

## REFLECTIONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT ON ABORTION\*

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The technical<sup>1</sup> and legal availability of induced abortion, that is “the expulsion of the human fetus ... before it is capable of surviving outside the womb,”<sup>2</sup> has resulted in its widespread practice and challenges evangelicals to come up with a clear position on the morality of suppressing the fruit of the womb. Although I addressed myself to this social problem several years ago, I would like to contribute once again to the ongoing discussion because I have modified my position considerably since my earlier article.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it seemed fitting to use this platform because the theme of our annual meeting is “Evangelicals, the Church, and Society.”

The importance of the subject is obvious. If the fetus is a human being, then abortion is nothing less than murder, the taking of innocent human life. Indeed, if abortion is the murder of the innocent, then the

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<sup>1</sup>H. S. Smyth cogently noted this paradox of modern medicine: “It would seem a special irony that the era which has provided us with the safest means of avoiding abortions has witnessed the greatest rise in their number.” H. S. Smyth, *Biblical Allusions to Life Before Birth* (157 Waterloo Road, London, SE1 8XN, Canada, 1975), pp. 3 f.

<sup>2</sup>C. C. Ryrie, *You Mean the Bible Teaches That ...* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), p. 85.

<sup>3</sup>B. K. Waltke, “Old Testament Texts Bearing on Abortion,” in *Christianity Today* 13/3 (Nov. 8, 1968), pp. 99-105, and in W. O. Spitzer and C. L. Saylor, eds., *Birth Control and the Christian* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1969), pp. 7-23. At that time I argued on the basis of Exodus 21:22 that the Old Testament does not equate feticide with murder. The case I presented, however, is less than conclusive for both exegetical and logical reasons. J. W. Cottrell, “Abortion and the Mosaic Law,” in *Christianity Today* 17/12 (March 16, 1973), pp. 602-605, criticized my acceptance of the traditional interpretation of the passage. Although I still think that interpretation is the proper one, Cottrell made a good case against it and the evidence supporting it is less than conclusive. In support of the unanimous interpretation of the ancients let me call attention here to a helpful historical study of the passage by M. S. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970).

A more serious objection to the way in which I used the passage, however, is the illogical conclusion I drew from it. It does not necessarily follow that because the law did not apply the principle of *lex talionis*, that is “person for person,” when the fetus was aborted through fighting that therefore the fetus is less than a human being. The purpose of the decision recorded in this debated passage was not to define the nature of the fetus but to decide a just claim in the case of an induced abortion that may or may not have been accidental. If the miscarriage occurred accidentally, then it would have been regarded as manslaughter, a crime not necessarily punishable by death. However, in the preceding case law, the judgment did not apply the principle of *lex talionis* in the case of a debatable death of a servant at the hands of his master. But it does not follow that since “life for life” was not exacted here that therefore the slave was less than a fully human life.

current practice of our society, made so widespread through liberal laws and the decision of the Supreme Court which overthrew the abortion statutes of the state of Texas,<sup>4</sup> causes Herod the Great's slaughter of the innocents (Matt. 2:16-18) to lose much of its once apparent enormity.

Moreover, the subject is important to every one of us, for as members of American society we all contribute to its attitude concerning abortion. Karl Barth incriminates the whole society that sets the stage for the crime. He includes among the persons concerned with this ethical issue

the mother who either carries out the act or desires or permits it, the more or less informed amateurs who assist her, perhaps the scientifically and technically trained physician, the father, relatives or other third parties who allow, promote, assist or favor the execution of the act and therefore share responsibility, and in a wider but no less strict sense the society whose conditions and mentality directly or indirectly call for such acts and whose laws may even permit them.<sup>5</sup>

No one can be neutral on this social issue, because even the stance of neutrality contributes to a mentality that allows the practice. To remain heuristic or silent on this matter indirectly creates a climate favoring those advocating abortion.

But by what accredited means can we decide the morality of prematurely terminating a pregnancy? It is at this point that the bankruptcy of scientism and humanism shows itself. Science is not autonomous, for it cannot generate values with any certainty. Harvey Cox recognized this lack of certainty in modern thought and the heavy burden it has placed on a society that has abandoned metaphysics and that has laid to rest a God who has legislated what is concretely good and obligatory for mankind. He noted:

Secular man's values have been deconsecrated, shorn of any claim to ultimate or final significance ... they are no longer the direct expression of the divine will. They have become what certain people at a particular time and place hold to be good. They have ceased to be values and have become valuations....

