

ABORTION AND THE INCARNATION*

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The world-renowned Strasbourgeois Albert Schweitzer wrote, "There is no historical task which so reveals a man's true self as the writing of a Life of Jesus."¹ A contributor to the evangelical symposium on the control of human reproduction commented, "By the same token, here in another area of study which also touches deeps of human conviction and experience, it is no less likely that we, as much as the New Testament teaching, are apt to be that which is laid bare."² One might therefore accept a paraphrase of Schweitzer's statement and say that there is no ethical task which so reveals a man's true self as his treatment of abortion. If we can say this with even a moderate measure of truth, then we must be prepared to be revealed as men and women of mixed motives—as persons made in the image of God and yet fallen short of God's glory.

1. *Abortion: What It Is*

Abortion is generally defined as the expulsion from the mother's womb of a living fetus which is incapable of surviving outside the womb. When the fetus is capable of surviving outside the womb, he is called viable and should he enter the world before nine months' gestation, this entry would be called a premature birth. Six or seven months is usually considered the earliest stage of viability, but babies have been known to survive when aborted as early as five months. The survival rate for five and six month old premature babies is estimated at ten percent. One in ten of such premature babies survives. The longer the fetus can remain in the womb up to the normal nine months' gestation, the greater his chances of survival.

Abortion can be distinguished into two main types, spontaneous and induced. *Spontaneous* abortion happens naturally, usually within three months after conception. It occurs because of defective ovum or

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1. Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, tr. W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 4.
2. Robert P. Meye, "New Testament Texts Bearing on the Problem of the Control of Human Reproduction", *Birth Control and the Christian: A Protestant Symposium on the Control of Human Reproduction*, ed. Walter O. Spitzer & Carlyle L. Saylor (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1969) pp. 27-28.

sperm or because of faulty implantation in the wall of the womb. The rate of conceptions ending in spontaneous abortion is estimated variously from ten to fifty percent. Daniel Callahan cites authorities estimating from 10% to 38%;³ R.F.R. Gardner cites G.W. Corner for a figure of 50%.⁴

Induced abortion is the deliberate expulsion from the womb of a living fetus normally incapable of surviving outside the womb. When abortion is induced by competent medical practitioners acting within the scope of the law, it is usually termed "therapeutic"; otherwise it is called "criminal." In either case abortion for the fetus almost always means the termination of his life.

Various terms are used to describe the developing child. Although usage of the terms is somewhat flexible, the following distinctions are generally accepted: zygote (from conception through implantation to the 14th day), embryo (14th day to eighth week) and fetus (ninth week to birth). These terms describe stages of development of an independent and living creature whose expulsion from the womb at about nine months begins his legal existence as a human being.

2. Literature

It is widely recognized among students of the problem of abortion that abortion concerns at least four main disciplines, namely: medicine, ethics, social science and law. These were certainly the disciplines represented at the International Conference on Abortion sponsored by the Harvard Divinity School and the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation and held in September, 1967. Some papers written as the outcome of the conference are available in a book edited by John T. Noonan and entitled *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970). The popular Bantam paperback *The Terrible Choice: The Abortion Dilemma* (New York, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1968) gives a survey of the different issues and points of view considered at the conference.

In August of 1968 a symposium on the control of human reproduction was sponsored by the Christian Medical Society and the magazine *Christianity Today*. At this evangelical symposium theologians, geneticists, sociologists, lawyers and medical practitioners discussed the issues of contraception, sterilization and abortion. Their papers, a few concluding articles and an excellent bibliography may be found in the book *Birth Control and the Christian*, edited by W.O. Spitzer and C.L.

3. Daniel Callahan, *Abortion: Law, Choice and Morality* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 402, n. 36.
4. R. F. R. Gardner, *Abortion: The Personal Dilemma: A Christian Gynaecologist Examines the Medical, Social and Spiritual Issues* (Exeter: Paternoster & Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 123. G. W. Corner, "An Embryologist's View" in *Abortion in a Changing World*, p. v. Sec. 2 on Literature.

Saylor (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, London: Coverdale, Toronto: Home Evangel, 1969). The views in this book are by no means uniform and reflect the sharp differences of opinion between evangelicals on the matter of abortion.

In November of 1968 the Association for the Study of Abortion convened an International Conference on Abortion at Hot Springs, Virginia. The papers and reports from this third international conference appear in the two volume *Abortion in a Changing World*, edited by Robert E. Hall (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1970). The conference included study groups relating abortion to animation, constitutionality, morality, mortality, obstetrics, poverty, progeny, psychiatry, public health and womankind.

