

Abortion And The Genesis Of Human Life Problem

Something seems fundamentally wrong with inserting a curette into the uterus of a pregnant woman, scraping the uterine wall, and cutting to pieces a human fetus that flushes out in a profuse flow of blood. Something seems fundamentally wrong with inserting a tube, connected to a suction apparatus over twenty-five times as powerful as a common house vacuum, into the uterus of a pregnant woman, and sucking out a human fetus, tearing it to bits. Something seems fundamentally wrong with inserting forceps with sharp metal teeth into the uterus of a pregnant woman and ripping out a human fetus, piece by mutilated piece. Something seems fundamentally wrong with inserting a long needle, through the abdomen of a pregnant woman, into the fetal sac and injecting a saline solution that the human fetus swallows, poisoning him or her to death, while the victim's outer layer of skin is completely burned off. Something seems fundamentally wrong with removing a human fetus from a pregnant woman through caesarean section and depositing him or her on a stainless steel drain board to die from neglect.

Every sensible sensitive human being knows in the deepest recesses of his or her soul that to subject a fellow human being to the above named procedures is abominable. But because of some moral kink in an egocentric society, even Christians have capitulated to a Godless worldview that would allow the systematic elimination of human life because it has become an "inconvenience." The issue is NOT rape, incest, poverty, deformity, teenage "indiscretions," drug abuse, the right of choice or privacy, back alley butchers, nor any other red herring abortion advocates fabricate to euphemize feticide. These distractions and other euphemisms—one doesn't "kill a human fetus," he or she "terminates potential life"—reveal just how distasteful their actions are. George Will calls them "speech quirks that may betray qualms" (96). Such language and arguments are employed to mask wanton self-centeredness at worst, or mental and spiritual confusion at best. It speaks of a society losing respect for itself.

God-fearing people—those with another mindset need not concern themselves with this issue—must view the fetus as something less than human ("subhuman," or "potentially human"), so as to not violate the sanctity of ALL human life principle. For example, one Christian doctor claims, "you have life in a sense, but you have no blood and no breath of life (*i.e.*, at conception), two requisites for a living soul" (Pettus 138). If this outlook were not taken, no consistently rational argument could be offered against infanticide, genocide, euthanasia, or any other form of the taking of innocent human life. It becomes a relative matter of assessing "value" or "worth" to a particular individual or group of individuals. In this case, if the fetus is considered a human being, it must be "devalued" for one to take its life. So who is to make this "value" call?

And what it to prevent this "devaluation" at other stages of life? Let us suppose the fetus is considered to be a human being, without qualification, and the mother is given the right to kill it because it is deformed. Why should she not be given the right to kill it three days after it is born? Three years? So, the whole issue must turn on the problem of defining the genesis of human life. This may be attempted in two ways: scientifically and theologically.

In 1981 a United States congressional hearing was held to determine what the United States Supreme Court failed to determine in its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* abortion decision; *i.e.*, when a human life begins (Human Life Bill – S. 158, hereafter referenced as HLB). World-renowned scientific experts testified and volumes of scientific materials were reviewed. The conclusion drawn by the committee, based on this evidence, was: "the life of a human being begins at conception, the time when the process of fertilization is complete" (HLB 7). An example from the written material submitted is typical (from G. Simpson and W. Beck, *Life: An Introduction to Biology*, 2nd ed., 1965):

The fertilized egg cell—or zygote—contains nuclear material from both parents. It marks the beginning of the life of a new human being and is a useful focal point for presenting all the diverse aspects of organic reproduction (HLB 9).

Likewise, the majority of expert testimony supported this view. Dr. Hymie Gordon, Professor of Medical Genetics and a physician at the Mayo Clinic stated:

I think we can now also say that the question of the beginning of life—when life begins—is no longer a question for theological or philosophical dispute. It is an established scientific fact. Theologians and philosophers may go on to debate the meaning of life or the purpose of life, but it is an established fact that all life, including human life, begins at the moment of conception. I have never ever seen in my own scientific reading...that anyone has ever argued that life did not begin at the moment of conception and that it was a human conception if it resulted from the fertilization of the human egg by a human sperm. As far as I know, these have never been argued against (HLB 9).

Of interest here is Gordon's recognition of the value of life question, which he leaves up to the "theologians and philosophers." Additionally, he attests to the fact that the genesis of human life at conception has been the traditional scientific position. As recently as 1963, Planned Parenthood (no friend of the anti-abortionist position) stated in a pamphlet: "An abortion requires an operation. It kills the life of a baby after it has begun" (HLB 10).

One wonders about the testimony of some witnesses who disagreed with the scientific mainstream. Did the evidence or the emotion of the debate form their opinions? What is significant about the contrary

opinions is twofold: first, an admitted ignorance as to when human life does begin—a tacit admission to the possibility of a conception genesis—and, second, the shifting of such a determination to the realm of metaphysics, *i.e.*, moving the discussion, subtly, from the *sanctity* of life issue to the *value* of life issue. Dr. Lewis Thomas, former Dean of Yale Medical School and, at the time of the hearings, Chancellor of the Memorial Sloan–Kettering Cancer Center, typified this position:

The question as to when human life begins, and whether the very first single cell that comes into existence after fertilization of an ovum represents, in itself, a human life, is not in any real sense a scientific question and cannot be answered by scientists. Whatever the answer, it can neither be verified nor proven false using today's scientific knowledge. It is therefore in the domain of metaphysics: it can be argued by philosophers and theologians, but it lies beyond the reach of science (HLB 49 – 50).

