

ABORTION & EUTHANASIA
Social Issues Facing Christians Today
Ps. 82

Teaching for Peace Church
November 18, 2007

PURPOSE / MAIN IDEA - Abortion & euthanasia transgress the Christian convictions about the sovereignty of God and sanctity of life. In line with God's concern for the marginalized of society, we must speak up and act in their defence.

I. INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles to Psalm 82.

1. We continue our series on Social Issues Facing Christians Today and consider this evening the issues of Abortion & Euthanasia.

PSALM 82 gives us a context for these considerations.

READ PSALM 82

2. In this psalm, God is revealed as the JUDGE of JUDGES!

- And in this capacity, the psalmist asks him to "rise up & judge the earth" (v. 6)

...

... because he sees that human judges are UNJUST (v.2) - showing partiality to the wicked!

(i) THIS IS NOT WHO GOD IS.

- Not only is God just ... but He is Someone, verse 4, who *defends the cause of the weak & fatherless, maintains the rights of the poor and oppressed; and rescues the weak and needy*"

- that's our God - just and full of mercy.

3. And when we think of the matters of abortion & euthanasia, we are dealing with the "weak & fatherless" (the unborn child, the frail elderly);

- we are thinking of the rights of the poor and oppressed (not only the child in the womb, the women who carry the child)

So we ASK: "What does it mean to rescue the *weak & needy*?"

LET'S PRAY

II. TWO KEY THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

When it comes to abortion & euthanasia, there are 2 key theological issues at hand, one to do with God; the other, man

1. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD - to whom does life belong? Who has rights over it, to do as they please?

(i) The Bible is clear that GOD gives men "life & breath & everything else".

In him we live and move and have our being - Acts 17:28

A. When people die, we say with Job (not always easily): *THE LORD gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.*

(ii) For that reason, Mother Theresa expresses her STRONG feelings about the evil of abortion with these words:

"Only God can decide life and death ... That is why abortion is such a terrible sin. You are not only killing life, but putting self before God; yet people decide who has to live and who has to die. They want to make themselves almighty God. They want to take the power of God in their hands. They want to say, 'I can do without God. I can decide.' That is the most devilish thing that a human hand can do."

2. The other doctrine involved in these matters is the SANCTITY OF LIFE.

= not so much when life begins & ends - though that's important and we'll come to that momentarily, but what GIVES LIFE VALUE?

- WHAT MAKES IT SACRED?

(i) I'll always remember a sermon I heard in which the preacher said,

"Some things are loved because they're valuable ... and some things are valuable because they're loved."

- And he went on to compare an antique lamp he had that he loved because it was valuable ... with his daughter's ragged, worn-out, thread-bare, stuffed bunny rabbit - which he dared NEVER throw out ... It was VALUABLE because it was LOVED!

A. And that's what gives us VALUE as people - we're loved, not cause we're valuable. We're loved just for who we are, ragged & worn. That love gives us value.

(ii) That's the THRUST of PSALM 139.

- The Psalmist rejoices that God "searches & knows" him - even from his earliest days in the womb - "knit together in his mothers' womb, fearfully and wonderfully made".

- In love, God knows his thoughts, words ... ALL his days.

- "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

- no where ... He is always loved - *God's right hand holds him fast (v. 10)*

(iii) John Stott writes, "*We have intrinsic value because God has created us in his own image, uniquely capable for relationships of love, since God is love.*

... But what if a person is unable to respond in love? What if they're in a persistent vegetative state or an unborn fetus? Does not their unresponsiveness disqualify them from being regarded and treated as a human being?

NO! This is where GRACE comes in. Grace is precisely love to the unresponsive. Grace is love taking a unilateral initiative.

In Psalm 139, the writer finds his humanity and dignity not in his knowing and loving God, but in the fundamental truth that God knows and loves him, whether he respond to God or not. This same divine unilateral love binds a mother to her unborn child, and young people to their frail, elderly, and perhaps demented relatives. It is not responsiveness which makes people human; it is love, not loving only but being loved!

III. THE CRC POSITION & HISTORY

So we come to the Christian Reformed Church's stated positions on abortion & euthanasia (back of bulletin):

READ

IV. PRESENT DAY REALITIES

What do we need to know to live out these positions of ours?

1. Since the 1960's, the field of SCIENCE has confirmed clearly that unique, individual life begins at conception:

(i) The fertilized egg from get-go has a DISTINCT genotype from her/his mother
 - with 23 pairs of chromosomes - a complete human.

A. A person starts life as a single fertilized cell, growing eventually to 900 million cells. From beginning to that maturity, cells multiply 45 times - and 41 of those times are BEFORE BIRTH!

(ii) Pre-natal medical technology now detects heartbeats by 18 days in the womb;
 - At 4 weeks, though the fetus is only about 1/4 of an inch long, the head & body are distinguishable (you've seen those remarkable pictures).

