

## When Abortion Was Wrong

*A History Of The Church's Attitude Towards Abortion And A Framework For Apologetics Today*

In the modern period of history there are no current issues as volatile as abortion, especially in American culture. More than any other issue, abortion sets the tone for political debate. Many voters will determine their votes on this issue alone. As the 2020 election looms, the ultimate concern for many voters is how this election will affect the Supreme Court and the fear, or hope, that new Supreme Court Justices will overturn the *Roe v. Wade* decision from 1973; a decision which applied the rights of liberty and privacy to abortion. Currently, the weight of public opinion favors legalized abortion. According to a 2019 Pew Research poll, sixty-one percent of Americans favor legal abortion in all or most cases and only thirty-eight percent oppose it in all or most cases.<sup>1</sup>

This issue not only divides culture, but is also dividing churches. Christians who support abortion, the legal right of a woman to make a personal decision on the matter, or are willing to support political candidates that support abortion have increased in number dramatically over the last decade, even among fundamental, evangelical, and Catholic churches.<sup>2</sup> Though this divide began earlier, the sexual revolution of the 1960's revealed a growing disconnect between the theology taught in Scripture and the general opinions of church members.

In response, various groups rose up, such as the Moral Majority of the 1980's, led by the likes of Jerry Falwell and others and influenced by Francis Schaeffer, to call the church back to the Judeo-Christian ethic. They stood opposed to homosexuality, feminism, communism, and other issues that were rapidly changing in the American culture. However, abortion was the most common rallying call of this organization. As Schaeffer wrote in his prophetic book, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race*,

Let it never be said by historians in the latter days of this century that – after the Supreme Court decided on abortion in 1973 and the practice of infanticide began – there was no outcry from the medical profession and no outcry from man outside this profession...

<sup>1</sup> "Public Opinion on Abortion," *The Pew Research Center*, last modified August 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/public-opinion-on-abortion/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

And above everything else, let it never be said that there was no outcry from Christians! All Christians know why people are different and have value as unique individuals – sick or well, young or old. People are unique because they are made in the image of God. What *has* happened to the human race?<sup>3</sup>

However, in spite of the attempts to thwart the agenda of the pro-choice position over the past half a century, this divide is even more apparent today. Even among Catholics, whose official church documents clearly reject abortion and excommunicate those who support such practice,<sup>4</sup> there is a growing support for the pro-choice position. Abortion apologetics are failing to convince even those who are already Christians. Many Christians today feel that they can maintain both historic Christianity and an openness to abortion. As pro-choice apologist and theologian Margaret Kamitsuka has written, "No one disputes that the church pronounced early and long that abortion is a moral evil and that the women who attempted or succeeded with an abortion are sinners."<sup>5</sup> However, she argues that "the pro-choice stance is not cut off from the historical Christian tradition."<sup>6</sup> In her work, she attempts to use debates over personhood, ensoulment, and punishments for abortion to argue that modern day pro-choice advocates are within historical orthodoxy for allowing abortion. But is this true? Can people claim to be in step with historic Christianity while supporting abortion?

Quite to the contrary, this paper will argue that, for 1900 years, the church has spoken with one, unified voice that abortion is sin. It wasn't until the twentieth century that this conviction was shaken. So, in the spirit of Schaeffer, whatever happened? In this

<sup>3</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, "Whatever Happened to the Human Race?," in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 5 (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 1982), 346.

<sup>4</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Complete and Updated* (New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1995), 606.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret D. Kamitsuka, *Abortion and the Christian Tradition: A Pro-Choice Theological Ethic* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

paper, the thinking of major theologians from each period of history will be examined and a framework for how apologetics in the modern period, standing on the church's long tradition, can effectively make a case against the practice of abortion will be given.

### **An Historical Survey of the Church's Response to Abortion**

The Church has morally opposed abortion, with the physical safety of the mother as the only possible exception, in every period of its history since the time of Christ until the modern era. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church has stated, "Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable."<sup>7</sup>

#### **Abortion in Early Pagan and Jewish Perspectives**

Abortion is not a new issue and has been practiced for thousands of years. In his book, *Abortion and the Early Church*, Michael J. Gorman describes the various methods and attitudes toward abortion in the centuries before the time of Christ.<sup>8</sup> This section will summarize his presentation. Sometimes this practice was accomplished by abandoning or drowning the child after birth, such as in the case of the midwives in Egypt in the account of Exodus, or offering the child up as a sacrifice to a pagan deity. Other times, it was accomplished by the drinking of poisons or the dissecting and extraction of the pre-born child in the womb. External methods included heavy physical exercise, tightening ropes around the midsection, or even jumping on the mother's stomach. Though the efficiency of methods has improved since these times, many of the basic concepts have remained the same.

Attitudes towards abortion in pagan cultures have varied from culture to culture and from person to person. Within Egyptian, Chinese, Babylonian, Indian, Greek, and Roman writings, there are writings supporting the practice and others opposing it. Those who opposed abortion often did so because they viewed the abortion as potentially harmful to the mother or potentially defrauding the father of his property. Those who remained neutral or affirmed the practice commonly denied the viability, inherent worth, or personal rights of the unborn or newly born, especially if the child was born weak or misshapen,

<sup>7</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Complete and Updated*, 606., 60

<sup>8</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1998), 13–32.

or believed that these rights were subservient to the needs of the state.