Cox added that modern man

must live with the realization that the rules which guide his ethical life will seem just as outmoded to his descendants as some of his ancestors' practices now appear to him. No previous generation has had to live in the glaring light of this realization. Simple ethical certainty, of the sort once available to man, will never be possible again.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Ryrie, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup>K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961), III, Part IV, p. 415. I am indebted to the extremely well-documented work by R. F. R. Gardener for calling my attention to many of the quotations cited in this address: R. F. R. Gardener, *Abortion: The Personal Dilemma* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972).

<sup>6</sup>H. Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 31.

We see, then, that for humanistic man there can be no accredited means for deciding the absolute morality of interrupting a pregnancy. In fact, it is not meaningful for him to speak of sin.

But as Francis Schaeffer pointed out in *Escape from Reason*, this glaring contradiction between man's need for values and the inability of materialism/humanism to meet this need condemns that philosophy. A system of thought that cannot provide sure values for man who demands values is inconsistent with reality and does not provide a framework with which he can live consistently. The evangelical, by contrast, turns to the Bible and finds that it speaks with moral certainty, claims to give to dependent man a statement of that which is absolutely good, promotes life, has been verified again and again as historically accurate in those areas capable of being subjected to empirical test, and above all is accompanied by the convincing work of the Holy Spirit.

But when we turn to the Bible in the case of abortion we are embarrassed for two reasons. First, it does not directly answer our question. Second, theologians who infer their answers from it differ in their conclusions. The queen of sciences, here as elsewhere, appears to have a wax nose that can be shaped according to the personal tastes of those who look at her. In spite of our embarrassing differences, however, the evangelical knows that the problem lies in his ignorance, prejudice, and weak intellect rather than in the Scriptures. With humility we must correct and perfect ourselves and one another in the light of God's unchanging truth. It is in that spirit that I share with you these reflections on abortion primarily drawn from the Old Testament.

We should recognize that abortion was practiced in the ancient Near East at the time of Moses, the first mediator of God's law and founder of the theocracy.<sup>7</sup> But since the Bible does not give us a clear ruling or statute regarding the morality of this practice we may conclude that the Bible regards abortion either as an amoral act, or as a practice whose morality is relative to the situation and therefore to be judged by other values than merely a respect for life, or as sin because it assumed that the fetus was a human being even though it had no independent existence. It will be my thesis that the inspired authors regarded the fetus as a human being. In the first half of my address I will try to define the term "human being," and in the second half I will try to demonstrate that the fetus satisfies this definition.

## I. WHAT IS HUMANNES?

The following statement by a professor of biology, advocating easy abortion and cited by R. F. R. Gardener, shows the acute need of defining humanness when discussing the subject of abortion:

People who worry about the moral danger of abortion do so because they think of the fetus as a human being and hence equate feticide with

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Waltke in Spitzer, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 9 f.

murder. Whether the fetus is or is not a human being is a matter of definition, not fact, and we can define any way we wish.<sup>8</sup>

But this statement is reprehensible for both moral and philosophical reasons. If we can define humanness "any way we wish," then no life is safe; we are left with no philosophical basis for protecting any life. Gardener properly quoted this censure by Daniel Callahan of the professor's cavalier remark: "A power group society could by use of this principle [of defining humanness any way we wish] define the chronically sick, the senile, the elderly as non-human, and thus justify the taking of their lives on grounds of the social good to be obtained."<sup>9</sup> The cogency of Callahan's rebuttal will be apparent to all who remember the German experience under Hitler, who by defining the Jews as less than human justified their elimination.<sup>10</sup>

But how shall we proceed to arrive at a Biblical definition of human? At least two methods commend themselves. We could exegete the two basic texts disclosing the origin and nature of man recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis; or we could study the crucial theological terms informing a Biblical anthropology about man's essential being, such as *bāsār* and *sōma*, "body,"<sup>11</sup> *nephesh* and *psychē*, "soul," *lēb* and *kardia*, "heart," and so forth. I have opted here to combine these methods by considering the crucial theological words in connection with an exegesis of the two foundational texts presenting the origin and nature of man.