These three conferences, all of them international in scope, indicate not only the seriousness of the issue but also the complexity of the problem of abortion. The complexity of the matter may be appreciated by glancing over the entries of abortion bibliographies. For books up to 1968 the standard reference is the *Annotated Bibliography of Induced Abortion*, edited by G.K. af Geijerstam (University of Michigan, 1969). This work lists and summarizes 1,175 papers on abortion throughout the world. The *Abortion Bibliography for 1970*, compiled by Mary K. Floyd (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston, 1972), is the first in a planned series of annual bibliographies on abortion.

An important essay on the legal aspects of abortion may be found in the *Georgetown Law Journal*, Volume 49, Winter 1960 and Spring 1961 numbers.⁵ This two-part essay by Eugene Quay is entitled, "Justifiable Abortion—Medical and Legal Foundations." Part One considers the legally justifiable indications for abortion, including 20 medical indications and a number of psychiatric ones; consideration of the effect of therapeutic abortion on the mother; eugenic considerations; glossary and a bibliography of books and articles. Part Two reviews abortion legislation and commentary from 2050 B.C. to the present, from both eastern and western sources. It includes appendices on statutory materials on abortion in the United States and on the Bourne case in Britain and concludes with a comprehensive bibliography. Quay's essay is indispensable for a thorough view of the direction of law until the sweeping changes that came to the West from 1967 on.

At least five other works deserve mention in a brief survey of the literature such as this. In 1965 the Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility published a pamphlet entitled *Abortion: An Ethical Discussion* (London: Church Information Office, 1965). This work is a brief but profound presentation of a responsible liberal approach to

5. Individual numbers for Vol. 49 are no longer available. The entire volume may be ordered from: Dennis & Co., Law Book Publishers, Buffalo, N.Y. Since Quay's work runs to 360 pp. in length, it is best to order the entire volume.

abortion. In 1968 two significant books appeared: *Life or Death: Ethics and Options*, edited by D.H. Labby (Portland: Reed College, Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1968); and David M. Feldman's *Birth Control in Jewish Law: Marital Relations, Contraception, and Abortion as set forth in the Classic Texts of Jewish Law: An examination of the relevant precepts of the Talmud, Codes, Commentaries, and, especially, rabbinic Responsa through the present day, with comparative reference to the Christian exegetical tradition* (New York: New York University Press, London: University of London Press, 1968). Feldman's study is particularly noteworthy, although his consideration of Christian exegesis is largely limited to Roman Catholic sources. In 1970 there appeared Daniel Callahan's definitive study *Abortion: Law, Choice and Morality* (New York: Macmillan, London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970). This is an indispensable reference work written by a liberal Roman Catholic. Although it lacks a bibliography, its notes are a rich mine of reference material. Finally, in 1972 there appeared a study written by a practicing gynaecologist who is also a Presbyterian Minister, R.F.R. Gardner's *Abortion: The Personal Dilemma: A Christian Gynaecologist Examines the Medical, Social and Spiritual Issues* (Exeter: Paternoster, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972). This book includes an excellent select bibliography. Although the situation is British, Gardner's work is lucid and thorough. The author would permit abortions for a variety of serious reasons. The book is of particular value because of the author's unusual combination of medical and ministerial competence.

Many other worthwhile studies could be added to this very brief survey of the literature. Those mentioned above do, however, provide sufficient diversity of approaches and depth of bibliographical material to provide a thorough introduction to the subject.

3. *The Central Question*

The central question in the abortion issue as far as morally sensitive students are concerned is simply this: When does a human life begin? For if a human life begins at *birth*, then abortion is not the termination of a human life and the moral problem is not very urgent. But if a human life begins at *conception* (or even at some other stage of development prior to birth), then abortion will usually involve the deliberate termination of a human life. And abortion then becomes a most serious problem for ethics and law. This paper is largely concerned with the question, When does a human life begin?

This question presupposes that the Bible does not give obvious legislation on abortion. For if the Bible clearly permitted abortion, the question when human life begins would be quite academic for evangelicals. Whether termination of human life or not, abortion would be justifiable. One could say, "The Bible has spoken, the case is closed." But indeed there is no chapter or verse in the Old and New Testaments

which spells out what our attitude to abortion should be. No systematic study seeking to develop the biblical teaching has uncovered any text which clearly and unambiguously speaks to our issues.⁶ Our treatment of the Bible on the subject of abortion must therefore be deductive. We must consider what the Bible says about abortion and related issues and deduce from that data, in a spirit of humility, obedience and prayer, just what we can about the will of God concerning abortion. As the Westminster Confession put it, "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture . . ."