For example, two philosophers who had a significant impact on later attitudes towards abortion were Plato and Aristotle. Plato believed that abortion should be allowed, and even forced, when parents are beyond child rearing age or when it is necessary for the good of the state, in spite of any rights the unborn child may have as a living being.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Aristotle is famous for his statement that abortion is not only allowable but may even be mandated under certain circumstances, such as a baby born deformed or when there is threat of overpopulation.<sup>10</sup>

Aristotle is of particular importance for understanding the church's history in responding to abortion because his views on potentiality and personhood will be assimilated by later theologians like Philo, Augustine, and Aquinas. Aristotle believed that life is present when the essential organs of the fetus have developed, which in his mind occurred forty days after conception for male children and ninety days after conception for females.<sup>11</sup> The legality, not necessarily morality, of abortion was determined by whether or not the fetus had arrived at the point of being alive. What is of note is that while Aristotle believed that the unborn child, once it had reached this point, had rights, it also had such rights before this period because it possessed potentiality. Since the fetus, left to itself, would have those features, they should be treated as a living human.<sup>12</sup> However, all such rights were subservient to the needs of the state.

The secular culture at the time of the Church's beginning was a mixed bag of views regarding abortion, but most considered it legally morally permissible and possibly morally permissible as well. The Jewish system, however, was a different matter. Though they too wrestled with the question of when a fetus becomes a person with rights, it is clear that the Jews up to the first century held to the immorality of intentional abortion. In such discussions, Exodus

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York, NY: Clydesdale Press, 2018), 139.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL.: The University Of Chicago Press, 2013), 218–219.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, "The History of Animals," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 1 (Princeton University Press, 1984), 914.

<sup>12</sup> See Aristotle, "Metaphysics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Princeton University Press, 1984), 1552–1728.

21:22-23 is a primary text that serves as a case study for the legal rights of the unborn,

If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges *decide*. But if there is *any further* injury, then you shall appoint *as a penalty* life for life.<sup>13</sup>

If someone, even accidentally, strikes a pregnant woman so that the fetus is hurt or dies, the one who struck her should die for the life he took or hurt. This text clearly advocates for the protection and rights of the unborn. Though there were different schools of thought, roughly summarized as the Alexandrian and Palestinian views, each holding to particulars of when a fetus becomes a person and what penalties should be afforded to perpetrators of abortion, Gorman writes, “both schools confined their discussion to accidental or therapeutic abortions. Neither considered the possibility of induced abortions for less than life-threatening reasons.”<sup>14</sup>

By the time of the first century, the opposition to abortion for theological and ethical reasons was well established. Josephus writes, “The Law orders all the offspring to be brought up, and forbids women either to cause abortion or to make away with the foetus; a woman convicted of this is regarded as an infanticide, because she destroys a soul and diminishes the race.”<sup>15</sup>

#### Abortion and the Ante-Nicene Church

It is clear that, in the world in which the Church was born, abortion existed and was practiced. The fact that, throughout the early church all the way until the modern period, the Church has spoken to the issue of abortion demonstrates that abortion continued to be practiced. However, from the earliest years of the church, the vast majority of theologians and all major statements from various ages opposed abortion strongly.

<sup>13</sup> Scripture taken from Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, © Copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960,1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, 1995. Used by permission.

<sup>14</sup> Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Flavius Josephus, “Against Apionem 2:202,” in *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, ed. Henry St. John et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 372–374.

While the New Testament does not directly address the issue of abortion, the earliest theologians of the Church before the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 addressed the issue with surprising frequency and clarity. The earliest direct reference to abortion from Christianity comes from the Didache,<sup>16</sup> a first and second century summary of early Christian teaching and ethics. This document emphasized the so-called “two-ways” of living one’s life. The first way, the way of righteousness and submission to God, leads to life while the second, the way of sin, leads to death. The rest of the book is a description of what it means to live the way that leads to life.<sup>17</sup> In describing the way of sin, the Didache states, “thou shalt not commit murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, ... thou shalt not murder a child by abortion nor ill that which is begotten.”<sup>18</sup> This document clearly demonstrates that the early church viewed abortion as murder. Further, it also states later that the way of death explicitly includes the murder of children.<sup>19</sup>

A second reference is found in the Epistle of Barnabas, written by an unknown author in the first or second century, but ascribed to Barnabas by Clement of Alexandria and Origen.<sup>20</sup> Though not itself Scripture, this text was revered by many in the early church. It too states clearly,

Thou shalt love thy neighbor more than thine own soul. Thou shalt not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shalt thou destroy it after it is born. Thou shalt not withdraw thy hand from thy son, or from thy daughter, but from their infancy thou shalt teach them the fear of the Lord.<sup>21</sup>

This passage indicates several key points. First, the text prohibits abortion and child abandonment.

<sup>16</sup> Also known as the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 377.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

<sup>20</sup> Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 206.

<sup>21</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., “The Epistle of Barnabas,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 148.

Second, it is significant that the instruction before the prohibition to abortion is the “golden rule.” The epistle roots its prohibition in the identification of the unborn as one’s neighbor and in the Lord’s command to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. Third, it is not only prohibited to abort a child, but also to neglect it once born. Rather, parents are obligated to care for and nurture this child.

Third, a reference to infanticide is found in Justin Martyr, a second century apologist. He did not speak to the issue of abortion while the fetus is in the womb, but he clearly spoke on the issue of killing newborn children when he wrote,

But as for us [Christians], we have been taught that to expose newly-born children is the part of wicked men; and this we have been taught lest we should do any one an injury, and least we should sin against God, first, because we see that almost all so exposed (not only girls, but also the males) are brought up to prostitution.<sup>22</sup>

A fourth early reference to abortion is found in the pseudepigraphical Apocalypse of Peter. In this work, dated to the second century, the writer describes a scene of judgement in the last days in which “there sat women having the gore up to their necks, and over against them sat many children who were born to them out of due time, crying; and there came forth from them sparks of fire and smote the women in the eyes: and these were the accursed who conceived and caused abortion.”<sup>23</sup> This work, though questionable on theology, nevertheless highlights the early belief of Christians that abortion was a murderous act, one that God will right on the last day.

