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A STUDY OF  
BIOETHICS  
FOR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS  
AT A SECULAR UNIVERSITY

EDWARD L. KRAUSS

FEBRUARY 1995

CONCORDIA SEMINARY  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

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## ABSTRACT

### A STUDY OF BIOETHICS FOR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS AT A SECULAR UNIVERSITY

by  
Edward L. Krauss

The tenets of humanism have been incorporated into classes that deal with bioethical issues at public universities. Christian students are faced with the dilemma of maintaining their Biblical ethics or adapting to the philosophy of humanism when studying genetics, or matters of abortion, or suicide, or euthanasia.

This study examines secular humanism and ethical systems and presents a Biblical focus for Christian students when confronted with opposing views. A series of Bible studies and discussion questions on these bioethical issues follows each of the chapters for use in small groups on college campuses.

CONCORDIA SEMINARY  
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

A STUDY OF  
BIOETHICS  
FOR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS  
AT A SECULAR UNIVERSITY

A MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
EDWARD L. KRAUSS

ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN  
FEBRUARY 1995

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Soli Deo Gloria.

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To my wife, Janet,  
our children,  
David, Kathleen, and Sharon,  
and our grandchildren,  
Samantha and Anthony.



## INTRODUCTION

Bioethics, the science of applying certain ethical principles to the field of medicine, emerged in the 1960's and 1970's, primarily in the United States, because of the need to assess the explosive growth in the life sciences and the significance of ethical questions in medical and health care policies never faced before.

The advances in genetic studies, in the human genome project, in genetic engineering, in reproductive technologies, in euthanasia, are affecting nearly every American in some way. The ethics of treatment of these basic points of life are in serious debate among clergy, scholars, doctors and professors.

Students in life-science curricula at colleges and universities are at the fore-front of discoveries that deal with the value of personhood. They are involved in courses of study, in research, in the front lines of many of the new methods of technology. The prevailing attitude on secular universities is strongly liberal and humanistic. This influence on our Christian young people is going to be felt in future generations.

This study will present basic information on various bioethical issues and theological perspectives, with discussion questions on secular humanism, various ethical systems, abortion, reproductive technology, suicide, euthanasia, and genetic engineering.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society, except where noted.

The process that I used for this Major Applied Project at University Lutheran Chapel in Ann Arbor was to invite a number of students to join me in a small group setting on Wednesday evening in our Chapel lounge. We began with a prayer for God's presence and guidance. After a brief presentation of the subject matter, for example, the information on secular humanism, the Bible Study and Discussion Questions were distributed. Bibles were available for everyone to turn to the appropriate texts. After an hour of discussion, a prayer was spoken which incorporated the issues of the discussion with thanks for God's direction.

## CHAPTER 1

### BIOETHICS AND SECULAR HUMANISM

A strong influence on bioethics comes from secular humanists who maintain that religion has failed to establish a foundation for justice or morality in the medical field. Humanists, whether secular or atheistic or naturalistic, emphasize human self-exaltation and claim human sovereignty and lordship apart from God's working in life. God's existence is not always denied, but does prevent man's self-realization. "Man must be his own lord or sovereign, choosing, knowing, or determining for himself what constitutes good and evil in terms of his own self-interest."<sup>1</sup>

The presentation of humanist views in bioethics has an effect on the belief-systems and life-styles of people. Adherents make persuasive efforts to bring others to adopt their underlying philosophy or ethical principles. University students are in a secular society and often pulled, some probably naively, into the humanist views of their articulate professors. They discover conflicts with the personal, religious, and ethical positions which were taught by their parents, pastors, and pre-college educational community. This situation results in traumatic struggles in the minds and consciences of sensitive students who want to retain their foundational Christian base but still respond to their class requirements in a favorable way.

The following is an historical overview of the development of secular humanism, a discussion of the effects of secular humanism on the bioethical views of Christian students at secular universities, and theological reflections with appropriate Scriptural and Confessional references.

### Secular Humanism

"Man is the measure of all things," attributed to the Greek philosopher Protagoras, 490-420 B.C., is the 'touchstone' of many humanists. Humanism is defined as a philosophical outlook centering on the autonomy of the human being as a dignified rational being, possessing the source of truth and right within oneself.

Paul Kurtz, an outspoken humanist, writes a brief history from a humanist point of view in an essay, "A Secular Humanist Declaration":

Democratic secular humanism has been a powerful force in world culture. Its ideals can be traced to the philosophers, scientists, and poets of classical Greece and Rome, to ancient Chinese Confucian society, to the Carvaka movement of India, and to other distinguished intellectual and moral traditions. Secularism and humanism were eclipsed in Europe during the Dark Ages, when religious piety eroded humankind's confidence in its own powers to solve human problems. They reappeared in force during the Renaissance with the reassertion of secular and humanist values in literature and the arts, again in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the development of modern science and a naturalistic view of the universe, and their influence can be found in the eighteenth century in the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup>

Kurtz blames 'religious piety' for the dearth of humanism during the Dark Ages and implies that real humanist progress was made only when religion was on the wane.

A more critical study of history would reveal that in the writings of Plato and Aristotle there is an element of religious thought--not Biblical nor Christian, of course--yet their humanism is not devoid of religious expressions.

Paul H. Beattie, who calls himself a 'religious humanist,' writes in his essay, "The Religion of Secular Humanism":

Both Plato and Aristotle tried to purify and exalt human thinking about god or gods, making god into the basis or absolute idealism in Plato's system or into the unmoved mover in Aristotle's system. Epistemologically speaking, Aristotle was a humanist, yet he used the word 'God' in his system of thought.<sup>3</sup>

This does not say that Plato or Aristotle were religious humanists, only that they cannot be espoused by secular humanists as 'founders' of their philosophy. In fact, one could argue that during the thousand years after these early Greek philosophers, there were religious elements combined with the idealism of the classical world. It was during the Renaissance, from A.D. 1300 to A.D. 1600, that a separation took place, with a pursuit of the glorifying of human freedom and potential, as opposed to a Reformation emphasis on divine grace and human relationships with God.

Humanities departments in universities pay homage to the Greeks and the Renaissance, utilizing a wide range of sources for the study of prose and poetry, philosophy, and the arts. The writings of Erasmus are significant, along with the artistry of Michaelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, promoting the aesthetic, imaginative powers of humanity.

Primary founders of scientific inquiry, Copernicus and Galileo, opened the doors, so to speak, for the Age of Enlightenment, where

science was adopted as an effective tool to be applied by reason to the solving of human problems.

The Enlightenment produced the first modern secularized theories of psychology and ethics. John Locke conceived of the human mind as being at birth a 'tabula rasa,' a blank slate on which experience wrote freely and boldly, creating the individual character according to the individual experience of the world. Supposed innate qualities, such as goodness or original sin, had no reality. The notion of man as neither good nor bad but interested principally in survival and the maximization of his own pleasure led to radical political theories. Where the state had once been viewed as an earthly approximation of an eternal order, with the city of man modeled on the city of God, now it came to be seen as a mutually beneficial arrangement among men aimed at protecting the natural rights and self-interest of each.<sup>4</sup>

The principal Enlightenment philosophers were John Locke and Jeremy Bentham in England and Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Voltaire in France. These men and their contemporaries classified themselves as Deists, who held to a few vague religious truths: the existence of one God, a system of rewards and punishments, and a general call to virtue and piety.

The reordering of society for happiness through laws and education became the goal of the 'philosophes,' as they were called, with the watchwords of reason, tolerance, and progress. Publications had a widespread effect, especially promoting scientific progress. The major trend was toward a materialistic explanation of the origin and nature of life. For example, in 1749, Georges Buffon published a Histoire Naturelle, with the theme that nature is a knowable order of phenomena that can be formulated into laws independent of God and metaphysics. Among other noteworthy writers and thinkers was Isaac Newton. He was

most famous for the development of a simple and encompassing theory of gravitation; he also inspired the search that led many to the view that the drive for happiness and pleasure dominates all else.

One area of speculation among the Enlightenment thinkers was the origin and nature of life.

While some deists engaged in semimystical speculation, the major trend was toward materialistic, sometimes mechanistic, explanations. Accordingly, organisms are dynamic, changing systems amenable to the principles of the physical sciences. As an example, Julien La Mettrie explained the body as an automaton and described thought as the result of a complex organization of matter; while Pierre Maupertuis anticipated modern genetics by attributing primitive desire, aversion, and memory to genetic particles.<sup>5</sup>

Already then the groundwork was being laid for current views that allow for abortion, euthanasia, and genetic experiments by those who would see humans only as matter without soul or spirit.