The first text we shall consider is the familiar statement in Genesis 2:7: "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." From the first clause, "the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground," we learn that man is in part "dust," or perhaps better "clay," personally fashioned by God. For this material aspect of man's being we scarcely need a revelation, for we could readily deduce that man originated from the earth both by the fact that he must continually ingest the minerals of the earth through its produce in order to maintain his existence and by the fact that upon death his body once again becomes part of the earth. The pertinent anthropological terms here are primarily Hebrew *bāsār* and Greek *sōma*, "body," as well as other words describing parts of the body.

The second clause, "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," reveals that man's origin is not only from the earth but also from

<sup>8</sup>G. Hardin, "Abortion or Compulsory Pregnancy," in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, May, 1968, cited by Gardener, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup>D. Callahan, *Abortion: Law, Choice and Morality* (New York and London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970), cited by Gardener, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>10</sup>A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, tr. Ralph Manheim (Houghton Mifflin, n.d.).

<sup>11</sup>I am indebted to R. H. Gundry for providing me with the proof copy of his splendid study, *Sōma in Biblical Theology with Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (London-New York: Cambridge University, 1976).

heaven. His life, manifested by his breathing, derives from the eternally living God (Deut. 32:39-41). I understand the phrase “of life” to be a subjective genitive denoting that man’s breath is a manifestation of life. Hans Walter Wolff concluded: “For Old Testament man, life is essentially manifested in the breath....”<sup>12</sup> Key theological terms for this material part of man’s body include *neshāmâ*, “breath,” and *rûah* and *pneuma*, “wind.”

Several other texts also teach that man’s life, manifested by his breathing, comes from the spirit of God. Job, for example, whose words the LORD approved (Job 42:7), said:

“For as long as breath is in me,  
and the wind from God is in my nostrils” (27:3).

Likewise, Elihu said:

“If he should determine to do so,  
if he should gather to himself his wind and his breath,  
all flesh would perish together  
and man would return to dust” (34:14 f.).

Isaiah referred to God as the One

“who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and its offspring,  
who gives breath to the people on it  
and wind to those who walk in it” (Isa. 42:5).

Finally, the Preacher, whose words are judged to be true (Eccl. 12:10), said: “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the wind will return to God who gave it” (12:7).

The final clause of our first text, “and man became a living soul,” shows that the result of this union of the clay with the breath of life is called *nephesh* (LXX *psychē*), traditionally rendered in the English Bible as “soul.” Here we learn that *nephesh* in its most synthetic sense denotes animated substance. Since soul is the *tertium*, the resulting state, it can properly be said that man does not *have* soul but that man *is* soul. Although *nephesh* is used in many other ways in Scripture,<sup>13</sup> it is clear in this basic text that soul is not a distinct aspect of man’s being but denotes his body animated with the life of God.

But we cannot end our definition of man merely as soul or animated substance, since all that has been said thus far about man the Bible also says about animals. They too derive their bodies from the earth, according to Genesis 1:24: “Let the earth bring forth living creatures

<sup>12</sup>H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), p. 59.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 10-25.

after their kind.” Moreover, they also derive their life from the spirit of God. For example, Psalm 104:30 says: “Thou dost send forth thy spirit [wind], they [the animals] are created; and thou dost renew the face of the ground.” Many other texts affirm that animals owe their life to the spirit or wind of God (Gen. 6:17; 7:15, 22; Ezek. 1:12, 20; 10:17; Eccl. 3:19, 21; Isa. 31:3). Not surprisingly, then, these animated beings are also called “living souls” in Scripture. For example, in Genesis 1:24 we read with reference to animals: “Let the earth bring forth living creatures.” This traditional rendering, “living creatures,” is for the same Hebrew expression, *nephesh hayyâ*, translated “living soul” with reference to man in Genesis 2:7. So we can say that animals are also called “living souls.”

To determine that aspect of man, then, which distinguishes him from the animals we have to go beyond Genesis 2:7 and turn to Genesis 1:26-28, the second basic text presenting the origin and nature of man. This text reads: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.’... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.” That which distinguishes man from animals is that man, in contrast to animals, is created in the image of God. But how shall we interpret this crucial phrase?