A fifth reference to abortion is found in the writings of Clement of Alexandria in his work, *The Instructor*, a second century document. He not only outlawed abortion as contrary to the laws of nature because it takes life, but he described the various means by which abortions were procured when he wrote,

Our whole life can go on in observation of the laws of nature, if we gain dominion over our desires from the beginning and if we do not kill, by various means of a perverse art, the human offspring, born according to the

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<sup>22</sup> Justin Martyr, “The First Apology,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 172.

<sup>23</sup> Allan Menzies, ed., “The Apocalypse of Peter,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 146.

designs of divine providence; for these women who, in order to hide their immorality, use abortive drugs which expel the matter completely dead, and abort at the same time their human feelings.<sup>24</sup>

Sixth, Athenagoras of Athens, an apologist of the second century, included an argument for Christianity by denouncing abortion as murder. To his opponents, who argued that Christianity practiced cannibalism, he responded,

How, then, when we do not even look on (a gladiatorial contest), lest we should contract guilt and pollution, can we put people to death? And when we say that those women who use drugs to bring on abortion commit murder, and we have to give an account to God for the abortion, on what principle should we commit murder? For it does not belong to the same person to regard the very fetus in the womb as a created being, and therefore an object of God’s care, and when it has passed into life, to kill it; and not to expose an infant, because those who expose them are chargeable with child-murder, and on the other hand, when it has been reared to destroy it.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, he argued, how can Christians be charged with being immoral and murderous when they will not even watch the gladiator games and they believe even abortion is murder? Once again, in this text, we see early Christian teaching that abortion is murder because the unborn child is a living being created and loved by God.

A seventh reference to abortion is found in Tertullian, the late second and early third century theologian. In his *Apology*, he wrote,

In our case, murder being once for all forbidden, we may not destroy even the foetus in the womb, while as yet the human being derives blood from other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to the

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<sup>24</sup> Clement of Alexandria, “The Instructor,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 262.

<sup>25</sup> Athenagoras, “A Plea for Christians,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 147.

birth. That is a man which is going to be one.; you have the fruit already in its seed.<sup>26</sup>

Tertullian, like the others, ties abortion to murder, even while the fetus is in the womb. In other writings, he goes on to describe various means of abortion and argues that the unborn child is a living being at conception, capable of being sick, growing, decaying, and is infused with a pre-existent soul.<sup>27</sup> He tied his beliefs to such passages as the Lord knowing Jeremiah in the womb in Jeremiah 1:5, John leaping for joy in Elizabeth in Luke 1:44, and Mary's worship of God for the baby inside of her in Luke 1:46. He goes on to argue, however, that the embryo becomes a human being when it is fully formed.<sup>28</sup> This is strange, considering his statements only ten chapters earlier. The discrepancy can be solved by understanding that Tertullian is arguing that, while the baby is not a fully formed human being, it nonetheless is a living being that will be a fully formed human being and, as Gorman writes, "can be considered a living being."<sup>29</sup> One can see a parallel to the works of Aristotle and his philosophy of potentiality.

Eighth, Hippolytus of Rome, a late second century theologian, also wrote in opposition to abortion. In his work, *The Refutation of All Heresies*, he condemned the practice as murder when he wrote,

Reputed believers began to resort to drugs for producing sterility and to gird themselves round, so as to expel what was conceived on account of their not wanting to have a child either by a slave or by any paltry fellow, for the sake of their family and excessive wealth. Behold, into how great impiety that lawless one has proceeded by inculcating adultery and murder at the same time.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Tertullian, "The Apology," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 25.

<sup>27</sup> Tertullian, "A Treatise on the Soul," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 205-207.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>29</sup> Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish and Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World*, 57.

<sup>30</sup> Hippolytus, "The Refutation of All Heresies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 131.

A ninth abortion reference is seen in the writings of Marcus Minucius Felix, a third century Christian apologist. In his *The Octavius of Minucius Felix*, with passionate words, he wrote, "Think you that it can be possible for so tender, so little a body to receive those fatal wounds?"<sup>31</sup> He went on to decry the practices of both exposing and abandoning young children to the elements or animals and to the drinking of poisons by expectant mothers, even accusing such an act of killing future parents.

In Cyprian, the third century bishop of Carthage, there is a ninth relevant passage, though not a reference to abortion per se. In a letter to Pope Cornelius, Cyprian accuses Novatus of murdering his own unborn son by kicking his wife.<sup>32</sup> This reference further demonstrates the assumption that the killing of unborn children was to kill a living human with rights and worth.

Tenth, Methodius of Olympus, a third and fourth century bishop also affirmed the value of those who die before birth in his work *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, writing,

Whence, also, we have received from the inspired writings that those who are begotten, even though it be in adultery, are committed to guardian angels. But if they came into being in opposition to the will and the decree of the blessed nature of God, how should they be delivered over to angels, to be nourished with much gentleness and indulgence? and how, if they had to accuse their own parents, could they confidently, before the judgment seat of Christ, invoke Him and say, 'Thou didst not, O Lord, grudge us this common light; but these appointed us to death, despising Thy command?' 'For,' He says, 'children begotten of unlawful beds are witnesses of wickedness against their parents at their trial.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Marcus Minucius Felix, "The Octavius of Minucius Felix," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 4 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 192.

<sup>32</sup> Cyprian, "The Epistles of Cyprian: Cyprian's Answer to Cornelius Concerning the Crimes of Novatus," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 325.

<sup>33</sup> Methodius, "The Banquet of the Ten Virgins," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 316.

Methodius affirmed the life and value of children who die, even those begotten from adultery. Their lives are guarded by the angels and they themselves will testified on the judgement day against their parents.