Moral values were a central problem for deists of the Enlightenment. While they rejected traditional Christian doctrines, they still looked to God as the ultimate guarantor of moral values. However, the demand for happiness and pleasure set the standard for morality. They veered from natural law toward utilitarianism.

Two other prominent men of this period are Immanuel Kant and David Hume, both of whom wrote somewhat critically of the Enlightenment, but expressed similar attitudes about religious matters as suspect. They supported academic openness and the promotion of reason. The Enlightenment held out such promise, yet it passed into history.

The Enlightenment expired as the victim of its own excesses. The more rarefied the religion of the deists became, the less it offered

those who sought solace or salvation. The celebration of abstract reason provoked contrary spirits to begin exploring the world of sensation and emotion in the cultural movement known as Romanticism. The Reign of Terror that followed the French Revolution severely tested the belief that man could govern himself. The high optimism that marked much of Enlightenment thought, however, survived as one of the movement's most enduring legacies: the belief that human history is a record of general progress.<sup>6</sup>

That final optimistic viewpoint, however, would be debated by those who suffered through two world wars, with a holocaust and attempted genocide of the Jewish race solemnly questioning any general progress. Further challenges are the continually changing liberal laws concerning abortion and euthanasia.

The religious revival of the nineteenth century swept away the skepticism of the philosophes. However, there was a remnant of thought which held that science could reveal nature as it truly is and how it could be controlled. Scientific methods were thus extended into every field of inquiry, eventually leading to the development of modern social sciences. Joseph Shaw writes in Readings in Christian Humanism:

Secularization did not happen overnight, but from the eighteenth to the twentieth century the gap gradually widened between Christian and secularist viewpoints about human existence, partly because of the developments in science, but more through the association of science with a naturalistic philosophy. In addition, the new demands of nationalism and industrialization gave a different focus to human energies. The social as well as the natural sciences contributed to secularization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.....Enlightenment thinkers adopted science as an effective tool to be applied by reason to the solving of human problems. What is new in recent times is a scientific naturalism which proclaims itself capable of explaining the human mind, human qualities, and religious faith itself, entirely by means of physical laws.<sup>7</sup>



This secularization was emphasized in the "Humanist Manifesto I", a document signed by 34 humanists in 1933, which declares:

In order that religious humanism may be better understood we, the undersigned, desire to make certain affirmations which we believe the facts of our contemporary life demonstrate. Today man's larger understanding of the universe, his scientific achievements, and his deeper appreciation of brotherhood, have created a situation which requires a new statement of the means and purposes of religion.<sup>8</sup>

Then follows a description of 'a religious humanism' without mention of God or Jesus Christ; in fact, it asserts "that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values." Also, "religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method."

Forty years later, in 1973, "Humanist Manifesto II" appeared, and was signed by leading humanists around the world. It stated a much more negative attitude toward religion than the first manifesto.

Some humanists believe we should reinterpret traditional religions and reinvest them with meanings appropriate to the current situation. Such redefinitions, however, often perpetuate old dependencies and escapisms; they easily become obscurantist, impeding the free use of the intellect. We need, instead, radically new human purposes and goals.<sup>9</sup>

For many this document serves a noble purpose, for it is the culmination of a search for a definitive statement which addresses itself not only to the problems of religion and ethics, but to the pressing issues of civil liberties, equality, democracy, the survival of humankind, world economic growth, population and ecology, war and peace.

The concerns in this statement are shared by Christians who also are concerned with social issues. However, the primary focus of

Christian humanism is on the potential of a productive and meaningful life brought about by God's gracious act of reconciliation through Jesus Christ; this provides the solid basis for ethical decisions in all areas of life, especially in bioethics.

Secular humanists, at least the authors and signers of the Humanist Manifesto I and II, are adamant in their denial of the existence of God, the supernatural, or the need for a Savior, or the existence of an afterlife. They recognize the failings and inhuman acts of humanity, but are convinced of the inner power and goodness of humans to work for everyone's benefit. This appears reasonable and acceptable to many people, for it proclaims a concept they want to believe in. In spite of this interest, the leaders of the humanist movement have to admit that people in general are not joining their groups; after forty years of effort the American Humanist Association had only 3,500 members and the American Ethical Union had only 3,500 members. Their philosophy however, has influenced many people, even members of churches. What is problematical is the fact that there are ever-increasing ethical issues in matters of child abuse, abortion, the spread of AIDS, etc., in matters of life and death; many of which impact students at colleges.

In the midst of this, humanists demand toleration of all ideas and life-styles; this is a 'battle cry' of the Enlightenment:

The battle cry of the Enlightenment in religious matters was toleration. The cry now sounds faint and irrelevant to us, partly because we flatter ourselves that we long ago achieved what it demands and partly because toleration itself appears to be a value that is bloodless and without specific content. Toleration is the beginning of enlightenment as Europe in the eighteenth century conceived it because it is the necessary social condition for people

to use their own intellects to decide what they will believe. The Enlightenment's demand for toleration is thus the demand that people be given the opportunity to fulfill their deepest spiritual vocation; that of using their intellects to determine the faith they will live by.<sup>10</sup>

However, even as humanists preach toleration, they show little toward those who would practice religion. Throughout history, secular humanists have denounced religious values as restricting and de-humanizing, as per Albert Ellis, a humanist psychiatrist:

Unbelief, humanism, skepticism, and even thorough-going atheism not only abet but are practically synonymous with mental health; devout belief, dogmatism, and religiosity distinctly contribute to, and in some ways are equal to, mental or emotional disturbance.<sup>11</sup>

Only begrudgingly would Ellis admit that people receive any kind of benefit in being religious:

In regard to the trait of commitment, devoutly religious people may--for once!--have some advantages. For if they are truly religious, and therefore seriously committed to their god, church, or creed, to some extent they acquire a major interest in life. Pious religious commitment, however, frequently has its disadvantages, since it tends to be obsessive-compulsive and it may well interfere with other kinds of healthy commitments--such as deep involvements in sex-love relationships, in scientific pursuits and even in artistic endeavors (because these may interfere with or contradict the religious commitments).<sup>12</sup>

For many people, including students, secular humanism invites the opportunity to live without restrictions from the outside, following one's inner compulsions. This is evident in attitudes of sexual freedom, even though some problems may be encountered in the process, as with venereal disease and AIDS, or of an unwanted pregnancy. The latter is viewed by those with a pro-choice philosophy as calling for a medical procedure through abortions, without conscience scruples, since

humans are simply a type of matter, with only a potential for humanity upon birth.

This secular humanistic attitude is pervasive on a secular university, both in the classrooms as well as on campus, in organizations of students, in dormitories, and affects relationships and career plans. A Christian who wants to live faithfully is often faced with obstructions which prevent his intention, discovering, for example, that graduate schools can be closed to those with strong Christian attitudes, even when all other prerequisites are met and acceptable.

#### Humanism's Effects on the Ethics of Christian Students

There are divergent views of the prevailing sentiment of secular humanism on campuses. Shaw writes this critical summation:

The status of humanism in the colleges and universities is an ambiguous one. Within the humanities divisions of the institutions the good fight for the humanist cause continues to be waged, but even there the fullness of the humanistic tradition gives way at times to narrow specialization. The field of philosophy, which traditionally interpreted humanity with reference to metaphysical and ethical considerations, tends now, from the influence of logical positivism and the philosophy of Wittgenstein, to concentrate on questions of linguistic analysis. The social sciences using empirical methods have amassed new data about human behavior and its causes, but such studies tend to regard human beings as organisms subject to conditioning by their environment. The more 'humanistic' social scientists point out that their colleagues have adopted the mechanistic models of a physics which is now outmoded.<sup>13</sup>

The author continues on a hopeful note that it appears that the university world seems more open to serious dialog about profound human questions than formerly, and that most public-supported colleges

and universities now offer courses in religion. He surmises that administrators discovered that they had deprived students of a great body of human experience and learning in their zeal to exclude sectarian viewpoints. Shaw includes a quotation from Harold Schilling's The University and the Church: "Clearly, an institution of higher learning that is without specialists who are conducting research and giving instruction in religion can not be regarded as a real university any more than if it had no productive physicists or philosophers."

As challenging and optimistic as these statements are, students relate that the courses in religion at major universities are taught by generally liberal theologians or historians, some of whom favor a humanist viewpoint, and are not fulfilling the high hopes of the author.

