



Abortion Issue Overview

By Sarah Jane Head, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission - July 15, 2003

History

On January 22, 1973, the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion in its landmark decision, *Roe v. Wade*. The Court ruled that an unborn child is neither a human nor a person, and therefore is not protected under the Constitution. A fetus, not seen as a separate entity in itself, merely functions as a part of the mother's body. The Court also conferred the decision for two other reasons: a woman's right to privacy included her right to terminate a pregnancy, and the states' interest in unborn life is not sufficient enough to outlaw abortion. The child, labeled as "potential life," does not require the government to protect its one chance to live¹. Also in 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in *Doe v. Bolton* to allow for abortions when the "health" of the mother is jeopardized². Loosely defined, the "health" of the mother can refer to anything from depression and emotional well being to the age or marital difficulties of the mother. This case also allows abortions to be performed in clinics, instead of hospitals. In 1992, the Court upheld the right to an abortion in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, but the ruling significantly weakened the core of *Roe v. Wade* by requiring counseling to women and a mandatory 24-hour waiting period after this counseling, as well as public files of all abortion providers, including ones that receive state funds³. Most recently, *Stenberg v. Carhart* (2000) upheld partial-birth abortions as a viable option for women seeking to terminate their pregnancy⁴.

The State of the Issue Today

Today finds Christians and concerned citizens alike at a delicate crossroad. Since *Roe v. Wade*, over 40 million abortions have been performed in the United States alone⁵. Every 20 seconds in America, a baby is torn from its mother's womb and discarded; about 1.4 million unborn babies are aborted every year in the U.S., not to mention the 40 to 60 million children (one every half second) aborted each year worldwide⁶. This killing spree is fueled by the fact that 3 out of 4 Americans say abortion should remain legal; ironically, out of this group, 50% say that abortion is murder⁷. As of July 2001, 52% of Americans believe abortion should be legal (down 7% from earlier this year), while 43% believe it should be illegal⁸.

Along with these astounding statistics, the abortion industry has "birthed" critical, new issues to consider in its wake. Many opponents of abortion see a ban on partial birth abortion as a doorway to ending the infanticide, and so continue to push for its acceptance. While 31 states enforce parental consent or notification laws for minors seeking abortions, these laws may be overridden by a court order, allowing young teenage girls to suffer through the consequences of their choices in isolation⁹. And while federal money purportedly is not used to support abortions, taxpayers have supplied Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in the country, with 1.6 billion dollars since 1987¹⁰. Abortion also jeopardizes a woman's health in an unnatural and cruel way. Nearly 70,000 women die each year from abortions¹¹. Underlying the physical danger, the emotional and mental health concerns surrounding abortion threaten

women and their futures. Many women, plagued by guilt, insecurity, or depression from an abortion, never fully recover from their decision. Also to be considered in the 21st century, the introduction of RU-486, the “morning after” abortion pill, allows women to further remove themselves from the stigma of killing a child by simply taking a few pills to abort the baby¹².

Answers to Some Pro-Choice Arguments

- ***It's not a life.*** Even if one did not want to deal with the complications involved in the technical definition of “life,” an embryo is still a human being—it has human characteristics and it exists—thereby affording it the protection originally intended by the founding fathers when they drafted the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence declares “human beings are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...” and “...that among these are Life¹³...” An embryo, while in its infancy of personhood, can become nothing else except a human being, unlike other unspecialized cells, which differentiate from the initial embryo. From a Biblical perspective, God purposes life from the very beginning of its time in the womb, thereby affording it extra protection as one of God’s amazing creations.
- ***It's my right.*** While the freedoms in a democracy allow incredible flexibility, one must realize the specific implications of what a democracy actually is. As Americans, we relinquish certain rights for the good of the whole and in order not to harm others. By allowing women to choose abortions, we are allowing one citizen’s decision to purposefully terminate the life of another. Also, Christian women surrender their rights to Christ, allowing Him the right to dictate their life’s direction.
- ***Unwanted babies would just be abused.*** Since 1973 and the legalization of abortion, occurrences of child abuse have actually risen substantially. Perhaps it is not unwanted children, but a degradation of the sanctity of human life among adults that is causing this increase. Also, thousands of loving couples desperately want to adopt a newborn into their home. With the onset of abortion, many of these couples are now looking overseas for children to bring into their lives.
- ***I don't want to care for a child with disabilities.*** Diagnoses of infant deformities usually arise from the use of a sonogram or amniocentesis. While both are recognized as effective medical procedures, mistakes and misdiagnoses do occur. Of 33,000 women studied who were told their babies were deformed or crippled in some way, 174 birthed completely normal, healthy babies. Of the children who were aborted (43% of the 33,000), there is no way to tell how many children would have led normal lives if they had only been given the chance to live¹⁴.
- ***If we didn't have legalized abortions, women would seek dangerous “back-alley” abortions.*** Of the more than 1.3 million abortions that occur in the U.S., 40 out of 1000 of these procedures are still obtained illegally and under hazardous circumstances¹⁵.

Biblical Response

The Bible cries loudly for the protection of human life. God clearly states that He created humans in His image, and therefore they are treasured above all creation (Genesis 1:26-27, 9:6). The Creator (Psalm 100:3, Job 31:5, 33:4) also had a special purpose and design in making each individual human (Psalm 139:13-16, Isaiah 49:1, and Jeremiah 1:5). No matter what the Supreme Court says, the Bible makes no distinction between the personhood of the born and unborn (Luke 1:15, 41, 44, Luke 2:16, 2 Timothy 3:15). The previous scriptures (from Luke and 2 Timothy) refer to a child in a different stage of development, both inside and outside of the womb, yet Scripture uses the same word for each one. The soul that exists outside the womb is the same soul that originated at the moment of conception inside the womb. Finally, because God “has granted life” (Job 10:12), who are we to take it?

¹ Larry L. Lewis. “Critical Issues: What the Bible Teaches About Abortion.” (pamphlet) (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention Christian Life Commission, 1990).

² National Right to Life at nrlc.org

³ Alan Guttmacher Institute (February 2000); National Abortion Rights Action League at naral.com

⁴ National Right to Life at nrlc.org

⁵ Alan Guttmacher Institute, "Family Planning Perspectives." Vol. 26, no. 3. (May/June 1994), p. 101; National Right to Life at nrlc.org

⁶ Peter Brimelow. *Forbes Magazine*. October 18, 1999; Alan Guttmacher Institute (February 2000); *Focus 2000: Sanctity of Human Life* (pamphlet) (Nashville: Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, 2000).

⁷ New York Times/CBS News Poll by Monica Seaberry and Mike Paquette. (Religion News Service, 1998).

⁸ Washington Times (July 3, 2001).

⁹ Alan Guttmacher Institute (February 2000).

¹⁰ *The Ryan Report* (February 1999).

¹¹ *Journal of the American Medical Association* (September 22/29, 1999).

¹² Bernard Nathanson on NewsMax.com (interview). (October 7, 2000); Alan Guttmacher Institute. "Family Planning Perspectives—Update." (September/October 2000).

¹³ Richard D. Land. "Is Life a Right?" (pamphlet) (Nashville: Christian Life Commission, 1990); Larry L. Lewis. "Critical Issues: What the Bible Teaches About Abortion." (Nashville: Christian Life Commission, 1990).

¹⁴ Washington Times (July 13, 1999).

¹⁵ Alan Guttmacher Institute (July 3, 2001).