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ABORTION

By Fanny Mak

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).

Whilst the Bible does not contain the word 'abortion' it does tell us that God is the creator who gives life, cares and protects it. Therefore, every life is precious in God's sight. Jesus Christ, our Lord, is pro-life.

A gift from God

Christians believe in a loving God who is full of 'grace', shown by 'giving' his only-begotten son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sins (John 3:16). Life is valuable because God loves it. Life is a 'gift' from God as Job said after the death of his children; *The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away* (Job 1:21). Human life is precious to the Creator and should be treated with humility by its procreators.

The nature of life

There is a great debate between pro-life and pro-choice groups on the question of when life starts. At issue is whether human life is being destroyed in abortion and embryo research. A number of Biblical texts shed light on the question:

The Lord said to her, *"Two nations are in your womb..."* (Genesis 25:23). This passage tells us the separate personalities and destinies of the unborn children in the womb.

In Exodus 21.22-25 we see that violence to the foetus is an offence even though it is an accident. Abortion could be an even more serious offence in God's sight because it is voluntary.

'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb... your eyes saw my unformed body ... All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be' (Psalm 139:13-16). God creates a child in the womb with his knowledge, care and protection. That child is an unborn person that needs human protection. Abortion at any time after conception means the death of an unborn child.

When Mary visited Elizabeth and the unborn John leapt, the normal term for a baby is used. It also appears that Mary was already pregnant, yet only recently so, yet that child too is recognised, there are two distinctive persons already developing in the wombs of these two women. The idea that for the first fourteen days an embryo is a 'nonbeing' must be discounted.

Pro-choice groups will argue that embryos are only 'potential humans' which do not need to be respected as human and therefore the only concern are the rights of the mother. In fact, embryos, like the rest of us, are humans with much potential.

Early Christian teaching

The early Christians were strongly against abortion in contrast to the view of the societies in which they lived.

"You shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill one who has been born" (Didache 80-140 A.D.).

"We say that women who use drugs to bring on abortion commit murder. And we also say they will

have to give an account to God for the abortion..... We also teach that it is wrong to expose an infant. For those who expose them are guilty of child murder” (Athenagoras. 175 A.D.) The exposure of infants, leaving them to die, or be taken to be slaves or prostitutes was lawful and not uncommon.

Likewise Tertullian (c197AD) wrote *“we may not destroy even the foetus in the womb... to hinder a birth is merely a speedier way to kill a human.”*

The early Christians were both clear and outspoken on this issue - abortion and the exposure of infants are morally evil, the murder of a child.

The Law today

The Abortion Act 1967, as amended by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act (HFEA) 1990, allows abortion up to 24 weeks, applies in England, Wales and Scotland, but not in Northern Ireland. When abortion was legalised, we were assured that abortion would be carried out only if the life or mental health of the mother or existing children were at risk with the continuing pregnancy or there is a ‘substantial’ risk of the child being born ‘seriously handicapped’.

However, after nearly forty years, there are 500 fetuses killed each day and nearly one in five recorded pregnancies in England and Wales ended in abortion in 2005. There have been 6.7 million abortions in Great Britain since 1967. According to Government figures in England only 1 in every 250 were because of a risk to the mother, 1 in every 76 were because of foetal handicap whilst more than 49 out of every 50 were for social reasons. Therefore abortion is carried out almost always for social reasons and is used as a form of contraception.

The Impact on Women

According to the pro-choice lobby the ‘the post abortion syndrome’ does not exist and is just a scare tactic used by pro-life groups. Women do often have a sense of relief after an abortion because of the feeling that a problem has been solved. However, abortion is a permanent decision; its impact can be long-lasting and only surface after a long period. Abortion can produce feelings of guilt, grief, depression, self-hatred, anxiety and anger, and can lead to substance-abuse. Such feelings can affect other children where a woman has such. Abortion is also strongly linked to the increased risk of health problems such as breast cancer and, premature birth and miscarriage in subsequent pregnancies. A recent medical study showed women who had undergone abortion have twice the risk of mental health problems, three times the risk of major depressive illness and four times the risk of suicide as women who had given birth to their baby.

Handicapped child

If we accept that an unborn child is fully human then aborting a handicapped unborn child is morally no different to aborting a handicapped child or adult. It is assumed that a handicapped person cannot live a meaningful and even happy life. However, their happiness does not solely depend on what they can do; rather, like the rest of us, it depends on the love they receive. Every individual experiences both happiness and unhappiness in life, and normally does not consider death is the best answer.

This is not to deny that caring for a handicapped child is often very difficult to undertake. In fact, the burden is so great that it should be carried not only by the child’s family alone, but by the society as a whole as well. On the positive side, it opens opportunities for the family of the child and the rest of us to show compassion, love, charity and kindness. By the grace of God, every life has a divine purpose.

Abortion after rape or incest

There is no question that we have to bring out this tough topic with great sensitivity and sympathy to the victim. Pregnancy as a result of rape is extremely rare. A woman is only fertile for about three to seven days in a month during her cycle whilst extreme psychological and physical trauma make fertilization and implantation less likely.

Rape is a crime, but the child is not the aggressor or the criminal, why should the innocent child pay with its life because its father is a rapist? Every child is a gift from God we should treasure, no matter who its parents are. In this country, the victim is not allowed to kill the rapist, why should we allow the child to be killed?

It is commonly assumed that rape victims who become pregnant want an abortion and that it can 'help' them to recover from the trauma and move on quickly. However a major study concluded that 'both the mother and child are helped by preserving life, not by perpetuating violence'. Mothers do not want to add to the evil or victimise their innocent child whilst others by their selflessness and strength rise above the evil and reclaim their self-esteem.

In cases of incest families will often close ranks and a quick abortion is seen as a way of hiding from scandal. This harms the mother even further. By the grace of God, we can show our real compassion to the pregnant woman and child by helping them through every step and make it as easy as possible for the woman to give up the child for adoption, if she desires.

Conclusion

Our God is a loving God who gives life and sent His son, Jesus Christ, to live among us to bring us salvation. It is also the Lord who gives and takes. Our duty is to respect, treasure life and take every possible step to protect it, but abortion is the termination of an innocent life which starts at the womb. Abortion can bring negative physical and psychological impacts on the mother and she may not be fully aware of them. Sadly, pro-choice groups say abortion is an undisputable right of women and they have a choice to abort. This way of thinking accomplished by the easy access to abortion under the current law has led to the alarming rise in the number of abortions.

Fanny Mak is an occasional volunteer in the Church Society office.

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