The secular humanist attitude is strong on campuses, with a demand for tolerance and a call for pluralism, and a declaration of itself to be the 'politically correct' attitude. Christians are put down and called intolerant, or prejudiced, or homophobic, when people with certain humanist agendas demand that everyone comply with their views. The conservative Christian students who are enrolled in medical school are taking biomedical ethics classes, are engaged in genetic research, and are faced with strong liberal pressures. Many break-throughs are taking place in research laboratories to treat human illnesses, but often are raising serious ethical questions that deal with human values. A secular humanist is going to answer these quite differently than a Christian.

Tristram Engelhardt, writing in Bioethics and Secular Humanism, attempts to be an arbitrator when he notes that opposition to humanism need not be only on religious grounds:

Many view humanism as displacing the central, decisive, and insightful rule of the emotions in favor of a belief in reason. Reason, they hold, has led to a false attempt to overrationalize life. Humanism is regarded by these critics as the source of a disproportionate reliance on technology, a failure to respect the environment, and a reluctance prudently to acknowledge the limited nature of the world's resources.<sup>14</sup>

Such argumentation with humanists may succeed in reaching a consensus regarding secular issues, but loses spiritual and theological importance. Francis A. Schaeffer is a strong apologist for Christian humanism, and challenges Christians:

Those who have the responsibility as Christians, as they live under Scripture, must not only take the necessary legal and political stands, but must practice all the possible Christian alternatives simultaneously with taking stands politically and legally. In "Whatever Happened to the Human Race?" we stress this in regard to abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia of the old--that Christians must not only speak and fight against these things, but then must show there are Christian alternatives. But it must not only be in regard to abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia that alternatives are practiced. They must be practiced in all areas. This is so, and especially so, even when it is extremely costly in money, time, and energy.<sup>15</sup>

The challenge for pastoral ministry on a secular university campus involves an ability to listen carefully to the concerns of Christian students and assist them to sort through ethical questions with the enabling power of God's Law and Gospel. Herein is the foundation, in the belief in God's creative-redemptive-sanctifying power as expressed in the Apostles' Creed. A Christian responds in gratitude, displaying sanctified ethics, according to the third use of the Law.

Christian students are a 'light' and 'salt' in the world and can claim the promises of God's presence and power to be strong against the pressures of humanism. They need support through counseling and

worship, together with Bible study, in order to face the mounting secular humanism's aims to free people from religion and dependence on God. These Christian students are on the cutting edge of ethical debate and are the hope for the Church in its outreach to the world, as they offer the true freedom of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which guarantees forgiveness, peace, and hope for eternity.

### Theological Reflections

The Scriptures give the basis for Christian humanism in the account of creation of the first humans, in Genesis 1:26-31: "God created man in his image.....male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.....' God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." This description of Adam and Eve at the time of creation is a profound statement of perfect humanism, the *imago Dei*. It was undoubtedly God's plan that this perfect situation would remain the status quo. Genesis 2 continues with the life of Adam and Eve in Eden, living in a perfect state, in communion with God, and responsible for the care of the world.

The fall into sin is recounted in Genesis 3:1-7 when these first humans succumb to the temptation to want what God has apparently withheld from them; they desire "to be like God, knowing good and evil." However, what had appeared so palatable becomes bitter, and they experience shame, guilt, and separation from God. There is no longer a close relationship and communion with God. Adam and Eve are driven from Eden, must labor for their livelihood, and will eventually die.

This 'original sin' has had repercussions throughout history as it affects every succeeding generation. The account in Genesis 4:1-8 of the first children of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, cites Cain killing his brother in a fit of rage and jealousy. This indicates a drastic un-human act, which typifies the extent of the scope of original sin. The words of David in Psalm 51:5 describe the fact of inherited sinfulness, "Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." These words describe not only David in his spiritual condition, but are the accurate description of every human since Adam and Eve.

God saw the need for spiritual restoration and gave to Adam and Eve the first promise of a Savior. In Genesis 3:15, God speaks to the serpent-satan: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." This promise was reaffirmed through ensuing centuries by the prophets, until the birth and saving action of Jesus Christ, the 'offspring' of the woman. Jesus enters the hostile environment of a sinful world, and by his atoning sacrifice on a cross and his victorious resurrection, 'crushes the head' of the evil one. He brings about reconciliation between humankind and God, as affirmed in 2 Corinthians 5:18, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ." Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and empowered to live sanctified lives as God had intended.

The Incarnation of the Word of God, as profoundly told in John 1:1-14, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," is the definitive sign of God's unconditional, loving concern for humankind. Jesus Christ is the key to human redemption, and the central action of



his death and resurrection brings about the ultimate liberation of the entire created order. Jesus Christ is the center of the process of humanization and is God's standard of what is human.

Abundant Scriptural examples indicate the high regard that God has for his human creatures. Psalm 8:4-6 speaks eloquently: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet." Jesus Christ spoke of the high regard that humans should have for one another, in Matthew 5:43-44: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."

St. Paul writes about the relationship that we have with one another, in 1 Corinthians 12:27, in his discourse on 'One Body, Many Parts': "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." All parts are necessary, all parts are valuable, not only in the human body, but in the body human.

Such Scriptures are the basis for Christian humanism. The Lutheran Confessions of the sixteenth century provide a solid foundation that can give assurance to those, even outside the church, who are searching for evidences about religious humanism. Dr. Martin Luther speaks of our human concern for ethical actions toward one another in his explanation of the Fifth Commandment, "You shall not kill":

Thus we may learn to calm our anger and have a patient, gentle heart, especially toward those who have given us occasion for

anger, namely, our enemies. Briefly, then, to impress it unmistakably upon the common people, the import of the commandment against killing is this: In the first place, we should not harm anyone. This means, first, by hand or by deed; next, we should not use our tongue to advocate or advise harming anyone; again, we should neither use nor sanction any means or methods whereby anyone may be harmed; finally, our heart should harbor no hostility or malice toward anyone in a spirit of anger and hatred. Thus you should be blameless toward all people in body and soul, especially toward him who wishes or does you evil. For to do evil to somebody who desires and does you good is not human but devilish.<sup>16</sup>

The reformers were concerned that all people, those who believe in Jesus Christ or who do not, should live virtuous and moral lives. They write in the discussion of "Good Works":

Neither is there a controversy among us as to how and why the good works of believers are pleasing and acceptable to God, even through they are still impure and imperfect in this flesh of ours. We agree that this is so for the sake of the Lord Christ through faith, because the person is acceptable to God. For works which belong to the maintenance of outward discipline and which unbelievers and the unconverted are also able and required to perform, are indeed praiseworthy in the sight of the world, and even God will reward them with temporal blessings in this world.<sup>17</sup>

Martin Luther regarded the works of unbelievers as part of the "Kingdom of the Left Hand of God" and important for the affairs of the world. They follow the law through the promptings of conscience, as Paul writes in Romans 2:14-15, "when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law.....they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness." But only those works were acceptable to God which came from the renewed heart through faith in Jesus Christ, as defined in Ephesians 2:8-10, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from

yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Then a child of God, living in the "Kingdom of the Right Hand of God" will display the ethical and moral attitudes of righteous living, especially in a secular world which often holds contempt for religious expressions.

The Christian's desire for ethical living is founded on the recognition of God's authority because he is Creator (the doctrine of Creation). Luther wrote in his summary of the First Article of the Apostles' Creed:

We learn from this article that none of us has his life of himself, or anything else that has been mentioned here or can be mentioned, nor can he by himself preserve any of them, however small and unimportant. The wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misuses all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride and greed, pleasure and enjoyment, and never once turns to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord and Creator.<sup>18</sup>

Luther would not have known the term 'secular humanism' but he was aware of the ungodly and unspiritual character of those who would follow its philosophy. He believed and taught that one was not truly a whole person until one believed in Jesus Christ as Savior (the doctrine of Christology).

We lay under God's wrath and displeasure, doomed to eternal damnation, as we had deserved. There was no counsel, no help, no comfort for us until this only and eternal Son of God, in his unfathomable goodness, had mercy on our misery and wretchedness and came from heaven to help us. Those tyrants and jailers now have been routed, and their place has been taken by Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and righteousness and every good and blessing. He has snatched us, poor lost creatures, from the

jaws of hell, won us, made us free, and restored us to the Father's favor and grace. He has taken us as his own, under his protection, in order that he may rule us by his righteousness, wisdom, power, life, and blessedness.<sup>19</sup>

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are converted and given the desire and the motivation to live a sanctified life to the glory of God (the doctrine of Sanctification).