4. Old Testament Evidence

The first consideration of the biblical evidence on abortion and related issues is the Old Testament. In dealing with the Old Testament, Christians should bear three things in mind, according to Professor Bruce Waltke.⁷ First, Old Testament passages must be referred to the New Testament for ratification, modification or abrogation. Second, Old Testament passages which relate to specific social situations cannot be applied without adaption to different social situations such as might apply today. For this reason passages emphasizing the eternal purposes and attitudes of the Creator are to be preferred. Third, questions peculiar to the Twentieth Century must not be addressed to Old Testament passages which exhibit no consciousness whatever of specifically modern problems. These principles seem generally reasonable and sound.

(a) Argument from silence

Professor Waltke states, "The first argument in favour of permitting induced abortion is the absence of any biblical text forbidding such an act."⁸ He argues that other civilizations prohibited abortion, and if the Old Testament did not, then it could hardly be forbidden. In reply one might question the prevalence of abortion among the Israelites when even the surrounding civilizations prohibited it.⁹ If we may assume that it was not common in the Old Testament community, then we may regard the absence of any biblical text forbidding it as being due to its exceptional occurrence. What is exceptional scarcely requires an explicit prohibition.

Waltke also argues that while the Old Testament provides legislation for a wide range of activities, nothing is legislated against abortion. Again one could argue that this could well be due to the exceptional

6. Cf. Meye, p. 28.

7. Bruce K. Waltke, "Old Testament Texts Bearing on the Problem of the Control of Human Reproduction", *Birth Control and the Christian*, pp. 8-9.

8. Waltke, p. 9.

9. Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/4* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), p. 419, who speaks of "the great modern sin of abortion."

occurrence of abortion, not only in Israel, but in the surrounding communities. What *was* common in many of the Canaanite cities was child sacrifice and it was this which the Israelites eventually imitated. Jeremiah twice condemned the practice of burning sons and daughters in the fire of Topheth (7:31 & 19:4-5).

In short, the argument from silence is precarious.

(b) The Exodus 21 problem

Professor Waltke's second argument is much the stronger. He writes, "A second argument in favour of permitting induced abortion is that God does not regard the fetus as a soul (Hebrew *nephesh*), no matter how far gestation has progressed."¹⁰ Waltke supports this statement by his interpretation of the famous Exodus 21 passage concerning premature labour induced by strife. For Waltke the passage reads thus: "When men struggle together and one of them pushes a pregnant woman and she suffers a miscarriage but no other harm happens, he shall be fined according as the woman's husband may exact from him . . . But if harm does ensue, then you shall impose soul (*nephesh*) for soul (*nephesh*)." (Verses 22-24) This interpretative translation clearly shows that the loss of the child by miscarriage is worthy only of a fine, presumably for the nuisance and the loss to the husband and wife, but not at all worthy of the penalty of life for life.

However, the text of Exodus 21:22-24 can be translated otherwise. It can be translated in this way, literally:

When men struggle together and one of them pushes a pregnant woman and her children come out but no harm happens, he shall be fined according as the woman's husband may exact from him . . . But if harm does ensue, then you shall impose soul for soul.¹¹

With this translation, the qualification "but no harm happens" applies both to the premature child and to the mother. And the provision, "But if harm does ensue," refers to either child or mother. If this is so, then the law of life for life must be applied and the text then proves that the premature infant is considered as a soul. It all hinges on the interpretation of the literal translation "and her children come out" and of the interpretive addition of the word "other" in the qualification "but no harm happens." This is an instance when a literal translation appears to be of particular help.

Now it could be argued that the prescription "And if harm does ensue, then you shall impose soul for soul" is not meant to be con-

10. Waltke, p. 10. For Ex. 21:22-24 passage, Waltke, p. 11.

11. For the arguments for such a literal rendering, see Jack W. Cottrell, "Abortion and the Mosaic Law", in *Christianity Today*, XVII, xii, 6-9 (March 16, 1973).

nected with the verse concerning the pregnant woman and her delivery of a child. Georg Beer thought that it should follow verses 18 and 19, since the law of life for life, etc., is more applicable to the situation of two men fighting and the one being wounded or killed than to the temporary damages suffered because of a premature birth.¹² If this is so, then Waltke's case tumbles along with the opposite case, for then no value whatever would be prescribed for the injury suffered by either mother or child. However, it is usually preferable to leave the order of the text intact. If the order of the verses is correct, then it would appear that a literal rendering of the text disproves rather than proves Waltke's point.