Finally, several edicts from the fourth century clearly affirm the church's opposition to abortion. The Council of Elvira stated in Canon 63, "If a woman becomes pregnant by committing adultery, while her husband is absent, and after the act she destroys [the child], it is proper to keep her from communion until death, because she has doubled her crime."<sup>34</sup> It also prescribed a penalty for this action in Canon 68 "If a catechumen should conceive by an adulterer, and should procure the death of the child, she can be baptized only at the end of her life."<sup>35</sup> Likewise, the Apostolic Constitutions stated, "You shall not slay the child by causing abortion, nor kill that which is begotten; for 'everything that is shaped, and has received a soul from God, if it be slain, shall be avenged, as being unjustly destroyed.'"<sup>36</sup>

The canons from the Council of Ancyra, taking a different approach to punishment than the Council of Elvira, stated in canon 21, "Concerning women who commit fornication, and destroy that which they have conceived, or who are employed in making drugs for abortion, a former decree excluded them until the hour of death, and to this some have assented. Nevertheless, being desirous to use somewhat greater lenity, we have ordained that they fulfill ten years, according to the prescribed decrees."<sup>37</sup> These documents confirm that abortion was considered morally wrong and in violation of God's commands. It is clear that the Church spoke unanimously that abortion was murder and immoral and that the lives of the unborn were to be honored, protected, and nurtured. The unborn were living beings, made by God and loved by Him.

#### Abortion in the Post-Nicene Church Era

In the years after the Council of Nicaea, several theologians directly addressed the issue of abortion

<sup>34</sup> "The Canons of Elvira," [www.legalthistorysources.com/Canon%20Law/ElviraCanons.htm](http://www.legalthistorysources.com/Canon%20Law/ElviraCanons.htm).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 466.

<sup>37</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., "The Council of Ancyra," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 73.

and the nature of the unborn. Beginning with Basil of Caesarea in the mid to late fourth century, these fathers continued in the tradition of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. Basil wrote,

The woman who purposely destroys her unborn child is guilty of murder. With us there is no nice enquiry as to its being formed or unformed. In this case it is not only the being about to be born who is vindicated, but the woman in her attack upon herself; because in most cases women who make such attempts die. The destruction of the embryo is an additional crime, a second murder, at all events if we regard it as done with intent. The punishment, however, of these women should not be for life, but for the term of ten years. And let their treatment depend not on mere lapse of time, but on the character of their repentance... Women also who administer drugs to cause abortion, as well as those who take poisons to destroy unborn children, are murderesses.<sup>38</sup>

Basil opposed Aristotle's model of denying humanity to those who were not yet ensouled. He also went on to also write, in an official canonical epistle, "Let her that procures abortion undergo ten years' penance, whether the embryo were perfectly formed, or not."<sup>39</sup> Building on the work of the Council of Ancyra, Basil limited the punishment for abortion to ten years of penance, but clearly understood the practice as murder and detestable.

A second reference to abortion is found in Ambrose, the fourth century bishop of Milan and mentor to Augustine. In lamenting the attitudes of women towards their own children and the evil hearts of men, he affirmed the life of the unborn and the immorality of abortion when he wrote,

Those who are very poor expose their infants and refuse to lay claim to them when they are discovered. The wealthy, in order that their inheritance may not be divided among several, deny in the very womb their own progeny. By use of parricidal mixtures they

<sup>38</sup> Basil, "Letter to Amphilochius Concerning the Canons.," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 8, 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 225.

<sup>39</sup> Basil, "The First Canonical Epistle of Our Holy Father Basil, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia to Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 14, 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 604.

snuff out the fruit of their wombs in the genital organs themselves. In this way life is taken away before it is given...Who except man himself has taught us ways of repudiating children?<sup>40</sup>

A third reference is found in the writings of Jerome. A leading theologian and translator in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Jerome condemned as murder the practice of brides aborting their unborn children so that they would not be pregnant before their wedding day. He not only accused them of murder, but also decried the practice because it sometimes led to the death of the mother. He wrote,

You may see many women widows before wedded, who try to conceal their miserable fall by a lying garb. Unless they are betrayed by swelling wombs or by the crying of their infants, they walk abroad with tripping feet and heads in the air. Some go so far as to take potions, that they insure barrenness, and thus murder human beings almost before their conception. Some, when they find themselves with child through their sin, use drugs to procure abortion, and when (as often happens) they die with their offspring, they enter the lower world laden with the guilt not only of adultery against Christ but also of suicide and murder.<sup>41</sup>

In the writings of Augustine of Hippo, there is a fourth reference to the issue of abortion. However, the situation gets more complicated when he comes on the scene in the fourth century. Augustine has been quoted by pro-life and pro-choices advocates because he wrestled with several key issues. In addressing those who only desire the pleasure of sexual relations and not the offspring they produce, he wrote,

Having also proceeded thus far, they are betrayed into exposing their children, which are born against their will. They hate to nourish and retain those whom they were afraid they would beget. This infliction of cruelty on their offspring so reluctantly begotten, unmasks the sin which they had practiced in darkness, and drags it clearly into the light of day. The open cruelty

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<sup>40</sup> Ambrose, "Hexaameron," in *Saint Ambrose: Hexaameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, vol. 42, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Of America Press, 1961), 207.

<sup>41</sup> Jerome, "Letter XXII to Eustochium," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 27.

reproves the concealed sin. Sometimes, indeed, this lustful cruelty, or, if you please, cruel lust, resorts to such extravagant methods as to use poisonous drugs to secure barrenness; or else, if unsuccessful in this, to destroy the conceived seed by some means previous to birth, preferring that its offspring should rather perish than receive vitality; or if it was advancing to life within the womb, should be slain before it was born.<sup>42</sup>

Augustine clearly thought abortion was wrong and that child-bearing was a primary purpose for sexual relations. However, the difficult aspect of his thinking is whether or not this action should constitute murder. Augustine, following Aristotle, struggled with the question of when the child becomes alive and drew a distinction between the formed and unformed fetus. In the above quote, he stated that the child in the womb early in pregnancy is "advancing to life." This shaped his view of Exodus 21:22, in which he argued, "The Law does not provide that the act" - loss of a fetus - "pertains to homicide," because one cannot as yet say there is a live soul in that body deprived of feeling, if it is in a body not formed and therefore deprived of all feeling.<sup>43</sup> In the case of the woman who's baby is not fully formed, Augustine argued that abortion should not be considered legally a murder. Some argue here that Augustine rejected the idea that such an abortion was ethically murder.<sup>44</sup>

However, this is to misread Augustine. In his later writings, though he admits that he struggled with the question, he erred on the side of protecting the life of the child. It isn't that Augustine did not think abortion was ethically to be considered murder, only that the legal charge of murder was not to be applied because there are legal questions about what the fetus experiences or about when the soul actually comes to the body. He wrote,

Hence in the first place arises a question about abortive conceptions, which have indeed been born in the mother's womb, but

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<sup>42</sup> Augustine, "On Marriage and Concupiscence," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 5, 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 271.