Here in the Creed you have the entire essence of God, his will, and his work exquisitely depicted in very short but rich words. In them consists all our wisdom, which surpasses all the wisdom, understanding, and reason of men.....In these three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love.....These articles of the Creed, therefore, divide and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth.....They do not have the Lord Christ, and besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup>

Where the Gospel is declared, faith is founded, and in the expression of Christian humanism, a re-creation is designed in the fashion which was God's original creation intention.

In summary, secular humanism is a major influence in science classes on college campuses. Christian students discover a pressure that requires careful study of God's Word as it relates to these issues. Following are several questions for small group study.

### Bible Study and Discussion Questions -- Bioethics

1. The issues of Bioethics at public colleges and universities are influenced by the liberal attitude of secular humanists, starting with the acceptance of evolution. Christian humanism finds itself at odds with this prevailing attitude because of the basic foundational principle of creation. Discuss this situation using Genesis 1:26-31 and 2:1-8 as references. Also see how Psalm 8:1-9 describes the glory of creation.
2. Humanism employs the philosophy that humans are basically good. The Christian responds that the 'fall into sin' of Genesis 3:1-7 accounts for the entry of original sin into God's world. The first un-human sin was the death of Abel by his jealous brother Cain, Genesis 4:1-8. Refer to Psalm 51:5 for the description of the spiritual condition of the descendants of Adam and Eve.
3. Humanists contend that mankind is making progress in reaching its goals of a perfect community without God. Christians contend that spiritual perfection can only be accomplished through faith in Jesus Christ, John 1:1-14. See 2 Corinthians 5:18 for the promise of reconciliation by faith in Jesus.
4. Martin Luther taught the doctrine of God's "Kingdom of the Left Hand." Romans 2:14-15 is the evidence for the truth of this basic understanding of human acts for the common good yet not acceptable to God for salvation. See Ephesians 2:8-10 for the prompting of good works that are pleasing to God, descriptive of the "Kingdom of the Right Hand."

5. Bioethical decisions are made from an attitude of love, but not just a general love of mankind, rather, it is a true self-giving love as personified by Jesus Christ. He describes this love in Matthew 5:43-44. How will the knowledge that one is a part of the Body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:27, provide guidance for ethical decisions?

## Endnotes for Chapter 1

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<sup>1</sup>R. J. Rushdoony, "The World's Second Oldest Religion," Secular Humanism, p. 11; quoted by H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Bioethics and Secular Humanism, (London: SCM press, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Kurtz, "A Secular Humanist Declaration," On the Barricades, ed. Robert Basil (Danbury, CT: Grolier, 1984), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Paul H. Beattie, "The Religion of Secular Humanism," *ibid*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup>The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1992 ed., s.v. "Enlightenment."

<sup>5</sup>The Encyclopedia Americana, 1984 ed., s.v. "Enlightenment."

<sup>6</sup>The Britannica, s.v. "Enlightenment."

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Shaw, ed., Readings in Christian Humanism, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), p. 32.

<sup>8</sup>"Humanist Manifesto I," The New Humanist 7 (May/June 1933).

<sup>9</sup>"Humanist Manifesto II," The Humanist 16 (September/October 1973).

<sup>10</sup>The Encyclopedia of Religion, s.v. "Enlightenment."

<sup>11</sup>Albert Ellis, "Is Religiosity Pathological?" On the Barricades, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>13</sup>Shaw, Readings, p. 36.

<sup>14</sup>H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Bioethics and Secular Humanism, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, A Christian Manifesto (Westchester, IL: Crossways, 1982), p. 132.

<sup>16</sup>Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," The Book of Concord, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 390.

<sup>17</sup>"Formula of Concord," The Book of Concord, Article IV, p. 552.

<sup>18</sup>Luther, "The Large Catechism," *ibid*, p. 412.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*, p. 414.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*, p. 419.

## CHAPTER 2

### ETHICAL SYSTEMS FOR BIOETHICAL DECISIONS

What are the criteria for making decisions about life issues? How do we apply this criteria? What makes one act good and another evil? Why is it an issue? Can a Christian prove that certain acts are moral and should be followed by everyone? Why is it important?

Christians base decisions about bioethics on the Scriptures, the revealed Word of God, as foundational grounds for determining what is good or evil, right or wrong. Humanists reject the validity of these conclusions and exalt the power of reason as the means of achieving acceptable answers, considering religion as constricting man's ability to be self-sufficient in matters of ethics. In this chapter, we discuss issues that have resulted in ethical systems, with a presentation that the basis for Christian decisions about bioethical concerns comes from the Scriptural doctrines of Law and Gospel.

#### Ethics and Morals

Words like 'ethics' and 'morals' are often used interchangeably, indicating those acts which are in accord with accepted rules of conduct, or to hold a set of beliefs about that which is good or evil. Paul Simmons, Professor at Southern Baptist Seminary, describes ethics:

Ethics is the systematic study of human moral conduct, the standards or right and wrong by which it may be directed, and the



goals or goods toward which it is directed. As such, it is concerned with choices, actions, attitudes, and character. It involves an examination of the nature of the person as a moral being, the source and meaning of values in human life, and the beliefs or perspectives upon which these are based.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of morality can be understood as defining what is good and beneficial or it can be the focus of doing what is right and one's duty. Value judgments are made as one assesses an action as good or bad. Subjective versus objective decisions are based on one's value system. One chooses to do or to forego an action because it upholds a certain value and recognizes a moral obligation in a situation. Value judgments as well as moral obligations are involved when college students discuss sanctity of life issues, like abortion or euthanasia, and determine their actions when based on their concepts of moral values. There is wide agreement that certain basic values are important, such as: love is better than hate, happiness is better than suffering, justice is better than inequality, freedom is better than oppression, etc. Disagreement enters when the discussion focuses on the best means to these ends. The search for the will of God in matters of values places the emphasis in an objective realm independent of personal preference or social consensus.

### Descriptive and Prescriptive Language

The language used in ethical debate is divided into "descriptive" which tells what is the case and what is done, using terms such as "is," "happened," and "did." "Prescriptive" language commands what ought to be done and includes terms such as "must," "should," and "ought." A descriptive statement does not necessarily make a moral judgment about right or wrong, while a prescriptive one states a moral duty and implies

an evaluation of a particular action. While some ethicists debate whether these two types of language can interrelate, a Christian sees them as two parts of a whole, a moral life-style which recognizes both the indicative and the imperative. In a discussion about premarital sex on campus, for example, a student will be tempted to separate the descriptive from the prescriptive, but a Christian will recognize the moral value and an obligation to maintain a high standard that is God-pleasing by remaining faithful to the Word of God.

### Motivations and Consequences

Ethical theories generally fall into two broad categories. Those that focus on motivations are deontological. Those that stress consequences are teleological. Deontological systems are duty-centered with the fundamental notion of keeping an obligation. Teleological ethics, and also known as utilitarian theories, emphasize the achievement of certain ends such as human happiness.

Christian ethics are generally categorized as deontological, for a believer in Jesus Christ receives the power of the Holy Spirit and is moved to live a morally upright life with love as the dominant focus and motivating force. However, it is not simply duty performed for duty's sake, but with a motive of love for God and the desire to please him. The consequences of a Christian's actions are not disregarded, but are secondary to the reasons or motivations for the actions. Determining the morality of the motivation of an action involves several factors. This is considered by John and Paul Feinberg, brothers who teach ethics at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, discussing moral praise or blame:

We believe a combination of three factors is involved in assessing moral praise or blame. First, the agent must have acted freely. If someone conforms to the moral law under compulsion, he is not considered moral. Likewise, if he disobeys the moral law, but is forced to do so, he should not be assessed moral blame. Second, moral praise or blame depends heavily on the agent's motives for doing what he did. According to Immanuel Kant, one may act from a desire to do one's duty, or one may act to further his own interests. Acting from a sense of duty is acting morally. Acting from self-interest is acting prudentially, but not morally. Motivation, then, is crucial in determining whether someone acts morally, but finally, for an agent to act morally, he must do an act which is morally right to do. Even if an agent freely acts solely motivated by duty, his act is not moral if he does an immoral act. In sum, an agent acts morally if he acts freely, does an act which is right to do, and does it with the sole motivation of doing his duty.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian ethic does not neglect results or the consequences of an act, but the motives for the act are primary. Those who promote goals as primary are utilitarians, with the goal of happiness as the guiding principle for actions, with the end justifying the means. Norman Geisler, a former professor of apologetics, writes:

In Christian ethics these results are all calculated within rules or norms. That is, no anticipated result as such can be used as a justification for breaking any God-given moral law. Utilitarians, on the other hand, use anticipated results to break moral rules. In fact, they use results to make the rules. Existing rules can be broken if the expected results call for it...In brief, the end may justify the use of good means, but it does not justify the use of any means, certainly not evil ones.<sup>3</sup>

Consequences are not the basis for deciding the moral rightness or wrongness of an action. Considerations like keeping a promise, or because it is commanded by God, or it is a just act, make an action morally right or wrong. The Feinbergs say: "The key for deontological theories is that an act is right because it is one's duty to do it, and it is one's duty for some reason other than the consequences stemming from

the act."<sup>4</sup> Those who argue for teleology or consequentialism could conceivably call a person moral because an act brought about good even if the act in itself was bad. For example, an attempted rapist on a college campus would not be considered immoral by some, because as a result of the act the administrators increase campus security for everyone's benefit. Such faulty reasoning would conclude that the results or consequences of an action determine whether the act is morally good or bad. What makes a person moral is obviously more than the results of one's actions, rather it is the motivations that prompt one's actions.