Abortion opponents may be overstating their case if they claim: "That life begins at conception is not disputable" (Will 96). However, the overwhelming weight of scientific evidence is in their corner, while the opposition can only profess ignorance, at best, and begs off the real issue by delegating the responsibility for defining the genesis of human life to other disciplines. Unless one is a strict materialist, he or she must admit that human beings are more than a particular configuration of atomic structure. But if the fusion of germ cells within the mother's body is not a human being, what is it? What have two human beings procreated? If it is only "potentially" human, does it have the potential to be something other than human? In fact, "Human beings can procreate nothing else but human beings" (Rankin 157).

Scripture never categorically defines the origin of the individual human life. However, this may simply be a case of omitting the self-evident—a human being comes into being when male and female human beings procreate [Gen 2:28]. The only text that speaks directly to the issue is the unique case of Adam:

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 nephesh (Gn 2:7).

This term *nephesh* is variously translated here as "being" (NASV, NKJV, NAB, CD), "soul" (RSV, KJV), "creature" (NEB), and "person" (LB). Edmond Jacob presents the basic idea for this passage:

Nephesh is the usual term for man's total nature, for what he is and not just what he has. This gives the term priority in the anthropological vocabulary, for the same cannot be said of either spirit, heart, or flesh. The classical text in Gn. 2:7 clearly expresses this truth...The nephesh is almost always connected with a form. It has no existence apart from the body. Hence the best translation in many instances is "person" comprised in corporeal reality...Hence

nephesh can denote what is most individual in human nature, namely, the ego, and it can become a synonym of the personal pronoun, Gn 27:25 (620).

Some have concluded from Gn 2:7 that one doesn't become fully human until he or she draws the first breath. This results in the obvious difficulty of defining the fetus's nature the moment before that breath. Also, this view neglects to deal with the contrast between creation and procreation. An analogy between Adam and his progeny cannot be made in this sense because Adam could not have experienced procreation. The most this model does is define what it means to be a human being.

Additionally, *nephesh* is as closely joined to the blood as to the breath:

For the nephesh of the flesh is in the blood...for it is the blood by reason of the nephesh that makes atonement...For as for the nephesh of all flesh, its blood is identified with its nephesh...for the nephesh of all flesh is its blood (Lv 17:11, 14 cf. Gn 9:4-5).

Thus, *in utero*, the fetus could be said to have *nephesh* (full "being," as Adam) apart from the first breath (oxygen is provided through the mother's blood).

The "humanness" (*nephesh*) of Adam was transmitted through procreation, and it is impossible to understand that he "fathered" his children at any other time than conception:

When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years became the father of (lit. "begot") a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth (Gn 5:3).

In Ex 21:22-25 the law of retribution is applied to the death of a fetus as a pregnant woman is accidentally stuck during a brawl. If it is understood that "no injury" in vs. 22 means that the fetus "goes forth" and does *not* die, and in vs. 23 "there is injury" means the fetus *does* die (whether the mother does or not), then the penalty is "*nephesh* for *nephesh*." The passage CAN be understood this way, although many interpret it differently (see Keil, Ellington, Kline, Waltke, Congdon, House and the wealth of literature on this passage). If this interpretation is correct, it provides a definite reference to a fetus as fully human (*nephesh*, just like Adam).

There are other passages that seem to recognize full "personhood" *in utero* (Ps 139:13-16; Jer 1:5). In Lk 1:44 (41) there is an interesting reference attributing human emotion to a fetus, "joy." Additionally, the author of these passages (Luke, who was a physician and guided by the Holy Spirit) used the word *brephos* in reference to the fetus. This is the same word he uses elsewhere in reference to infants (2:12, 16; 18:15; Acts 7:19).

An interesting modern case of the origin confusion among abortion advocates is that of Conner Peterson in California. Conner was the unborn son of Scott and Laci Peterson. He died when his mother was murdered. His father was charged with, and convicted for, double

homicide. In 26 states, the death of an unborn as the result of violence is homicide. According to a Fox News Poll, 84% of those surveyed agreed Conner's father should be charged with two counts of homicide.

Regardless of who is ultimately responsible for Conner's death, his case raises questions about the consistency of legal systems and modern thought in general. How can people legalize the wholesale killing of over one million unborn sons and daughters each year, and call the killing of Conner and other such victims, homicide? Is abortion less violent? Does the mother's stamp of approval on the killing of her unborn child somehow "de-victimize" her child? Does the victim of abortion have a choice? Is the victim of homicide any more human than the victim of abortion?

Homicide is by definition the unlawful killing of one human by another. Do abortion advocates shoot themselves in the foot by calling Conner's death "homicide"? Are they not acknowledging that Conner was the separate victim of a murder? Are they not giving him full human status by doing so? Do they really believe that society can legislate away the dignity of one human over another? What is the fundamental difference between the unborn victim of a murderer and the unborn victim of an abortionist? The taking of Conner's life is an abomination, but what is the taking of the lives of millions of unborn sons and daughters with no names?

The theologian who denies that human life begins at conception in light of the Biblical evidence is confronted with the same difficulty as the scientist denying it in light of the scientific evidence. Neither can, with any certainty, define when it does begin. If they support the abortionist viewpoint, they are put in the precarious position of willfully destroying what MAY be a human life. They may not wield the curette, insert the suction tube, crush a fetal skull with metal forceps, or personally burn the skin off a writhing victim, but they lend credence to these Godless acts which can only gain acceptability as the so-called voices of "truth" acquiesce to a secular mindset bent on serving its own selfish interests. There is no room in the Christ-like heart for the blackness of human sacrifice at the altar of inconvenience. For the Christian, ALL human life is sacred. He or she will not participate, even through mental ascent, to the systematic slaughter of those created in His image, simply because somebody does not want them. Human beings are not to be among the things we throw away.

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