmes and cites others) can maintain an absolutist ethic but use quality of life factors in making decisions about the application of the absolute principle. He contends that Fletcher has confused principlism and legalism. He notes that scripture contains no word for "absolute" and then he offers two meanings of the word, universal and exceptionless. He claims that most biblical norms are universal, but need not be exceptionless, and only a few such as the commands to love God and neighbor are exceptionless.

CMDS Journal, Summer 1990; XIX(2):4-10 Four articles on Operation Rescue

Hirsh MR. Commitment to sacrifice: What Operation Rescue is doing.

Fern DR. Why I participate.

Randall JS. Why I do not participate.

Frame R. An objective evaluation

Operation Rescue (O.R.) is described as a peaceful and non-violent attempt to bring to an end to the "holocaust" of abortion. Its motivation is scriptural (Proverbs 24:11) and its example is Christ. The first article chronicles the history of O.R. and describes police and judicial mistreatment of protestors. The author addresses the question of why there is dissension about involvement among Christians, and concludes that apathy must be replaced by a willingness to sacrifice.

One rescuer writes that he is involved because O.R. has been an extremely effective means of raising the conscience of America, and because social change rarely occurs without conflict or challenge. He states that physicians have abandoned their professional responsibility, and he encourages them to become knowledgeable, to get involved, and to refuse take part in abortions.

A non-participant believes that not all are called to the same efforts, and that there are many other ways to support the cause of life. He encourages strength through unity.

"...as abortion has divided society at large, so have approaches to the problem divided the believing community" says one observer. Some favor political compromise, others maintain a belief in uncompromising abolition of abortion. Some oppose O.R. thinking it is poor strategy to engender more public opposition, others say image is a non-issue. Although he feels the jury is still out on the effectiveness of O.R.'s approach, the author is convinced that the O.R. movement is not justified in claiming their motivation is purely principle and unconcerned with image. He believes that their non-violent strategy obscures an underlying "just war" stance.

Almquist A. When does human life begin? CMDS Journal, Winter 1989; XX(4):13-15

The author begins by lamenting that many who are opposed to abortion are not willing to undertake other 'pro-life' causes. He defends a scriptural portrayal of prenatal human life and identity. He questions, however, the position taken by many that human life begins at the moment of fertilization. Instead he supports the view that implantation is a more biologically tenable, and a more pragmatically useful (vis a vis methods of contraception), position.

Readers responses. No end to 'Beginning of Life'. CMDS Journal, Summer 1990; XXI(2):17-20

Eight earnest responses to Dr. Almquist's article, most disagreeing, a few supporting his view.

Forsythe CD. Abortion is not a 'necessary evil': Why Americans oppose abortion but want to keep it legal. Christianity Today May 24/1999:63-4

The author discusses 4 myths which have led many Americans to believe that abortion is a necessary evil and points out the serious implications for future public policy brought about by this distorted thinking.

Bibliography

Hilgers TW, Horan DJ (eds). Abortion and Social Justice. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1972.

A compilation of scholarly and well-reasoned writings on the medical, legal, and social issues early in the abortion debate.

Nilsson L. A Child Is Born. New York: Delacorte Press, 1977.

A beautiful photographic presentation of prenatal life.

Tiefel HO. The unborn: Human values and responsibilities. JAMA 1978; 239:2263-2267.

The author, after discussing definitions, concepts and 'biblical bearings', concludes that the unborn are sufficiently like us that they must be considered human beings and we are therefore morally responsible for what happens to them.

Schaeffer FA, Koop CE. Whatever Happened to the Human Race? Old Tappen, NJ: Revell, 1979.
One of the first strong statements against abortion (plus euthanasia and infanticide) by respected evangelical voices. Well presented from a biblical and historical perspective.

Nathanson BN. Aborting America. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979.

An expose of the deceptive argumentation and statistics used by pro-abortion advocates in the 1960's and 70's to advance their cause. The author was an abortion advocate and practitioner until philosophical and moral reasoning led him to conclude that abortion was wrong.

Verny T, Kelly J. The Secret Life of the Unborn Child. Toronto: Collins, 1981.

This book gives scientific information in lay language about the intellectual and emotional development of the unborn child.

Gorman MJ. Abortion & the Early Church. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1982.