Most theologians have recognized that that we cannot interpret it literally—that is, that man’s physical being is in the image of God. Such an interpretation should be rejected for at least four reasons. In the first place, we are told elsewhere that God is a spirit (John 4:24; Isa. 31:3) and that he is ubiquitous (1 Kgs. 8:27). In the second place, a literal interpretation would leave us with all sorts of bizarre questions. If man’s physical being is in the image of God we would immediately wonder what, if any organs, God possesses. Does he have sexual organs, and if so, which? Does he have the form of a man, or of a woman, or of both? The very absurdity that God is a sexual being renders this interpretation highly unlikely. Thirdly, it seems unlikely that man’s dignity above the rest of the animals (Gen. 9:5 f.; Jas. 3:7-9) is due to his slight physiological differences from them. Is it credible that animals may be killed but that man may not be killed because his stature is slightly different? Finally, a literal interpretation seems not only contradictory to the rest of Scripture, and unlikely, but also inappropriate. Gardener aptly observed: “But our anatomy and physiology is demanded by our terrestrial habitat, and quite inappropriate to the one who inhabits eternity.”<sup>14</sup> For these reasons theologians have concluded that the statement in Genesis 1:26-28 must be metaphorical of man’s spiritual or immaterial nature.

But what aspect of man’s spiritual nature is in view? Francis Schaeffer infers that it refers to our personality:

Within the Trinity, before the creation of anything, there was real love and real communication .... This God who is personal created man in his own

<sup>14</sup>Gardener, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

image .... He is the image of this kind of God and so personality is intrinsic to his make-up. God is personal, and man also is personal.<sup>15</sup>

Now while this is undoubtedly true, it is only partially complete for it does not fully distinguish man from animals. They also possess intellect, sensibility and will, a normative definition of personality. Most who observe animals speak of their personality.

Other theologians have defined the term more narrowly to denote man's ability to communicate with and relate to a personal God. Kierkegaard expressed this conviction thus: "Essentially it is the God-relationship that makes a man a man," and Emil Brunner concluded that "the image of God is fundamentally relational." The Reformed theologian G. C. Berkouwer wrote: "The characteristic of the biblical view lies precisely in this, that man appears as related to God in all his creaturely relationships."<sup>16</sup>

Although this interpretation comes closer to a proper understanding of the metaphor, I would like to define the term even more precisely than merely in terms of function. The term denotes man as a spiritual, rational and moral being, and thus as related to God.

It will help to remind ourselves that this text was written by Moses for a people to whom he was mediating the law of God. When renewing the covenant with them as they were about to venture across the Jordan to establish God's rule in the promised land, Moses pointedly recalled that the LORD revealed himself on Mount Horeb not as a corporeal but as a transcendent, spiritual, moral being. He described that epoch-making moment of history thus:

And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the very heart of the heavens—darkness, cloud and thick gloom. Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form—only a voice. So he declared to you his covenant which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them on two tablets of stone (Deut. 4:11-13).

God communicated his transcendence through the phenomena accompanying his revelation, and he revealed himself as a spiritual, moral being by appearing as only a voice—just the ten commandments. It is in the image of this spiritual, moral being that man is created. In contrast to the animals who are said to be created "after their kind," that is, who behave instinctively or as essentially mechanistic beings, man is created as a moral being concerned about distinguishing between right and wrong. Whereas animals behave without moral concern, man is concerned with values, meanings and morals.

Crucial theological words pertaining to man's nature here are *leb* and *kardia*, "heart," which denote man as a spiritual, rational, moral

<sup>15</sup>F. A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity, 1968), p. 87.

<sup>16</sup>Bernard Ramm, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 61-64.

being. Significantly the Bible frequently uses "heart," an anthropomorphism, with reference to God. For example, God resolved in 1 Samuel 2:35: "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind." As Wolff observes, "The statements about the 'heart' of God are worth thinking about because they always concern God's relationship to man. The heart of God is most often mentioned as the organ of God's distinct will, against which a man is judged."<sup>17</sup>

We conclude, then, that man is clay personally fashioned by God, animated by breath manifesting the life of God, and in God's image as a spiritual, rational, moral being.<sup>18</sup>

## II. THE NATURE OF THE FETUS

We now turn to Biblical statements regarding the fetus to determine whether the inspired writers of Scripture regarded it as a human being.