### Ethical Systems

Are there moral laws that are binding on all humans and not purely subjective? Geisler writes that there are six major ethical systems, each designated by its answer to the question, "Are there any objective ethical laws?"

In answer, *antinomianism* says there are no moral laws. *Situationism* affirms there is one absolute law. *Generalism* claims there are some general laws but no absolute ones. *Unqualified absolutism* believes in many absolute laws that never conflict. *Conflicting absolutism* contends there are many absolute norms that sometimes conflict, and we are obligated to do the lesser evil. *Graded absolutism* holds that many absolute laws sometimes conflict and we are responsible for obeying the higher law.<sup>5</sup>

Geisler places the first three, antinomianism, situationism, and generalism, into the broad category of non-absolutisms. Since Christian ethics are grounded in Scriptural principles, the systems of non-absolutism or ethical relativism cannot be acceptable. However, the presenters of these systems have found a ready audience among the public, including college students in a pluralistic environment.

Those who espouse *antinomianism* hold that there are no binding moral laws and that everything is relative. Limited antinomianism is more widely held in not denying all moral law, but laws anyone might impose on others. Utilitarians follow the principle that one should act so as to produce the greatest good for the greatest number of persons, and that there are no absolute moral laws but one should do what brings the greatest pleasure. Existentialists claim that our highest duty goes beyond moral law, and one transcends the ethical by "a leap of faith." Even with negative aspects, there are positive contributions in the form of stressing individual responsibility for one's actions and personal relations instead of mere prescriptive regulations. These views are quite inviting to impressionable and idealistic college students. This student generation has been given the label of "Generation X" by social scientists, for they look for a rationalization for freedom of actions, without having had much foundation for value judgments in their lives. However, they must realize the subjectiveness and individualism of these systems, along with the irrationality that would endorse total liberty which leads to irresponsible actions.

In *situation ethics* the claim is made that there is only one unbreakable norm, one law for everything, the law of love. Since each situation is different from all others, one rule cannot be applied to all situations; therefore only the norm of love will suffice. Love is the only thing that is intrinsically good; love replaces the law; love and justice are identical. There are things to commend situationism: it is absolute, there is only one unbreakable law, although the circumstances are relative; it stresses love and the value of persons. Jesus says in John

13:34-35, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Paul certainly affirms in Romans 13:10 that "Love is the fulfillment of the law." But the criticism of situationism is that it is impossible to filter all Scriptural teachings into the one universal norm of love; it is too general and ambiguous, and a different universal norm than love can be possible. Situation ethics is popular on campuses because of the ambiguity of the claim of love being the only norm for action. What can happen is that one moral law turns out to be no moral law and becomes antinomianism.

*Generalism* argues that there are some binding moral principles, but none are really absolute; this is a utilitarian position. The goal is to have ethical laws to help people determine which action will bring the greatest good for the greatest number; an act is automatically good because it has a good goal, to bring happiness. Acts are judged good or bad according to their consequences of producing happiness or pain. Refinements of this theory have resulted in classifications of *act* utilitarianism, considering the acts that promote happiness, and *rule* utilitarianism, which deals with universal laws and rules that promote the greatest happiness. Moral principles are based, however, on God's will and they are right because of his unchangeable character. To encourage chastity on campus, for example, is not simply to avoid sexual encounters or to preserve societal standards, to be relinquished if society could survive without it, but as a fulfilling of a God-pleasing norm for premarital relationships. These will then be extended into the marriage relationship for a monogamous, life-long relationship.

In the discussion of *absolutisms*, three forms are identified: unqualified, conflicting, and graded. The first, *unqualified absolutism*, is very influential and widely held among Christians; it maintains that sin is always avoidable, moral absolutes have no exceptions, and they are never in conflict with one another. St. Augustine makes the classic presentation and pronounces God's intervention when there is a moral conflict. Thus some exceptions become acceptable. Adherents of *conflicting absolutism*, the second form, realize this is not an ideal world and there are moral conflicts; when these occur we should do the lesser evil, and know that forgiveness is available if we confess our sins. *Graded absolutism*, the third form, also recognizes real moral conflicts; however, with the consideration that moral laws are not of equal weight, a type of hierarchicalism is established. And, since love for God is a greater duty than love for people, when moral laws come into conflict we are obligated to follow the higher moral law; when doing so, we are not held responsible for not keeping the lower one. One notes the contrast with situationism which holds to only one norm, love, and then allows the situation to determine what one should do in a given case. Young people are tempted to take the path of least resistance; they need to be alerted to moral absolutes that declare that God disapproves of premarital intercourse or abortion on demand, even when peer pressure would advocate a freer and more relative behavior. In the process of making a judgment on what action to take, one uses reason with the desire to be guided by God's Spirit for doing that which has a higher priority, and thus is acting morally.

## Natural-Law Ethics

Humanists turn to human nature and natural law as the criterion of morality. They posit that humans have intellect and free will, so they can freely act according to their rational nature or go against it, acting in a human or non-human way. Andrew Varga, professor at Fordham, writes:

The common element of these theories is the position that we are born incomplete human beings but that we have specific potentialities which enable us to bring our nature closer to its fulfillment or completion and thus become good persons. Hence these systems are called self-realization theories. The moral good for the individual consists in actions that bring him as close to the ideal of human nature as possible. We are obliged by our very nature to build the genuinely human in us and avoid actions that are "dehumanizing." We have a number of potentialities that are the exclusive characteristics of human beings. Ethics has the task to study and clarify these characteristics in order to determine what is genuinely human and hence morally good.<sup>6</sup>

The morally good act will bring us closer to self-realization and fulfillment. This natural-law ethic is the basis for modern science and research at universities and has an effect on students, to promote humanism. It is in conflict with the Scriptural teaching of the loss of free will by our first parents in Eden when they disobeyed God; the free will to please God is not available to humans until they repent of sins and are restored through faith in Jesus Christ. On a human level, there can be improvement in relationships and in development of character, but only in the realm of the "Kingdom of the Left Hand," according to Luther. The moral standard that is God-pleasing is only accomplished by believers with a restored free will and desire to act in truly human ways, thus reflecting their citizenship in both kingdoms.



## The Role of the Conscience

A generally accepted principle is that good people live according to their consciences. They indicate that when they are faced with a moral decision they do not turn to any elaborate ethical positions but just follow their consciences. However, when conscience is examined, it becomes more complex. One's conscience is developed through the teachings of parents and church, also by public opinion about what actions are good or bad. These ethical principles remain in our memory and are available for application when facing a particular situation.

Conscience is realistically a subjective norm of morality, as opposed to other objective criteria. As one matures, it seems necessary to question the validity and correctness of early training, to be assured that one is acting in good faith and following sincere convictions and not just rationalizing one's conduct. In addition, one needs to examine God's Word regarding conscience and moral actions to be in conformity with his will.

Natural knowledge of God and his law cannot save a person but can only give a knowledge of sin and judgment. Paul writes in Romans 1:19-20: "What may be known about God is plain to them.....for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities.....have been clearly seen.....so that men are without excuse."

The Reformation description of the three-fold use of the law indicates the initial purpose of God's law is to prevent the coarse outbursts of lawlessness and immorality; this would be the action of all people, both believers as well as of the unregenerate, and indicate one's conscience at work. The second use of the law also affects conscience, in

that it points directly to God's commands in the Ten Commandments, and would guide people into repentance and a search for mercy. Conscience is cleansed through forgiveness from Jesus Christ with a new direction for living. Thus the third use of the law comes into effect for the Christian as a pattern or guide for moral living. One's conscience needs re-shaping in order to live as a faithful child of God.