This historical review shows that the abortion debate is not a twentieth century problem.

Atkinson D. Some theological perspectives on the human embryo. [two parts] Ethics & Medicine 1986; 2(1):8-10 and 2(2):23-24,32.

After laying a framework for Christian ethics taken from the biblical narrative of the flood, the author delineates four principles he deduces: (1) our understanding of scientific data must be made within the context of a created order, (2) all life has value, and there are restrictions on the taking of life, (3) persons and animals are different, and (4) there is an absolute prohibition against shedding innocent human life. He then discusses the divine image created within humans using several Old Testament and New Testament passages.

Strong C, Anderson G. The moral status of the near-term fetus. Journal of Medical Ethics 1989; 15:25-27.

The authors argue that the fetus has the same moral status as a newborn, and thus should be regarded as a person. They go on to say that this does not preclude justifiable killing of the fetus, at least to save the life of the mother.

Spagnola AG. Identity and status of the human embryo. Ethics & Medicine 1990; 6(3):42.

This one page summary of the 1988-89 study sessions of the Board of Directors of the Italian Catholic University's Center for bioethics highlights biological, philosophical, legal, psychological, ethical, and theological aspects of the question.

Beckwith FJ. The misuse of maternal mortality statistics in the abortion debate. Ethics & Medicine 1991; 7(2):18.

The author points out the misuse of numbers by both sides in the debate.

Sims PF. Teenage pregnancy and abortion: A review. Ethics & Medicine 1992; 8(1):6.

A factual review of the many problems of teenage pregnancy and abortion.

Gorman MJ. Why is the New Testament silent about abortion? Christianity Today 1/11/93:27-29.

Put into historical perspective, the author maintains that the fourth century collection of first century Jewish-Christian writings is indeed against abortion.

Kristol E. Picture perfect: The politics of prenatal testing. Ethics & Medicine 1993; 9(3):23-31.

An in-depth review of the new technologies which allow parents and physicians to "eradicate illness in a whole new way ". The author stresses that these new capabilities have produced subtle quality-of-life standards and not so subtle ways of discouraging birth of those who do not measure up.

Young K. The zygote, the embryo, and personhood: An attempt at conceptual clarification. Ethics & Medicine 1994; 10(1):2-7.

The author concludes "An embryo's personhood rests then in his being, not in his acts or functions or in what happens to him."

Thorp JM. Prenatal diagnosis and therapy. Chapter 2 in New Issues in Medical Ethics. Bristol, TN: Christian Medical & Dental Society, 1995.

The author gives clear scientific data on the issue of prenatal testing which can be used by physicians and parents-to-be who come from a pro-life perspective.

Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. The struggle against abortion: Why the use of lethal force is not morally justifiable. Ethics & Medicine 1995; 11(2):26-32.

A well-reasoned and well-articulated defense of its title.

Meilander G. Body, Soul, and Bioethics. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.

The author discusses the history of modern bioethics and public policy, especially in regard to the emphasis on personhood and autonomy. He concludes that abortion is the issue that will not die because of its central focus on personhood and autonomy.

Moreland JP, Mitchell J. Is the human person a substance or a property-thing? Ethics & Medicine 1995; 11(3):50-55.

This paper concludes "...to be a human person is to possess an essential human nature. The unborn are individual human substances, possessing an essentially human nature; therefore they are human persons. Functional definitions of personhood are arbitrary, metaphysically inadequate and ethically problematic."

Cameron NM, Schiedermayer DL (eds). Bioethics and the Future of Medicine. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.

This book includes five chapters which discuss abortion from various perspectives:

#13 Smith SJ - Post-abortion syndrome: Fact or fiction

#14 Roberge LF - Abortifacient vaccines: Technological update

#15 Beckwith FJ - From personhood to bodily autonomy: The shifting legal focus in the abortion debate

#16 O Mathuna DP - The Bible and abortion: What of the 'Image of God' ?

#17 Pohl CD - Abortion: Responsibility and moral betrayal.

Paton D. The use of backstreet abortion arguments in favour of legalized abortion. Ethics & Medicine 1997; 13(1):5-10.

The author maintains that the statistics cannot be believed, but more important, the fetus' right to protection should not depend on such arguments, but is based on the recognition that he or she is a human being distinct from the mother.

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