This point of view is put forward by J.W. Montgomery in the same symposium¹³ and by J.W. Cottrell.¹⁴ Waltke, however, maintains that the weight of scholarly opinion supports his view, and it certainly does. But as Professor Cottrell put it, "The weight of scholarly opinion to which Waltke appeals is outweighed by the text itself."¹⁵ Therefore, concerning Waltke's second argument that induced abortion is permitted because God does not regard the fetus as a soul, one could conclude that the text to which he appeals does not support him, and that it may even prove precisely the opposite of what he maintains.

Waltke does not, however, seek only to justify induced abortion. He is well aware that the Old Testament does place positive values on the fetus. He only maintains that a fetus is not a soul, which is to say, is not an individual human being with the absolute right to life that a man or woman has. But he does go on to note two points concerning the value of the fetus nonetheless. First, he acknowledges the Old Testament witness that conception is a gift of God and concludes that the Christian will therefore seek to protect the fetus because he ought not to destroy what God has put together. Second, he underlines the teaching of Psalm 139 that God is actively involved in the process of fashioning the fetus. He concludes that while the Old Testament does not equate the fetus with a living person, it places great value upon it. He notes that the Talmud appears to reflect the biblical balance by allowing abortion when the life of the mother was in danger.¹⁷ We might go on to conclude from the Talmud's position at this point that if it requires danger to the mother's *life* to permit abortion, then it is *close* to assuming that the fetus is equal in value to the mother.

To sum up the Old Testament witness with regard to abortion, I would conclude as follows. First, Exodus 21 does not minimize the

12. *The Interpreter's Bible*, I, 1000, referring to Beer's *Exodus*, p. 111.

13. John Warwick Montgomery, "The Christian View of the Fetus", *Birth Control and the Christian*, pp. 69ff., esp. Addendum, pp. 86ff.

14. See n. 11.

15. Cottrell, p. 9.

16. Waltke, p. 12, where this is his second point.

17. Waltke, pp. 12-13. The Talmud ref. is *Mishna, Oholot*, 7:6.

value of the unborn child and may even make that child's life equal in value to an adult's. Second, many Old Testament passages, notably Psalm 139, testify to the activity of God in the process of conception and fetal development. Third, to the question when does a human life begin, the Old Testament does not give a completely unambiguous answer.

5. New Testament Evidence

Professor Robert P. Meye has made a valuable contribution to the abortion debate by emphasizing the first context of New Testament thinking about reproduction as the sphere of human sexual relationship.¹⁸ Nonetheless Meye chooses to reject consideration of the only New Testament passage bearing directly on fetal life, that is, the birth narrative of Luke, the beloved physician. Meye writes that the single exception to this primary context of New Testament thinking about reproduction as the sphere of human sexual relationship "is found in the narratives in Matthew and Luke of the virgin birth of Christ. This is not only an exception, but it is an exception on the divine side, and cannot easily be applied to the present discussion."¹⁹ In a footnote he draws attention to the fact that even the Christocentric emphasis of Karl Barth makes no use of the virgin birth in the lengthy section on married life and procreation in *Church Dogmatics* III/4. With this the only New Testament passage bearing directly on fetal life is passed by.

It is hard to accept any passing by of the birth narrative in Luke. Certainly one could admit that the virgin birth (or more accurately the virgin conception) of Jesus Christ is indeed an exception on the divine side. But Christ is just as certainly both very God and very man. As man He is the last Adam, as we see in 1 Corinthians 15:45, and in verse 47 He is called the second man (*anthropos*) from heaven. As the second Adam, then, Christ is necessarily relevant to the totality of human life. . . . The narrative of His birth in the beloved physician's Gospel may therefore be able to teach us something about the beginning of a human life.

(a) Luke 1:26-56

The thirty verses of Luke 1:26-56 provide considerable data for speculation. Certain facts do nonetheless seem clear. In Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, an angel visits Mary to tell Mary of God's plan for her. Mary's response to this word of the Lord is faith and affirmative obedience. Some time after this angelic visitation ("in those days"), Mary hastens to travel to Elizabeth's home in Judah. That Mary has conceived by the time that she enters the house is shown in verse 43, where she is called the "mother of my Lord." Mary's greeting to her

18. Meye, pp. 31 ff.

19. Meye, p. 32.

cousin not only provoked a prophetic response from Elizabeth but occasioned an emphatic leap of the unborn John in Elizabeth's womb.