### Theological Reflections

Do the Scriptures have authority in matters of contemporary bioethical issues like genetic engineering or fetal tissue transplants? Some would argue that the Bible has little to say to today's technology and scientific concerns. Granted that modern medicine is far removed in time from the writing of the Scriptures, yet there are several things that can be borne in mind. The warning of Paul in Colossians 2:8 is still appropriate today, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." Jesus Christ testifies to the enduring quality of his words in Luke 21:33, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." A Christian who is concerned about truth sees the Word of God as definitive, in Romans 11:33-34, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" The revelation of God in the Bible offers guidance for Christians when making decisions. Simmons comments on moral decision-making:

Making a moral decision in medical cases is always a complex interreaction of several factors. Data from the situation and the artful application of skill and knowledge drawn from the world of medicine are brought together with religious beliefs and principles. The Christian looks to science for factual data and to the Bible for moral and theological guidance.<sup>7</sup>

The writings of the Reformers contain only a few instances of the word, ethics, and these are primarily in reference to civil or natural ethics. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession contains the following: in "Article II. Original Sin":

Here the scholastics have taken over from philosophy the totally foreign idea that because of our emotions we are neither good nor bad...these ideas appear in the scholastics, who improperly mingle philosophical and civil ethics with the Gospel.<sup>8</sup>

Also, in "Article IV. Justification":

If we can be justified by reason and its works, what need is there of Christ or of regeneration?....We have heard of some who, in their sermons, laid aside the Gospel and expounded the ethics of Aristotle. If the opponents' ideas are correct, this was perfectly proper, for Aristotle wrote so well on natural ethics that nothing further needs to be added.<sup>9</sup>

The confessional writings may not include the word, ethics, but they constantly refer to moral standards based on the Law and the Gospel.

There are different methods of Scriptural interpretation, even as there are a variety of ethical systems. The historical-grammatical method is the time-honored hermeneutical system of interpretation with basic principles that derive the meaning from the text, that seek the native sense of the text, and that let Scripture interpret itself. Following these principles, one reaches conclusions that God is the author of Holy Scripture, that it is Christocentric, that it speaks directly to the reader,

that it is clear and understandable in presenting basic doctrines of law and gospel.

The more recent historical-critical method claims to enable the scholar to distinguish between Holy Scripture and the Word of God and to shift concern from Scripture as a record of objective fact to a compendium of traditions that reflect the faith stance of the writers. This system is favored by those who desire the Bible to speak to bioethical issues in a contemporary way and still claim to have scriptural authority. For example, in a discussion of personhood, since the New Testament does not refer to abortion, God is presented as pro-choice. Humans are given responsibility to participate in the creative activity of God, including not only the command to propagate, but also to control their fertility; abortion may at times be understood as an option to control population growth. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, then professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, speaks to the issue of methods of interpretation in the following:

For orthodoxy the Bible in its entirety is God's objective revelation, and both the events and the interpretations comprising it are veracious; faith accepts and is grounded in the propositional validity of the Scriptural text, and all sound exegesis of the Bible must proceed from this presuppositional base. For contemporary hermeneutics, however, the text of Scripture cannot be understood as objective, historically veracious revelation separated from the exegete (the subject-object distinction); an existential-dialectical relation between text and interpreter (the hermeneutical circle) has to be assumed; and since God's revelation can never be equated with the Scriptural text, hermeneutical affirmations will necessarily have a paradoxical quality, and relativism will "play a more radical role than ever before." In brief, for orthodox Protestantism the Bible has stood as an unblemished historical revelation, objectively distinguishable from its interpreters, who in

order to understand it must allow it to interpret itself apart from the existential orientations reflected in church tradition or in the mind-set of the exegete.<sup>10</sup>

The principle of Scripture interpreting Scripture is a foundation of Lutheran theology. Scripture is the authority for Luther because it reveals Jesus Christ, because in it God speaks his Word of judgment and grace. The Scriptures are God's means of taking captive one's conscience, as Luther said at the Diet of Worms, and he could not violate his conscience. The consciences of unbelievers indicate a natural knowledge of law, as Paul writes in Romans 2:15, "they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness." When one is converted through the power of the Holy Spirit, the conscience becomes informed and assists the believer in the discernment of moral living. The informed conscience will guide the Christian when faced with struggles to live in freedom yet not offend someone weaker in the faith. Paul illustrates with an example of food, 1 Corinthians 8:9-13, "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you....when you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ."

The Scriptural doctrine of original or inherited sin indicates the underlying problem which results in immoral acts. There will never be proper motivation for moral acts unless one's inner being is renewed. Paul's Epistle to the Romans provides the doctrinal answer to the dilemma, especially in 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." The biblical doctrine of justification by grace

through faith in Christ Jesus and the Law-Gospel distinction are basic principles for the interpretation of the Scripture texts.

Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law and to bring freedom from the law and its demands to those who trust in him as Savior. There are three classifications of OT law; the moral law still applies in principle to believers, as a guide for life, as Jesus expounded in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7; the civil law does not apply since we no longer live in a theocracy; and the ceremonial law system was fulfilled in Jesus' life and his death on Calvary as the sacrifice of God for the sins of the world. The Epistle to the Hebrews 9:28 clearly proclaims, "So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

The OT is useful for Christian ethics, for there are instances where the Mosaic Law will aid in interpreting the teachings of the NT. The Feinbergs write:

In fact, appeal to the OT may give a fuller explanation of a principle and God's reasoning for it than one finds in the NT. For example, while we believe Romans 13:1-7 warrants capital punishment, we believe Genesis 9:5-6 gives a much clearer statement of why God enjoins it. Second, even when OT and NT law do not exactly overlap, the OT can be very instructive in setting forth God's underlying attitude toward an ethical issue. For example, nowhere in the NT does one find the specific regulations of Exodus 21:22-25 that protect pregnant women and their unborn children. Those ordinances are part of the Mosaic Code, but are not part of the NT Law of Christ. On the other hand, as we shall argue when discussing abortion, proper understanding of that passage shows it to be one of the strongest passages in Scripture defending the rights of pregnant women and unborn children. Given that fact, it seems proper to appeal to it as indicating God's attitude toward

any kind of harm to the unborn, including abortion. Since nothing in the NT suggest that God's attitude toward the unborn has changed, the OT passage is relevant for determining God's attitude toward the unborn and for demanding protection of them.<sup>11</sup>

Those who argue for a utilitarian position that the end justifies the means will be challenged by Paul in Romans 6:1, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" This is Paul's rhetorical question in response to his earlier statement in chap. 5:20, "The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." God would raise our insights for moral judgments to trust his justifying power and live in the Gospel with the Holy Spirit guiding our ethical decisions.

Christian students in a secular humanist environment on a college campus will discover that the Scriptures are God's revelation of his will for his people regardless of the time in history. Faith in Jesus Christ brings assurance of forgiveness of sins and the hope of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit for godly living. The assurance that one lives in Gospel freedom does not necessarily remove all struggles from making ethical decisions. In this Christian liberty one seeks the counsel of God from his Word, as in Romans 14:12: "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God;" and 1 Corinthians 10:23, "Everything is permissible" -- but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible' -- but not everything is constructive." The Feinbergs offer the following questions to ask oneself when confronted with a situation that causes one to hesitate about the propriety of the action:

The first question is *Am I fully persuaded that it is right?.....*  
The second, *Can I do it as unto the Lord?.....*  
Third, *Can I do it without being a stumbling block to my brother or sister in Christ?.....*  
Fourth, *Does it bring peace?.....*  
Fifth, *Does it edify my brother or sister?.....*  
Sixth, *Is it profitable?.....*  
Seventh, *Does it enslave me?.....*  
And the final test is *Does it bring glory to God?*<sup>12</sup>

In the presentations of bioethical issues that follow, appropriate scriptural affirmations will guide student discussions for making moral decisions that will be God-pleasing.



### Bible Study and Discussion Questions -- Ethical Systems

1. Humanism bases ethical systems on reason that is totally devoid of God or of spirituality. Christians are guided by the Word of God and their reason becomes subjected to that revelation. Discuss the evidences of sinfulness of natural reason in Romans 1:16-32 compared to the enlightened reason of a Christian. See also Colossians 2:8.
2. Utilitarians emphasize that the end justifies the means and promote the pursuit of happiness. Discuss the differences between this and the Christian ethic, using Romans 6:1 and Romans 7:14-25 as guidelines.
3. Situation ethics posits love as the only criteria for actions. Christian ethics has its foundation in the love of God through Jesus Christ. See John 13:34-35 and Romans 13:10; also 1 Corinthians 10:23 and its truth for Scriptural ethics.
4. Humanist ethical systems are constantly being rewritten and refined. The Word of God is absolute for God's people through all time. Discuss the words of Jesus in Luke 21:33; see also Romans 11:33-34.
5. Conscience may provide one with an inkling of God's law, as in Romans 2:14-15. However, when it is informed through the Word of God, it plays an important role in moral living; see 1 Corinthians 8:9-13 for principles in the matter of giving offense.