<sup>43</sup> Augustine, "Questions on Exodus: 80," in *The Patristic Bible Commentary*, ed. John Litteral, n.d., <https://sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/exodus/questions-on-exodus-by-augustine-of-hippo>.

<sup>44</sup> Dolores E. Dunnett, "Evangelicals and Abortion," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33, no. 2 (June 1990): 219.

not so born that they could be born again. For if we shall decide that these are to rise again, we cannot object to any conclusion that may be drawn in regard to those which are fully formed. Now who is there that is not rather disposed to think that unformed abortions perish, like seeds that have never fructified? But who will dare to deny, though he may not dare affirm, that at the resurrection every defect in form shall be supplied, and that thus the perfection which time would have brought shall not be wanting, any more than the blemishes which time did bring shall be present: so that the nature shall neither want anything suitable and in harmony with it that length of days would have added, nor be debased by the presence of anything of an opposite kind that length of days has added; but that what is not yet complete shall be completed, just as what has been injured shall be renewed. And therefore the following question may be very carefully inquired into and discussed by learned men, though I do not know whether it is in man's power to resolve it: At what time the infant begins to live in the womb: whether life exists in a latent form before it manifests itself in the motions of the living being. To deny that the young who are cut out limb by limb from the womb, lest if they were left there dead the mother should die to, have never been alive, seems too audacious. Now, from the time that a man begins to live, from that time it is possible for him to die. And if he die, wheresoever death may overtake him, I cannot discover on what principle he can be denied an interest in the resurrection of the dead<sup>45</sup>

Augustine pointed out that at whatever stage an abortion occurs, it involves the death of the thing aborted. If the thing dies, it must have been alive. In *The City of God*, he re-affirmed his thought when he wrote, "That abortions, which, even supposing they were alive in the womb, did also die there, shall rise again, I make bold neither to affirm or to deny, although I fail to see why, if they are not excluded from the number of the dead, they should not attain to the resurrection of the dead."<sup>46</sup> Augustine clearly

<sup>45</sup>Augustine, "The Enchiridion or Faith, Hope, and Love," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3, 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 265.

<sup>46</sup> Augustine and Philip Schaff, "The City of God," in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2,

opposed the practice of intentional abortion as immoral and contrary to the purposes of God, strongly tipping his hand that the issue should be considered ethically equal to murder in all cases, though not legally so in the case of those not fully formed.

A fifth reference to abortion is found in a joint work of Jerome and Gennadius, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, written in the fifth century, in which these men quote from various writers of history. This work includes a quote from Tichonius of Africa who, commenting on the book of Revelation, wrote, "there will be one simultaneous resurrection of all, at which shall arise even the aborted and the deformed lest any living human being, however deformed, should be lost."<sup>47</sup>

Finally, writing in the mid to late fourth century, John Chrysostom addressed the situation of men who impregnate a harlot, accusing them of making it worse by the act of abortion in his sermons on Romans when he wrote,

Why then bring disgrace upon all these? Why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? where there are many efforts at abortion? where there is murder before the birth? for even the harlot you do not let continue as a mere harlot, but you make her a murderess also. You see how drunkenness leads to whoredom, whoredom to adultery, adultery to murder; or rather to a something even worse than murder. For I have no name to give it, since it does not take off the thing born, but prevents its being born. Why then do you abuse the gift of God, and fight with His laws, and follow after what is a curse as if a blessing, and make the chamber of procreation a chamber for murder, and arm the woman that was given for child-bearing unto slaughter?<sup>48</sup>

Chrysostom taught that abortion is murder and contrary to the laws of God and that children are to be seen as gifts of God. He wrote that those who kill the unborn turn a blessing into a curse and turn what

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1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 493.

<sup>47</sup> Jerome and Gennadius, "Lives of Illustrious Men," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 3, 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 389.

<sup>48</sup> John Chrysostom, "Homilies on Romans," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 11, 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 520.



should be beautiful, God's gift of relations, into adultery and murder.

The theologians following after the early church clearly supported the protection of the unborn and the immorality of abortion and all ultimately affirmed the life of the unborn at all stages of development, though with different levels of confidence.

#### Abortion in the Middle Ages

From the fifth century until the Reformation, the Church possessed great influence and power over cultural, ethical, and legal issues. Yet, though the Church's influence was far reaching, this did not mean that all people under the Church's rule always did or believed what the Church taught. Abortion remained an issue which the Church had to repeatedly address and it did so often. In his work, *A Love For Life*,<sup>49</sup> Dennis Di Mauro details numerous council statements and theologians during this time period who opposed abortion.

It is true that, in this period, there were theologians who held to differing views on this issue. During this time, there were those who allowed abortion before the point of ensoulment. John of Naples, in 1315, was a chief source of this thinking when he wrote that a doctor, if a baby has not reached the point of ensoulment, "although he impedes the ensoulment of a future fetus, he will not be the cause of death of any man."<sup>50</sup> However, this position did not gain wide acceptance. Others allowed for abortion in the case of danger to the health of the mother, such as Antonius of Florence. However, in contrast to John of Naples, whom Antonius cited, Antonius argued, in keeping with church tradition, that one ought not to seek abortion on the basis of pre-ensoulment because, if wrong, this would amount to ethical, if not legal, murder.<sup>51</sup> Even in these cases, abortion was not held up merely as a personal decision but as one that should be theologically and scientifically evaluated and, when in doubt, should not be pursued except to save the mother's life.