John's leaping was normal enough for a six month old fetus. The timing of the leap, however, was noted as significant by Elizabeth, who was at the time filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 41). Was the leap, then, due to the arrival of the blessed virgin or of the fruit of her womb? On the ground that John was the forerunner of the Lord, not of Mary (v. 76), we may safely conclude that John's leap was in response to the arrival of the Christ rather than of Mary. Needless to say, "the infant leapt with a hidden impulse of the Spirit."²⁰

We do not know at what stage the unborn Christ was when John signalled His approach so vigorously. The words "in those days" (v. 39) and "about three months" (v. 56) are too indefinite to yield solid conclusions. But because Mary *hastened* in those days, and because she remained about three months, that is, until about the time for John's birth, the time between her own visitation in Elizabeth's sixth month and her arrival at Elizabeth's home could not have been long, perhaps no more than a week. Acts 1:15—where "in those days" is used within a time span of ten days—supports this supposition. Assuming that the time between Mary's visitation as a virgin and her arrival as a mother at Elizabeth's was about a week, the conceptus Christ would be ready for implantation if conceived immediately after the visitation or would still be in the most elementary stages of zygote existence if conceived sometime later. The text does seem to suggest a pause between the visitation and the hasty journey to Elizabeth by its phrase "in those days." In this case the Christ Whom the unborn John greeted was probably not even implanted in the womb. If so, the somewhat more than six month old fetus to be named John responded to the arrival of a zygote not even implanted in the wall of the womb.

Now it could be argued that John responded only to the divinity joined to the zygote's flesh and that this zygote flesh was not yet a human being. In this case John would be responding not to an unborn Jesus but to the Second Person of the Trinity. To this argument some ingenious replies can be made, but the biblical reply is surely found in the prophetic words, "the mother of my Lord." Mary was not mother of a thing but of "my Lord." The fruit of her womb was not mere tissue but "my Lord." Calvin explains, "In calling Mary the mother of her Lord, the unity of person in the two natures of Christ is intended, as if she had said, he who is born a mortal man in the womb of Mary is at the same time the eternal God. We must remember that this woman does not speak from her own intelligence, but only enunciates what was prompted by the Holy Spirit. The title of Lord really belongs to the Son of God revealed in the flesh . . ." ²¹

20. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Vol. I, tr. A. W. Morrison, ed. D. W. Torrance & T. F. Torrance Grand (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 32.

21. Calvin, *ibid.*, p. 33. The older translation avoids the glaring example of a dangling participle at the opening of the first sentence quoted.

It is worth noting, moreover, that David prophesied of "my Lord" (Ps. 110:1), and near the end of His earthly ministry Jesus puts His finger on the uniqueness of the Messiah when He quoted David's prophecy. Jesus asked, "How can they say that the Christ is David's son? . . . so how is he his son?" (Lk. 20:41-44). Jesus did not bluntly deny that the Christ could be David's son. What Jesus did was to ask *how* the Christ could be David's son. After Chalcedon we would say that with regard to His humanity the Christ was David's son, but with regard to His divinity the Christ was God's Son. To say *either* one *or* the other was obviously wrong; the Christ was both very God and very man.

Now we have seen that Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, called Mary the mother of "my Lord." In other words Mary was the mother of the Christ. From Luke 20:41-44 we have gathered that the Messiah must be regarded as *both* God *and* man. Therefore Elizabeth's Spirit-inspired utterance "mother of my Lord" tells us that the conceptus is both God and also man. Calvin affirms this in any case from the very word "Lord." Since, then, this conceptus is man (as well as God), therefore its flesh is not a thing but a human being. Therefore the argument that John responded only to the divinity joined to the zygote's flesh is untenable—indeed it smacks of the monothelite heresy. In truth John responded to the presence of the Lord Christ Who was both very God and very man.

If ever there were a clear sign that even a zygote was for all its minuteness and rudimentary form none other than the Christ, John's response to Jesus' presence was that sign.

Now it is a biological fact that the zygote's existence begins with its conception. At this point scientific research can inform our understanding of Scripture. So then, if Jesus were the Christ even as a zygote (as John's leap and Elizabeth's recognition of Mary as the mother of her Lord have shown), then we who know that the zygote's existence begins with conception must admit that the zygote Christ to Whose presence John had responded was a human being from the moment of conception. Now if this is true of Jesus, Who was also the son of David according to the flesh, then it is true of every human conceptus. That is, from the moment of conception, the conceptus resulting from the fusion of a human sperm and a human ovule is a human being. When does a human life begin? It begins at the moment of conception, as the incarnation of the Lord shows.

(b) The problem of fetal wastage

In his book *Abortion: the Personal Dilemma*, Rex Gardner notes an estimate that 50% of all conceptions result in spontaneous abortion.²²

Certainly many such abortions occur without mothers ever knowing about it. In any case if the spontaneous abortion rate is so high, one might argue that the unborn child is not a man but is only meant to be a man. Until birth he is only meant to be a man. The fetus is to be cherished increasingly as it develops, but it is not yet a man. How else could one account for such a high rate of fetal wastage?