## Endnotes for Chapter 2

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<sup>1</sup>Paul D. Simmons, Birth and Death: Bioethical Decision-Making, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>John S. Feinberg & Paul D. Feinberg, Ethics for a Brave New World, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Norman L. Geisler, Christian Ethics, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>Feinberg, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup>Geisler, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup>Andrew C. Varga, The Main Issues in Bioethics, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p. 15.

<sup>7</sup>Simmons, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup>Theodore G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 106.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup>John Warwick Montgomery, "Lutheran Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics Today," Concordia Theological Monthly, Occasional Papers No. 1, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1966), p. 91.

<sup>11</sup>Feinberg, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 44.

## CHAPTER 3

### ABORTION

Abortion is a bioethical issue that has a profound effect on college students. An abortion is often chosen to end an unplanned pregnancy due to premarital sexual activity. The current permissive attitude would ask, Can anyone hamper the freedom of choice as to having sexual intercourse, and if pregnancy results, the choice of having an abortion should this situation prove inconvenient to a program of college studies? Other pertinent questions are, When does a human person begin? What is the moral and legal status of a fetus? Who decides the bodily autonomy of the pregnant woman? What about rights of the unborn child? Who has authority to make/enforce decisions?

The World Almanac of 1994 estimated the number of live births in 1993 at 4,078,000. The Universal Almanac of 1994 estimated the number of abortions in 1990 at 1,429,577. Abortions have increased from about 586,000 in 1972. Figures also suggest that one of every two pregnancies is unintended; of those that are unintended, one out of every two is aborted. The U.S. Commerce Statistical Report of 1993 lists the largest group of women having abortions, 58%, were in the twenty- to twenty-four-year-old group. The largest portion of abortions, 79%, were among those never married. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta reports that in 1990 the women having abortions were predominantly twenty-four years or younger, white, unmarried, and

have no live-born children. Reports indicate 65% were white and 36% were black women. The evidence indicates that single college women are the most likely to obtain an abortion.

### Supreme Court Rulings

Many current college students were not yet born in 1973 when the Supreme Court ruled in the *Roe v. Wade* decision that a state has no right to restrict abortion in the first three months of pregnancy, that it is a decision between the woman and her doctor alone. In the second trimester regulations could be designed to protect the health of the pregnant woman. In the last trimester the state can regulate abortions and even prohibit them once the child reaches viability; however, even these regulations can be overturned in those cases in which the mother's health is considered in jeopardy. Thus these young people have always known the possibility of a legal abortion for a pregnancy that is inconvenient.

Another Supreme Court decision in 1973 of *Doe v. Bolton* ruled that health must be taken in its broadest possible medical context, and must be defined in light of all factors relevant to the health of the mother, whether physical, emotional, psychological, familial, or the woman's age. Since all pregnancies have consequences for a woman's emotional and family situation, the court's health provision has the practical effect of legalizing abortion up until the time of birth. Thus, a college woman could convince her physician that she needs the abortion to preserve her emotional and psychological health.

The Court reaffirmed previous rulings when in 1976 in *Planned Parenthood v. Danforth* it held that a woman's right to privacy supersedes the fetus' right to live; that a father's interest in his unborn child is secondary to the mother's decision; and that a young girl does not need her parents' consent to have an abortion. This gave allowance to any female away at college to have an abortion without parents ever knowing about it.

A 1989 Supreme Court ruling of *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* upheld a Missouri statute which banned the use of state facilities and prohibited state employees from performing abortions; it restricted somewhat the permissive health provisions which allowed for third-trimester abortions. Other states passed restrictive laws. However, at this writing, judges in Michigan and Arkansas have declared certain statutes as unconstitutional that limit government payments for abortions except for those pregnancies that are a result of rape or incest, or any rulings that require a twenty-four hour waiting period before an abortion is performed, or a prescribed counseling session that informs women of the status of the fetus. These actions were the result of the Clinton administration threats to cut off payments to states unless those statutes were struck down. It is therefore possible for college women to continue to have abortions, receive government aid to pay for them, and not be required to receive counseling nor to inform their parents. The concept of freedom of action, freedom of choice, and freedom from outside interference, are all evidences of the humanist philosophy.

### Rights of Unborn, Rights of Pregnant Women

The liberal community is adamant in demanding a woman's right to privacy and to her choice about whether or not to continue a pregnancy. College women are often in the forefront of this debate as they cite monetary problems and push for government support of abortions. In the liberal atmosphere on most campuses, students seek freedom of expression, also in matters of sexual activity, as a personal and private matter. Recently seen bumper stickers give expression to permissive attitudes: "If you are opposed to abortion, don't have one" or "Don't put your laws on my body."

The debate over human rights in abortion is viewed as one of the most morally, socially, and politically sensitive issues confronting America today. The Feinbergs discuss the debate:

Rhetoric is often loud and reason thin on both sides of the debate, and for some this is an issue that demands protest not only in word but in deed. Typically, each side portrays the other as uncaring and unfeeling about rights it feels are crucial. Pro-life advocates cannot understand why abortionists are insensitive to the baby's right to life. After all, they reason, this baby is a human being. If there is no right to kill a person after birth, why should there be a right to kill one before birth? Can't abortionists see that this is murder? On the other side of the question, advocates of abortion rights cannot understand why pro-lifers want to abridge a woman's right to exercise freedom of choice and apparently control what she can do with her body. In this vein, they remind us that they are really not pro-abortion. They decry it as much as pro-lifers do, and they believe they are not insensitive to the rights and needs of the developing fetus. But they feel that a woman's right to choose what to do with her body must be paramount. Hence, they prefer to refer to themselves as pro-choice.<sup>1</sup>

After years of public discussion, the debate generally focuses around the question of the value of human personhood, both that of the unborn

baby as well as of the mother, the baby's right to life over against the woman's right to control her body. An issue of the debate is whether the fetus is part of the mother's body or merely living in and off her body. Most will agree that it is life, but question whether it is a person. Dr. Jean Garton, president of Lutherans for Life, writes:

Webster's dictionary defines the word "woman" as "female human being." Since at least fifty percent of those aborted are "female human beings," obviously not "every woman" has a right to control her own body. This slogan advocates elitism for powerful women rather than equality for all women. If the claim that EVERY WOMAN HAS A RIGHT TO CONTROL HER OWN BODY is to have any integrity, it should include all female human beings, all women--even the "little women" in the womb.<sup>2</sup>

Proponents of abortion rights will point out that the Court did not rule that women have a constitution right of abortion, but they have a right to privacy when making decisions about a pregnancy. Furthermore, the Court has nowhere said that a woman must have an abortion for any reason. The American Medical Association considers abortion a medical procedure and therefore approves of it. Statistics are cited which indicate a growing acceptance of abortion: The National Opinion Research Center reports in 1992: 31% approve of abortion as being legal in any circumstances (up from 21% in 1975); 53% approve it as legal under certain circumstances, as a pregnancy endangering the mother's health, or a rape victim, or genetic defects; 14% consider it illegal in all circumstances (down from 22% in 1975).<sup>3</sup> The proponents state that since the question of abortion is primarily a moral issue, not a political or legislative one, religious groups have the responsibility of teaching whatever they wish about the morality of abortion and the personhood of

the fetus, but they do not have the right to force their morality on others. Right to life advocates do accept the responsibility of teaching morality. However, they object to the legislative acts and presidential proclamations which have affected all citizens, whereby tax monies are provided to women on welfare for abortions.

The fundamental difference between the two sides of the abortion debate focuses on the baby's right to life versus the woman's right to freedom of choice. Some would say the woman's right to control her body is paramount, and that any law must focus on the right to privacy, as well as to the need for safe medical attention. Yet, on the obverse side, can that right outweigh another person's right to life, as well as the consideration of the consequences for conscience, for society, and for family life? The Christian sees a central question of discerning God's will in the matter of the value of life, desiring to work between motivation in Christ and concern for human needs. By the power of the Holy Spirit, his people become lights in a world that has grown used to an idea of demanding rights and disposing of things that interfere with happiness.