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<sup>49</sup> Dennis Di Mauro, *A Love for Life: Christianity's Consistent Protection of the Unborn* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008), 19–24.

<sup>50</sup> John of Naples, "Quodlibeta," as quoted in *Summa Summarum Quae Sylvestrina Dicitur*, by Silvester Da Prieras, 1518, 4.

<sup>51</sup> John T. Noonan Jr., "Abortion and the Catholic Church: A Summary History," *Natural Law Forum. Paper 126*, 1967, [https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1125&context=nd\\_naturallaw\\_forum](https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1125&context=nd_naturallaw_forum).

However, in spite of these debates, Di Mauro demonstrates that this reality cannot bear the weight that pro-choice proponents desire it too when they cite these questions and debates as proof that the church allowed for abortions during this time. He wrote,

Pro-choice Christians often use such debates from the early church or the Middle Ages to suggest that the church allowed, or at least tolerated, early-term abortions. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Almost invariably, the medieval church considered abortions to be gravely immoral. These debates (usually concerned) ... the question of when an abortion could be considered murder under the civil law.<sup>52</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, two prime examples from the medieval period will demonstrate the positions, debates, and controversies of the time period. First, in the seventh century, the Council of Trullo explicitly condemned abortion when it stated, "Those who give drugs for procuring abortion, and those who receive poisons to kill the foetus, are subjected to the penalty of murder."<sup>53</sup>

A second important source from the Middle Ages is Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth century premier Catholic theologian of the Middle Ages and even today. Following Aristotle and Augustine, Aquinas argued that the fetus received a soul when it was fully formed forty days after conception for boys and eighty to ninety days for girls. He wrote, "We conclude therefore that the intellectual soul is created by God at the end of human generation, and this soul is at the same time sensitive and nutritive, the pre-existing forms being corrupted."<sup>54</sup> After this time, the fetus is animated and to kill it is murder.<sup>55</sup> However, pro-choice theologians want to argue that Aquinas was not clear on the question of early term abortions before the baby was fully formed. They argue that Aquinas did not see anything wrong with abortion before the point of animation.

In response, Thomas Simonds has provided a helpful analysis of Aquinas' theology and relevancy to this debate and has argued that pro-choice

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<sup>52</sup> Di Mauro, *A Love for Life: Christianity's Consistent Protection of the Unborn*, 23–24.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., "The Canons of the Council in Trullo," vol. 14, 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 404.

<sup>54</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1948), 575.

<sup>55</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 3 (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1948), 1467.

theologians have flipped Aquinas' argument.<sup>56</sup> Aquinas' writing was focused on the theological question of when a person become an embodied, intellectual soul. For him, this was definitively present at the point in which the fetus is fully formed and animated, and thus must be alive. But what pro-choice theologians get wrong, as Simonds points out, is that,

Aquinas himself never said that early term abortions were permissible... (He) never said that the human soul is only present when quickening occurs. Aquinas said that his method of philosophy could show that the human soul had to be present when quickening occurred because movement was a visible sign that the fetus was alive... The human soul could be present earlier, and not be detected.<sup>57</sup>

Though he did not understand the "pre-animated" fetus to be a person in the formal sense, Aquinas never argued that abortion was tolerable at any phase, only that at the point we know the soul must exist, to kill the fetus is definitively murder. As Simonds points out, if pro-choice theologians would be consistent in their use of Aquinas, they would see that his argument is that at the point we know the fetus is alive, it is murder to kill them.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Aquinas celebrates the feast of Mary's conception because, in his mind, we do not know when ensoulment occurs for sure.<sup>59</sup> Thus, while Aquinas did believe that ensoulment began at the point of animation, he does not provide any positive sourcing for pro-choice theologians to argue for abortion, either in the earlier or later stages.

#### Abortion in the Reformation Era

Carrying on in the tradition of the early Church and Middle Ages, the Reformers also opposed abortion strongly. However, unlike their Roman Catholic counterparts, the Reformers emphasized the pleasure and companionship of marriage and did not oppose all forms of contraception.<sup>60</sup> Yet they maintained an opposition to all practices that ended the life of the unborn. For example, in his commentary on Genesis, Martin Luther wrote,

How great, therefore, the wickedness of human nature is! How many girls there are who prevent conception and kill and expel tender fetuses, although procreation is the work of God! Indeed, some spouses who marry and live together in a respectable manner have various ends in mind, but rarely children. The God who declares that we are to be fruitful and multiply regards it as a great evil when human beings destroy their offspring.<sup>61</sup>

Luther argued that God saw unborn children as precious and that the idea that a person would reject such a gift was unconscionable. He saw such an act as murder and as a sin against God's plan and goodness. In another writing, he condemned, with rather strong language, a particular woman who, after committing adultery, had a maid jump on her stomach to abort the child within her.<sup>62</sup>

John Calvin, coming just after Luther, agreed with him substantially on this issue. He did not mince words about his attitude towards the murder of the unborn when he wrote on Exodus 21:22, stating,

This passage at first sight is ambiguous, for if the word death only applies to the pregnant woman, it would not have been a capital crime to put an end to the fetus, which would be a great absurdity; for the fetus, though enclosed in the womb of its mother, is already a human being, (homo,) and it is almost a monstrous crime to rob it of the life which it has not yet begun to enjoy. If it seems more horrible to kill a man in his own house than in a field, because a man's house is his place of most secure refuge, it ought surely to be deemed most atrocious to destroy a fetus in the womb before it has come to light. On these grounds I am led to conclude without hesitation, that the words, 'if death should follow,' must be applied to the fetus as well as to the mother.<sup>63</sup>

Calvin taught that the unborn child is a human being, of the genus homo, and is a living being. Thus, it is unthinkable for a person to rob that child of the

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Andrew Simonds, "Aquinas and Early Term Abortion," *The Linacre Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (1994): 10–17.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>59</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 4 (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1948), 2159.