At this point one would argue that a 50% fetal wastage estimate is rather high. Other authorities estimate anything from 10% to 38%.²³ It does not really matter whether the fetal wastage is 10%, 50% or 99%, but to popular acceptance of the position taken in this paper, 50% seems to be a stumbling block. One can only say that other authorities give lower estimates and that the most common estimate seems to be 20%. But for the sake of argument let us increase this estimate to 25%; let us say that 25% of all conceptions are spontaneously aborted. Does this necessarily show that the other 75% cannot be human beings? It just shows that 1 in 4 do not make it to birth. In comparison with those who are born, but who are never born again, this is not so bad a ratio. As things stand in the world today, only 2 in 7 are even counted as nominal Christians.²⁴

In my paper "Abortion: The Last Resort" (United Church of Canada Renewal Fellowship, 1968), I argued that the destiny of every child conceived in the womb is the kingdom of God. Dr. Gardner commented, "So far as God's purposes for children are concerned, this statement is both wholly admirable and true. So far as it applies to every conceptus, I disagree. . . . If the author is right about God's intention, then it is frustrated (even without man's deliberate sin) by miscarriage in a high proportion of cases."²⁵ But can we assume that simply because miscarriage or spontaneous abortions occur, that God wills what occurred? God's specific will is not an easy thing to comprehend and in the final analysis it is largely incomprehensible this side of heaven, but I cannot see much point in identifying *what happens* with God's will. Much of what happens is obviously contrary to God's will, and even we who are supposed to do God's will have to pray that His will be done, so that we will go out and do it (in addition to the end that the prayer be answered). God's will is always being frustrated, even though in the long run His good will does prevail. His will is for our good, although in a fallen creation His will for *what is permitted* may seem contrary to His will for our good. I would therefore affirm that even a spontaneous abortion rate of 99% does not necessarily reflect God's will. His will is for our good and although He may permit even a 99% rate, this is under the circumstances of the fall.

23. Callahan, p. 402, n. 36.

24. *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, 1972 Edition, quoting Encyclopedia Britannica's 1971 yearbook, 1968 estimated memberships.

Total religious population of the world: 2,540,199,000.

Total Christian population of the world: 924,274,000.

25. Gardner, p. 125.

(c) The problem of the evil use of sexuality

Dr. Gardner also criticized my statement about every child's destiny because it implied that conceptions made by rape are nonetheless the will of God. "I find it difficult to believe that God can look in anything but anger on a drunken wretch impregnating a terrified girl, or even his exhausted wife."²⁶ Agreed. But when God made man, God bound Himself (as it were) to the consequences of such a free creation. If man would use his sexual powers against God's will, God would still prove faithful as the Creator and Preserver of all things. Even God's enemies could have children, although they would not escape God's laws and eventual judgment. So great is the humility of God that His Son became flesh, and not only shared the human lot from conception to manhood, but accepted an unjust death on a cursed cross. There is no greater humility than this. Christ crucified not only saved us by His blood but also showed us just how profound God's humility is. God's humility is higher than the highest that man can reach for, but this very height renders it capable of the depth of a cursed cross. So also, in a lesser way, God's humility extends to His remaining faithful as the Creator and Preserver of Life, even when sexuality shows itself to be ugly, hateful and evil. God is indeed angry with the rapist, with the incestuous, with the promiscuous, because by these sins man is in a sense seeking to control God, man is forcing God to be Creator and Preserver. Sexual sin is perhaps everyman's magic—magic being the means employed by the creature to control his Creator.²⁷ Nonetheless God is sovereign. God is not mocked without penalty. Not only will God deal with evil finally at the last day, but His laws today have eventual effects. Men are given up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, Who is blessed forever (Rom. 1:24-25)!

(d) The problem of the breath of life

Dr. Gardner writes, "My own view is that while the fetus is to be cherished increasingly as it develops, we should regard the first breath at birth as the moment when God gives it not only life, but the offer of Life. Now this is not an example of the Christian retreating in the face of a scientific attack. This surely is the original biblical teaching that God took a fully-formed man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and thus the man became a living creature—Adam."²⁸

26. Gardner, p. 126.

27. Cf. Barth, *ibid.*, p. 137. "Without self-giving to a Thou the sexual act becomes the magical practice of a demonised sex; the attempt by a sort of conjuration, by fusion with the sexual polar opposite (masculine or feminine), to secure that which is to be had only in mutual, individual and personal self-surrender."