These authors believed that God personally fashions each individual in the womb. Job traced his origin back to his primal beginnings with these metaphors:

Thy hands fashioned and made me altogether,  
 and wouldst thou destroy me?  
 Remember now that thou hast made me as clay;  
 and wouldst thou turn me into dust again?  
 Didst thou not pour me out like milk  
 and curdle me like cheese,  
 clothe me with skin and flesh  
 and knit me together with bones and sinews?  
 Thou hast granted me life and lovingkindness,  
 and thy care has preserved my spirit (Job 10:8-12).

Similarly David sang:

For thou didst form my inward parts;  
 thou didst weave me in my mother's womb.  
 I will give thanks to thee,  
 for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
 and my soul knows it very well.  
 My frame was not hidden from thee  
 when I was made in secret  
 and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth.  
 Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance;  
 and in thy book they were all written,  
 the days that were ordained for me,  
 when as yet there was not one of them (Psalm 139:13-16).

When Moses complained that he was slow of speech and slow of tongue, the Lord asked him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him

<sup>17</sup>Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. the similar observation of R. Brow in D. and P. Alexander, eds., *Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 24 f.



dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Ex. 4:11).

Now these inspired writers and poets do not contest the fact that there is a causal connection between sexual intercourse and conception; in fact, our advanced knowledge about the DNA molecule and the genetic code fits comfortably into the Biblical revelation, which has much to say about man's sexuality.<sup>19</sup> But they regard sexual intercourse as merely the means whereby God, the first cause of all things, gives his blessing. Claudius Matthias expressed the Biblical view well when he said, "It went through our hands, but comes from God."<sup>20</sup> And Luther gave expression to the faith of the saints when he said, "I believe that God created me."

So we conclude that the fetus, like Adam, is in part clay personally fashioned by God.

On the other hand, the Biblical writers teach that while God shapes the fetus he does not create its biological life *ex nihilo*. They teach, rather, that the life of the fetus does not come immediately from God but mediately from its parents. We can infer this from the statement in Genesis 2:2 that God ceased from his creative work on the seventh day. If each life is an immediate act of creation from God rather than a mediate one through the seminal process, then this statement loses meaning.

Second, Paul taught that the human race is a unity. To the Athenians he said, "God has made from one all nations of men to dwell on the face of the whole earth" (Acts 17:26). If each life is a separate creation not passed on mediately from Adam, this unity is called into question. Thus we could conclude solely on the doctrine of the unity of the human race that the original life breathed into Adam is passed on seminally and is present at the time of conception.

If this is true, then breath, which is associated with life in the Bible, is only a later manifestation of life but not essential to it in the gestation period. In the case of the fetus other symptoms, such as growth, indicate the presence of this life. When a fetus ceases to develop, the doctor assumes the fetus is dead and will at that point perform a therapeutic abortion.

Perhaps we can illustrate the point by an analogy. During the spring and summer a tree manifests its life by the presence of green leaves on it, but we would have to look beneath its bark to determine whether or not it is alive during its dormant season. Now let us suppose that a tree bore green leaves about 99 percent of its life cycle, or about 361 days out of the year, just as man normally breathes during 99 percent of his life cycle, or about 831 months out of 840. In such a case we would probably speak of the "leaves of life" to denote a living tree. But it would not follow that the absence of leaves on a tree during its four dormant days would indicate that during this period of its life cycle it was only a

<sup>19</sup>Cf. C. S. Lewis, "Dogma and the Universe," in W. Hooper, ed., *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 38-47.

<sup>20</sup>Cited by H. Thielicke, *How the World Began*, translated with an introduction by J. W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg, 1961), p. 82.

potential tree or less than a tree. Likewise it does not follow that the absence of breath in the fetus indicates that during the period of gestation the man is only potentially a man or less than a human being.

We conclude, then, that the fetus consists both of clay personally fashioned by God and of biological life mediately derived from the Creator, for these aspects of man are passed on seminally and are already present at the time of conception.