<sup>60</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Sexual Ethics: An Evangelical Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 149.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, vol. 4 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing, 1964), 304.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Douglas Winkey, "Seizing the Stake: Female Martyrdom in England during the Reformation" (Theis, Iowa State University, 2014), 28.

<sup>63</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 41–42.

life ahead of them. It is even more grievous to kill a baby in its place of security and safety. Though this passage is not about the intentional abortion of the child per se, but it does lay a theological foundation that directly opposes such a practice.

In response to the Reformation, the so-called Counter Reformation in the late 1500's and early 1600's also adamantly opposed abortion. Pope Sixtus V, in an official papal bull against abortion in 1588, *Effraenatam*, meaning "against those who procure abortion", wrote,

We absolutely establish and decree that the same punishments (for murder) are to be applied to those who give to women sterilizing potions, medicine and poisons in order to impede conception of the fetus and upon those who make and prepare such potions, medicine and poisons... and upon those that give such a counsel, as well as on women who knowingly take such sterilizing potions, medicine and poisons.<sup>64</sup>

He further argued that even those who encourage and counsel for abortion should be considered of equal guilt. Though Gregory XIV, who became Pope in 1590, revoked the severity of punishments and resorted to excommunication, he still maintained the immorality of abortion.<sup>65</sup>

#### Abortion in the Puritans and the Great Awakening

In the period after the Reformation era, beginning in the 1600's and lasting through the early 1800's, the Church experienced introduction and expansion into the New World of the Americas. It was during this time that the Puritans came to North America and set up their own civilization. As the colonies were formed, grew, and expanded, they were forced to deal with the issue of abortion, as well as a host of other societal concerns.

While abortion was practiced in the early colonies, to say it was morally or legally encouraged or acceptable would be to misread history. As Marvin Olasky demonstrates in his book, *Abortion Rites*, there were many examples of prosecution and public scorn for such actions from the 1600's through the

1700's.<sup>66</sup> Abortion among the Puritans was never promoted, but, before the "quickenings" of the child when it was detected, it was not considered legally murder.

However, this does not mean that the puritans "tolerated" abortion in any form. Olasky points out that these Puritans, steeped in Calvinism as they were, followed Calvin's essential teaching. For example, in 1712, Benjamin Wadsworth, the preacher who would become president of Harvard, famously wrote, "If any purposely endeavor to destroy the fruit of their womb (whether they actually do it or not) they're guilty of murder in God's account."<sup>67</sup>

After its early years, America moved into the period of its Great Awakenings in the early and mid-1700's. As colonial pastors and missionaries spread the Gospel, they saw not only a resurgence of salvation, but of biblical ethics as well, even if only for a time. This included an opposition to abortion. The preachers of the Great Awakening have left little by way of direct address on the issue, though they saw themselves as standing in the tradition of the Reformers before them. However, there are instances where abortion was clearly stated as immoral. For instance, John Wesley, one of the leaders of the First Great Awakening, wrote in his journal about a conversation between himself and a Native American,

After dinner, I asked the grey-headed old man what he thought he was made for. He said, "He that is above knows what He made us for. We know nothing. We are in the dark. But white men know much...." I told him, "If red men will learn the Good Book, they may know as much as white men. But neither we nor you can understand that Book unless we are taught by Him that is above: and He will not teach you unless you avoid what you already know is not good." He answered, "I believe that... And our men do what they know is not good: they kill their own children. And our women do what they know is not good: they kill the child before it is born. Therefore, He that is above does not send us the Good Book."<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Padre Antonio Trimakas, trans., "The Apostolic Constitution 'Effraenatam' of Pope Sixtus V Against Abortionists," 1590 1585, [https://documentacatholicaomnia.eu/01p/1588-11-29,\\_SS\\_Sixtus\\_V,\\_Bulla\\_'Effraenatam\\_Perditissimum'\\_,\\_EN.doc](https://documentacatholicaomnia.eu/01p/1588-11-29,_SS_Sixtus_V,_Bulla_'Effraenatam_Perditissimum'_,_EN.doc).

<sup>65</sup> Katherine Brind'Amour, "'Effraenatam' (1588), by Pope Sixtus V," *Embryo Project Encyclopedia* (Arizona State University, 2007), <http://embryo.asu.edu/handle/10776/1736>.

<sup>66</sup> See Chapter One in Marvin Olasky, *Abortion Rites: A Social History of Abortion in America* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 1992).

<sup>67</sup> Benjamin Wadsworth, *The Well-Ordered Family* (Boston: Green, 1712), 45.

<sup>68</sup> John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1951), 21.

Wesley taught that abortion was wrong and that he had communicated this to his audiences. In the mind of this Native American leader, and of Wesley himself, the continual practice of abortion was a reason that God had not given them His word.

#### Abortion in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

In the 1800's, abortion was legal in both the United States and in England before fetal movement could be detected.<sup>69</sup> However, as R. Sauer argues, the writings of the time demonstrate that abortion was uncommon in both married and unmarried women. He argues this is due to its 'stigma of illegitimacy.'<sup>70</sup> Likewise, Ignacio Castuera argues that, while legal, abortion was not widely practiced, except through home remedies.<sup>71</sup> Throughout this period, there were secular ebbs and flows in the popular and medical attitudes towards abortion. However, the Church's attitude towards abortion during this time intensified. As Castuera writes, "Although the Catholic Church never endorsed abortion, it tolerated abortions in the early stages of pregnancy for most of its history. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century that changed. Although Protestants had not previously emphasized abortion as an issue, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were some who did."<sup>72</sup> Though his perspective on the Church "tolerating" abortions is mistaken, Castuera is right in arguing that the focus of the Church on abortion grew during this time.