28. Gardner, p. 126.

of Genesis 2:7 was much more than air, that it was also thought and word. Thus man's first task after his creation was to *name* the creatures of the earth and air (Gen. 2:19-20). Thus immediately after Christ breathed on the eleven (Jn. 20:22), He laid the foundation for preaching the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins. Thus also when the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, Peter and the rest of the Apostles preached the Gospel and answered the people's anxious question with the call to repent, to be baptized and so on.

Now if the breath of life has to do with thought and with the word, at least as much as with air, then it is worth noting that the unborn child from the age of eight weeks has readable electrical activity in his brain. Nowadays heart readings are considered less significant for determining death than are brain readings. When there is no electrical activity in the brain a man is presumed to be dead. But an eight week old fetus has readable electrical activity in his brain, and yet there is little fuss about abortion up to the 12th week of his existence. Moreover, if there is *readable* electrical activity in the fetal brain at eight weeks, then there is probably some electrical activity in the rudimentary brain present at four weeks. In any case, if we apply the same test of life to the unborn which is now applied to the dying, then we must admit that the 30mm long fetus of eight weeks is a live human being.

(e) Conclusion

From the New Testament doctrine of the incarnation in general and from Luke 1 in particular, one can deduce that each individual human life begins at conception, the problems of fetal wastage, sexual abuse and the importance of birth notwithstanding. From this one can conclude that induced abortion involves the termination of a human life.

It is important at this point to note that termination of a human life is not necessarily murder. It is a type of killing, of course, but the motives of those involved in an abortion must be carefully considered before any charge of murder comes to our lips. Those who simply do not believe that the unborn child is a human being can hardly be called murderers when they procure or perform an abortion. It is the motivation of anger, of insult and of bad feeling that appears to be the substance of a murderous motivation (cf. Mt. 5:21-22). Let those of us who believe that abortion is the termination of a human life never engage in such anger, insult and bad feeling, or we ourselves will become liable to the hell fire. The best reaction to the present abortion climate might well be to engage in caring about and helping and loving pregnant women in distress; this work is done by the hundreds of Birthright centres in Canada and the United States.³⁰

30. See: Louise Summerhill, *The Story of Birthright: The Alternative to Abortion* (Kenosha, Wisconsin: Prow Books, 1973. \$1.95 paper). Or write Birthright Head Office, 699 Coxwell Ave., Toronto, Ont., Canada; or Birthright Inc., 18 Euclid, Woodbury, N.J., U.S.A.

(1) One cannot dispute that in the case of Adam God's giving of the breath of life made the human body a man. Until Adam was given the breath of life, he was simply not a living being. However, what was true of the first man is by no means necessarily true of all who came from him. Certainly all men and women depend every moment of their lives on God's breath for their very existence (cf. Ps. 104:30). But it does not necessarily follow that Genesis 2:7 must be literally repeated in the case of every newborn baby in order to make it a living soul.

It is pertinent here that while Genesis 2 records the giving of the breath of life to Adam, it does not record any such thing for Eve. Now this omission could hardly mean that woman is inherently inferior to the male. After all Genesis 1:27 teaches the fundamental equality of the sexes: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." What then does the omission signify? Surely it signifies that Genesis 2:7 was a singular and unique and once for all action. Once God breathed the breath of life into Adam, man from that time on had life in him. Consequently, when Eve was created from Adam's rib, she automatically had life in her, for life pervaded the whole of Adam's body. What else can explain the omission of God's gift of the breath of life to Eve? Surely Genesis 2:7 was a once for all event. Although man would always remain dependent on God every moment of his life for the gift of life, what was given in Genesis 2:7 was given once for all.²⁹

From the "making" of Eve on, then, man had the breath of life in him, just as, after the fall, he had the stain of original sin in him. What then can we say of the newborn's first breath? We can say that while this first breath does not change the newborn's being—after all, he is Adam—it is nonetheless a *sign* of God's loving-kindness and of man's total dependence on God for his life. Viewed in this light Genesis 2:7 cannot be used by Gardner to justify his contention that life really begins at birth.

(2) The second line of argument against Gardner's interpretation of Genesis 2:7 is this. Parting company to some extent from the interpretation of Calvin and Barth, we might argue that the breath of life

29. Following a suggestion of Calvin, one might argue that what was said of Adam in Genesis 1 applies to Eve as well (Comm. Gen. 2:7, "but omits the intellectual part, of which mention has been made in the first chapter."). However, Calvin regarded the breath of life in Genesis 2:7 as something held in common with animals. Barth accepts this interpretation and notes that the only difference between man and animal in regard to this breath of life is the *manner* in which God gave it (*Church Dogmatics*, III/1, p. 236). This is an interesting position and certainly has value, but is it not too rigid? Is it not possible to admit a certain continuity between man's creation in the image of God and man's quickening with the breath of life breathed into his nostrils? I do not think that one can say bluntly that Genesis 2:7 omits mention of the intellectual part of man.