- Brain wave activity is detected at 40days
 - At 8 weeks, arms & legs are apparent, by 9 or 10, the baby can suck his thumb.

A. To say that life begins at any point other than conception is quite arbitrary.

2. STATISTICALLY (The latest I could find was 2004)

(i) In the US, anywhere from 1 to 1.3 million abortions per year (In Illinois, over 50,000) - (they vary - Planned Parenthood / Center for Disease Control)
 - 46-55 million worldwide

(ii) About 95% of abortions are done as a means of birth control
 - 1% for rape or incest
 - 1 % for abnormalities
 - 3% for concerns about mother's health - (which the CRC acknowledges may justify an abortion - if the mother's life is genuine threatened by the pregnancy)

(iii) Reasons for choosing abortions: (Slightly different ones than outline - these from Planned Parenthood)

- Not ready for childbearing - 25%
- Can't afford - 21%
- Partner does not want child / relp problem - 14%
- Too young - parents or others object - 12%

- Disruption to education or job - 11%
- Wants no (more) children - 8%
- Risk to maternal health - 3%
- Risk to fetal health - 3%
- Other - 2%

(iv) Most abortions are done in the first trimester of pregnancy

- 60% under 8 weeks
- 5.5% over 16 weeks

Many US States now have some restrictions on later-term abortions - requiring parents' consent, 2nd physician approval - but, as far as I could tell, as long as you could prove a mother's "MENTAL HEALTH" need for it - for any of those reasons listed above - then it can still be obtained. Abortion is legal.

3. What happens to the child in an abortion? (I'll read my research here):

Please excuse this being so horrific, but in all my reading this week this STIRRED me the most.

READ STOTT, p. 370-71

(i) BARBAROUS

(Before we turn to some responses, let me just say a word about Euthanasia).

V. EUTHANASIA

As the CRC position indicates, the same issues of the sovereignty of God and the sanctity of life are involved in these end-of-life issues.

1. H.O.P.E. (Healthcare opposed to Euthanasia) defines it as: "*The intentional killing by act **OR** omission of a person whose life is considered not to be worth living.*"

- The key word there is "INTENTIONAL" - Euthanasia is CAUSING someone to die. This is different than ALLOWING him or her to die.

(i) So withholding or withdrawing useless treatment from a terminally ill patient is not euthanasia.

Nor would be the administration of painkillers to a dying patient which may INCIDENTALLY accelerate death, but whose primary intention is to relieve pain.

A. Sometimes that issue of the “fear of pain” is used to justify euthanasia. But pain-killers today are largely effective for dying people.

2. Back in the time before Christ, before HIPPOCRATES (500 BC), doctors had a dual role - one was to cure; the other to kill.

- It was Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, who developed an OATH which stated that PHYSICIANS would “First, do no harm”.

- they would only be agents of healing, not death.

(i) Medicine in Western civilization is built on that premise. Doctors still take the oath.

- We don't want to see that change - as it has in the Netherlands (& Oregon) so that doctors, with patient consent, can be agents of death.

A. WHEN death comes is God's prerogative. We are the creatures, not Creator.

VI. RESPONSE

1. Our God calls us to care for the weak & needy. HOW?

We need to pray, even repent for indifference:

(i) Martin Niemoller, German anti-Nazi theologian from the 1940's wrote:

In Germany, they first came for the Communists and I did not speak up because I wasn't a Communist;

Then they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up - because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for the trade unionists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Catholics and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant.

Then they came for me - and by that time, there was no one left to speak up.

2. We need to BE INFORMED, as we've become better so tonight.

3. We need to support alternatives and those needing help (like the CRC position states)

(i) Euthanasia has grown because of the EROSION of community. Praise

God for Christian hospice movements (Esther).

(ii) Women facing abortion choices are often stressed, even oppressed. Praise God for P.A.S.S. and other Crisis Pregnancy Care centers. Let's help.

(iii) Mother Theresa used to say, "*We fight abortion by adoption*" - so we support agencies like Bethany. We encourage adoption.

- Most adoption agencies face a shortage of babies - they end up going to Guatemala, Russia, other Eastern Countries.

4. Finally, we use our democratic privileges of free speech and representation and demonstration to press for legal protection for the unborn.

- You have until December 14th to sign up for Illiana Right to Life annual March for Life in Washington on January 22.

- Costs are only \$120, \$75 for kids - Leave Sunday night, be back on Wednesday morning - includes lodging and travel.

- Have any of you done this March before?

(i) Of course, there are other ways to express our convictions politically.

VI. CONCLUSION

... AND WE MUST ...

Psalm 82 reminds us that these OPPORTUNITIES to get involved and express convictions are gifts of God Most High.

- He is the JUDGE ... but under Him, verse 6, we are appointed as "gods" on earth.

- People called to influence the world according to His ways and values.

May He find us faithful. AMEN!