One of the most powerful statements in opposition to abortion during this time, although indirectly, was the papal bull *Ineffabilis*, issued in 1854. In this bull, Pope Pius IX stated as infallible doctrine, "The most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God . . . was preserved free from all stain of original sin."<sup>73</sup> While this statement was a statement about the immaculate conception of Mary, it's affirmation that Mary was, from conception, a living recipient of grace was an indirect affirmation of the nature of the unborn.

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<sup>69</sup> Ignacio Castuera, "A Social History of Christian Thought on Abortion: Ambiguity vs. Certainty in Moral Debate," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 76, no. 1 (2017): 176.

<sup>70</sup> R. Sauer, "Attitudes to Abortion in America, 1800-1973," *Population Studies* 28, no. 1 (1974): 53.

<sup>71</sup> Castuera, "A Social History of Christian Thought on Abortion: Ambiguity vs. Certainty in Moral Debate," 176.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 176

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 180

Likewise, numerous Protestants affirmed the immorality of abortion and the sanctity of the lives of the unborn. They too wrestled with the question of when a fetus receives a soul, as evidenced by Herman Bavinck's discussion of the issue in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, published towards the end of the 1800's. He wrote, "So there has to be a moment in which the fetus becomes a human being who will have his or her own independent and continuing existence. When this happens or how this happens is a mystery. Science has no idea when or how this happens, and theology with its conjecture of the fourth or fifth day is only guessing."<sup>74</sup>

However, contrary to popular opinion, this did not mean that these theologians were tolerant or accepting of early term abortions. Like the generations before, there are no positive allowances for abortion in any major theological writing, statement, or decree from this time period. Rather, they inherited the strong theological tradition opposing any attempts by man or woman to end a life (whether actual or potential) intentionally, and thus playing God.

As an example, Charles Spurgeon in the mid to late 1800's, had much to say against what he called "infanticide."<sup>75</sup> He decried the evils of this practice in all its forms and argued clearly that the infant in the womb was a person with worth to God and that infants who died in infancy go to heaven. He wrote,

As for modern Calvinists, I know of no exception, but we all hope and believe that all persons dying in infancy are elect. Dr Gill, who has been looked upon in late times as being a very standard of Calvinism, not to say of ultra-Calvinism, himself never hints for a moment the supposition that any infant has perished. He affirms that it is a dark and mysterious subject, but states that it is his belief, and he thinks he has Scripture to warrant it, that they who have fallen asleep in infancy have not perished but have been numbered with the chosen of God, and so have entered into eternal rest.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 583.

<sup>75</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Classical Reflections on the Wisdom of the Psalms*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 290.

<sup>76</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, "Infant Salvation," *The Sword and the Trowel*, no. 3 (2007).

## A Summary and a Proposed Framework for Pro-Life Apologetics

Having surveyed the history of the church's attitude toward abortion in the primary sources, it is clear that, with the possible exception in the case of the life of the mother, all abortion was opposed on moral grounds, and usually civil grounds, by every major council and every major theologian in various denominations from the first century until the 1900's and no records exist of any theologians that stated support for abortion. Those who seemed to be ambiguous on the subject wrestled with the question of abortion's legality, not its morality. Given that the science and philosophy of the day argued that life begins when the baby can move, they could not argue that murder was an appropriate charge for an early term abortion. However, as science has developed in the modern period, it is clear that, from the moment of conception, the fetus demonstrates all the necessary qualities for life.<sup>77</sup> Thus, if they knew then what we know now, there would have been no moral or legal ambiguity. This survey demonstrates that those who wish to affirm abortion on demand do so in opposition to historic Christian teaching.

The question then remains: How should Christians in the modern period frame pro-life apologetics in a way that is historically consistent? First, the Church has always grounded its position on two theological foundations: that mankind is made in the image of God, with intrinsic value, and that God is sovereign over the life and death of all men. It is God who gives life and thus that life should be treasured. As Francis Schaeffer wrote, "You cannot be faithful to what the Bible teaches about the value of human life and be in favor of abortion."<sup>78</sup>

Second, throughout history, the Church has attempted to be scientifically literate and sensitive. For them, that meant being unable to speak to early term abortion in a legal sense. Yet, this did not stop the Church from speaking in a moral sense to the issue. While it is important to be scientifically literate in this discussion, and current scientific evidence should embolden contemporary apologetics now that more empirical data is available, the Church must stand on revealed Scripture as its authority.

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<sup>77</sup> See Randy Alcorn, *Prolife Answers to Prochoice Arguments* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2000), 51–100.

<sup>78</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, "The Great Evangelical Disaster," in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 4 (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 1982), 346.

Finally, the consistent attention to both abortion and infanticide demonstrates the concern of the Church throughout history for the lives of both the born and the unborn. Christians ought not choose to care for one or the other, but ought to care for all of life. This should not diminish the Church's stance against abortion, but should strengthen its witness. Not only do the writings of the early years of the Church emphasize care for children before and after birth, such as in the case of the quoted section in the Epistle of Barnabas that forbids withdrawing one's hand and care from a child, but Spurgeon, while emphasizing the immorality of infanticide, also preached on the immorality of destroying children through abusing them or ignoring their needs.<sup>79</sup> In the name of being consistently pro-life, he went on to found numerous programs in his city to care for children, including orphanages and adoption agencies.

An abortion apologetic, building on historical precedent, that is firmly grounded in theology, scientifically informed, and consistent in practice will be able to make a powerful, comprehensive case against the practice of abortion.

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<sup>79</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, "Do Not Sin Against The Child," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 14 (1868), <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/do-not-sin-against-the-child/#flipbook/>.

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