But does the Bible also teach that the fetus is the image of God? Here too the answer must be affirmative, for at least three reasons.

First, we note that the Scriptures assert that man's sinful nature, which seems to be related to his spiritual, moral nature, is passed on seminally. David lamented, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3). Job said on one occasion, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one" (Job 14:4). Eliphaz concurred: "What is man, that he should be clean? And he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" (Job 15:14). All these passages suggest that the sinful spiritual state of man is passed on mediately from generation to generation, and they therefore implicitly teach that the fetus is a spiritual, moral being.

Then too, Paul knew of a law that is universal for all men: "But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23). The psychical-spiritual unity of the human race is just as real as its biological unity. We conclude therefore, on the basis of inherited sin, that man's spiritual element is passed on mediately from Adam and not as the immediate creation of God, who does not author sin.

Second, Moses who taught the covenant people that God created Adam "in his own image" later taught that this image was passed on seminally. He recorded that "Adam fathered (*yôlîd*) a son in his own likeness and according to his image" (Gen. 5:3). The verb *hólîd* everywhere else means to "father a child."<sup>21</sup> Without doubt, then, the author intends his reader to understand that through sexual intercourse—seminally—the essential feature of humanness, that which relates man to God and separates him from the rest of nature, is handed down.

Finally, Psalm 51:5 f. (7 f. Hebrew) in particular supports the notion that at the time of conception man is in a state of sin and that man's spiritual, moral faculty is already present in the fetus.

In tracing the origin of his sin with Bathsheba, David lamented, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." E. R. Dalglish, in his authoritative work on Psalm 51, concluded: "In Psalm li. 7 [English v. 5] the psalmist is relating his sinfulness to the very inception of life; he traces his development beyond his birth ... to the genesis of his being in his mother's womb—even to the

<sup>21</sup>F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), p. 409.

very hour of conception.”<sup>22</sup>

But in lamenting his spiritual state traceable to the time of conception, David goes on in the next verse to note that already in his fetal state the moral law of God was present in him. Perhaps this point has not been noted in the popular literature on the subject because of the poor English renderings of this crucial text. According to the KJV the text reads: “Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” The descriptive words “inward parts” and “hidden part” do not, however, describe David’s body as might be inferred, but modify his mother’s womb. This interpretation can be inferred both from the close connection of verse 6 (v. 8 Hebrew) with verse 5 (v. 7 Hebrew) and from the words used, which literally mean “the covered-over parts” and the “bottled-up place,” words that more aptly describe his mother’s womb than his own body.

Having proved beyond reasonable doubt that David has in mind not his body but his mother’s womb, Dalglisch concluded:

In the depths of the womb the psalmist was wrought in the context of sin (v. 7) [English v. 5]; but there is another factor: the psalmist knows full well the divine desire for truth to be a moral imperative even in the formulative stages of his being within his mother’s womb and is conscious that even there wisdom was taught him, i.e., in his embryological state in the closed up chamber of the womb, the moral law was inscribed within his being.<sup>23</sup>

If this exegesis of Psalm 51:5 f. is correct, and to the best of my knowledge it is, then it seems an inescapable conclusion that the image of God is already present in the fetus.

No evangelical would deny that a baby is a human being and that it is made in the image of God, that is, that it has the capacity for spiritual, rational and moral response. The question, then, is, “Does the fetus have that capacity?” The answer of Scripture is that it does and that this capacity was already present at the time of conception.

We conclude then, on both theological and exegetical grounds, that the body, the life and the moral faculty of man originate simultaneously at conception.

### III. CONCLUSION

We are now in a position to give a clear statement regarding the morality of induced abortion based on God’s Word. The fetus is human and therefore to be accorded the same protection to life granted every other human being. Indeed, feticide is murder, an attack against a fellow man who owes his life to God, and a violation of the commandment, “You shall not kill.” Concerning the practical application of this conclusion I would agree with Ryrie that abortion can be justified only in those cases when the fetus presents material aggression against the mother.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>E. R. Dalglisch, *Psalm Fifty-One in the Light of Near Eastern Patternism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), p. 121.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>24</sup>Ryrie, *op. cit.*, p. 91.