For further study see Barth on Gen. 2:7 in *C.D.* III/1 and Montgomery in *Birth Control and the Christian*.

6. *Concluding Remarks*

This paper has only scratched the surface of the abortion issue. There are many problems not even suggested above, some of which require theological consideration as much if not more than research by other disciplines. Such, for example, is the problem posed by twins, for which the creationist-traducian debate is not irrelevant.³¹ But in a paper whose conclusion is that a human life begins at conception and that abortion is therefore the termination of a human life, it is important to note as clearly as possible that the forgiveness of sins applies to the abortion situation just as much as to any other. Since everyone has mixed motives, no one should condemn those who seem to have sinned but who are repentant or at least humble before the God Whom they know only in part. To be as clear as possible, those who seek God in humility and repentance and who trust in the righteousness of Jesus Christ our Saviour are forgiven their sins, no matter how heinous those sins may have been.

Whatever one's view of the conditions under which abortion may be justified, there is one practice all too prevalent in hospitals which do abortions. This is the practice of seeing that aborted fetuses still alive will die. Saline abortions sometimes produce living fetuses; hysterotomies will often involve a five or sixth month fetus. Some hospitals seem to prefer to smother the living fetus by placing the placenta over his face. Others seem prepared to drown the fetuses in pans of water. Others yet simply expose the premature birth to room temperature and air until for one reason or another he dies. This practice of seeing that the aborted fetuses die is indefensible, for, as we have already mentioned, five and six month fetuses have a ten percent chance of survival. There are living today children who were aborted, who were rescued by conscientious nurses and given good premature care, and who were eventually adopted. In my judgment Christians should work (1) to amend criminal and medical statutes to prohibit the practice of fetal killing and exposure after abortion, and (2) to found fetal aid societies and clinics to enable as many aborted fetuses as possible to survive and to be brought up by childless and other able couples.

This may seem far too utopian a programme. But Dr. Gardner noted a most unfortunate effect of the abortion mentality on doctors. He wrote,

One point that seems to have been overlooked is that gynaecologists are also obstetricians. "A patient

31. If a human life begins at conception, what does one say about identical twins, who begin life as one fertilized ovum at conception but split into two separate zygotes later on? Did their separate lives really begin at the time of the split or at their conception as one ovum? The traducian theory with its basic idea that every man is Adam, generated from Adam in every way, would seem to minimize the importance of the problem, for no matter who one is, one is really Adam however different one's time and space is.

struggling for life or to preserve a pregnancy expects the doctor to try, and go on trying beyond reason—and he usually does. But will he try quite as hard if he has just come from destroying a fetus? He may *think* he can keep the two functions separate in his mind, but the unconscious influence will be insidious.” Those words were penned before the passing of the Abortion Act 1967; certainly I am aware of their truth today. Whereas earlier we had regular meetings to discuss every unsuccessful pregnancy, and try to pin down any preventable factor with a view to ever-improving results no such meeting has been suggested since 1967. I confess to finding in myself a lessening of enthusiasm. Is there any point in struggling quite so hard to preserve an unborn fetus already at risk and which may well never flourish, when one has just been called upon to terminate healthy pregnancy after healthy pregnancy? It is a temptation one tries to resist: but it would be dishonest to deny its existence.³²

From this I conclude that the specialty of fetology may decline as the abortion mentality becomes more and more accepted in the public and the medical mind. It may therefore be that fetal aid clinics would serve the dual purpose of saving human life and of continuing a science in danger of eclipse. Gardner has also noted that numbers of Christian doctors are deciding that the abortion act has closed the door to a gynaecological career for them.³³ Fetal clinics might also help in a limited way to lessen the pressures on Christian doctors and nurses who may want to specialize in gynaecological and obstetrical service.

The urgency of the problem is of course most acute for the fetus who is aborted alive. Dare we let the least of these our brethren perish for lack of concern, sustenance and protection? If there is no ethical task which so reveals a man's true self as his treatment of abortion, let us reveal ourselves as persons who are conformed to Jesus Christ and who love our neighbour with both wisdom and innocence.

32. Gardner, pp. 50-51.

33. R. F. R. Gardner, “Christian Choices in a Liberal Abortion Climate”, *Christianity Today* (May 22, 1970), p. 7.