### The Beginning of Life

When does human personhood begin? It had generally been accepted that when the male sperm penetrates the female egg, another human being is formed. Paul Simmons provides these technical observations:

There is a scientific consensus regarding fetal development that is important to understand. The life of any particular person is on a continuum from the time of conception to death. There are four stages in the development of the fetus. The *zygote* is the female ovum (egg) that has been fertilized by the male sperm in the



Fallopian tubes of the woman, where it remains for about three days. During this time, cell division begins. The *blastocyst* is the stage begun with implantation in the uterus, where rapid cell division continues. Many zygotes never attach, of course, and pass unnoticed through the woman's menses. The *embryo* is the stage beginning after two weeks from conception. During this time there is organ differentiation. All the internal organs one will ever have are present in rudimentary form by the end of six weeks. The *fetus* is the stage from eight weeks to birth, during which there is continuous growth or development but nothing "new" is added. This is the period of bringing to readiness for birth what is already begun.<sup>4</sup>

Present technology enables studies of *in vitro* fertilization to conclude that until the chromosomes are united, usually during the first twenty-four hours, a cell cannot be ready to replicate itself; only then can it be called a human cell. This would allow for the removal of the cell or an abortion, some claim, which would not yet be taking a human life. However, others just as strongly argue that the process begun at fertilization has started forming human life and should not be interrupted. The newly fertilized egg can be examined under a microscope and the DNA determined to be human.

A key element in recent discussions is a shift from a biological term, life, to a legal term, person. Persons have rights which are not grounded in natural law but are granted by the state; one of them is the right to life. Courts have held that injury to the fetus even at an early stage of development is a basis for redress; most of those cases involved injury in automobile accidents. The dominating question now is: "When does personhood begin?" Arguments are raised that a fetus is not a person until some decisive moment after conception. One argument suggests the time of implantation on the wall of the uterus during the first nine days. Another suggests the possibility of 'twinning', during

which the cell can divide and produce identical twins, which usually occurs between the seventh and the fourteenth days. Another is the beginning of the 'primitive streak' or the initial evidence of a spinal cord, at about the twentieth day. Since there cannot be a unique person prior to this time, there must not be an individual person until after the twentieth day. Another argument is based on the fact that brain waves are not detected until approximately twenty-five to thirty-two days. The ancients argued for the time of quickening or movement as the time of "ensoulment" and was the spiritual reality for an individual person, this would be during the fourth or fifth month. The ability of the baby to survive outside the womb from about the sixth month would be the criteria for those who define the person as viable when breathing takes place. As the current debate indicates, there is no common agreement on when human life or personhood begins. Dr. Geisler writes:

The pro-abortionist's self-designation as "pro-choice" places emphasis on the right of the mother to decide whether she wants to have a baby. It reveals the belief that the right to privacy is dominant in the decision. Many proponents believe that no unwanted baby should ever be born. No woman should be forced to have a child against her will. The Supreme Court clearly based its decision on this assumption, referring to the unborn as merely "a potential [human] life." At the same time, the Court also recognized explicitly that if the right of personhood is established, the "appellant's case, of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the [Fourteenth] Amendment." Hence, the pro-abortion position is dependent on the belief that the unborn is not fully human.<sup>5</sup>

Proponents of abortion on demand argue that the fetus is subhuman. It may be life, but it is not human. It does not possess self-consciousness and is physically dependent. Furthermore, should there

be a determination of fetal defects, extra care and costs will be needed. Also, all children should be wanted so that abuse will not occur. The issue then moves into the arena of 'quality of life' with the question of who decides for those who cannot make decisions. Prolifers point to the facts that many children who have visible genetic defects, such as Down's syndrome do live happy and productive lives. Also the concern is raised that studies of recent years indicate that even with the high number of abortions there is more reported child abuse than before, whereas an opposite trend should be the assumption.

Others would argue that the fetus is only potentially human and this emerging value must be weighed against the mother's rights to determine whether abortion can be permissible. Those who hold this position favor an abortion to save the mother's life, for rape, for incest, and for genetic deformities.

The topic of pregnancy due to rape is pertinent in a campus situation, as there are instances of "date rape" or forced intimacies at fraternity parties, etc. In the past, not many of these rapes were reported, perhaps because of the woman's fear of the publicity; the college administration's concern would focus on recruitment and the fear of parents about campus safety. In recent years, the situation is different; one reads of more reports of date rape. However, there are many that go unreported due to the difficulties of the victim to convince others, including the police, of the act of rape.

Not all rapes result in pregnancy; in fact, the possibility is quite minimal. Dr. Garton makes the following observation when a woman becomes pregnant due to rape:

Yet, consideration must be given to the needs, emotional and physical, of a woman who does become pregnant as a result of rape. The traumatic effects of the violence require that we provide her with the most sensitive and supportive counseling. It is, nevertheless, highly questionable to assume that the trauma of the assault itself and the subsequent pregnancy are best remedied by abortion. Psychiatrists indicate that it is impossible to predict for which woman an abortion would be more detrimental to her mental health than would be the strain of carrying the child to term. A raped woman's greatest needs when pregnancy occurs are for psychological counseling which meets her particular problems and the caring support of family and friends. Unfortunately, in the absence of these responses, abortion is viewed as the just course of action.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, is it just to remove evidence of a violent act by abortion? Can we solve the problem of one violent act by committing another violent act? There are two victims involved and both are in need of support. Abortion is a destructive approach to a human problem and involves the harmed and hurting woman in an aggressive action which cannot relieve the pain of the first tragedy.<sup>7</sup> It is incumbent on society, and especially on Christians, to offer supportive and loving care, with an emphasis on pro-life. The possibility of adoption for the newborn needs to be a favorable alternative to the mother raising the child who is the result of rape.

Is the fetus a human? Three approaches to this question are presented by Paul Simmons: the genetic school identifies the person with the person's genetic code; the developmental school argues that the genotype is not enough, there must be more physiological capacity, although there is differences of opinion on when this takes place; the social consequences school focuses on social and relational factors in personhood, and that life cannot be limited to biological factors.

Generally speaking, attitudes toward abortion can be correlated with these approaches. Those who take the developmental approach are not likely to regard every abortion as the destruction of a person. They would disagree over the time during gestation at which that would be true, however. The social consequences approach would largely leave the decision to the woman or the couple involved, believing that their moral attitudes would serve as the primary protection of fetal life. Those who begin with the genetic definition, however, feel that no abortion can be morally justified, for it is the murder of a person. This approach has the value of establishing an objective standard or point of reference (conception) that can be universally recognized by morals, law, and medicine. This gives its proponents the decided advantage of simplicity in arguing their case. Each of the other approaches is much more difficult to apply to legal or medical considerations.<sup>8</sup>

There is a fourth and most important approach, the theological and religious one, with the belief that life is God's creation and that it is valuable. Whether the arguments are simple or complex, the abortion debate has become increasingly volatile. Some 'right to life' proponents have worked to establish an amendment to the United States constitution to prohibit abortion for any reason except to save the life of the woman. Certain members of Congress have been targeted for defeat or election depending on their position on the abortion issue. Members of militant groups, such as Operation Rescue, have picketed abortion clinics and used tactics as intimidation of pregnant women planning to enter the clinics. Courts have levied large fines to trespassers and sentenced some to lengthy jail terms. In recent weeks doctors and assistants have been shot to death outside of the clinics with an explanation of justifiable homicide for the doctor's part in killing innocent babies. The debate appears no closer to a commonly accepted solution, and young women appear to be more adamant in their position over against moral arguments because of these actions. The murder of

anyone cannot be condoned, even if one attempts to rationalize such action as an attempt to save lives of unborn babies. Society will need to find better ways of working through this problem, and Christians should be in the forefront of such debate.

### History of Abortion

The Christian ethic emphasizes the sanctity of human life. The Gospel illustrates God's respect for life and his love for each individual. College students have an interest in primary source research and the historical events that help shape the present. Extra-biblical writings that oppose abortion include the Didache and the Epistle of Barnabas. Early church fathers like Tertullian called abortion murder; the canons of St. Basil condemned abortion at any point; the Council of Ancyra in A.D. 314 laid down 10 years' penance as the penalty for abortion. However, pre-Christian writings give evidence that abortion was practiced. Dr. John Klotz, professor of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, states:

We have an herbal prescription that dates from about 5000 years ago which recommends mercury as an effective abortifacient. The Ebers Papyrus, which dates from about 1500 B.C., provides directions for producing an abortion. Particularly interesting is the Hippocratic oath and the approach taken by Hippocrates, his contemporaries, and his successors. As we have pointed out earlier, the Hippocratic Oath forbids abortion and pledges the doctor to oppose it. Yet included in the Hippocratic corpus is a description of instruments for bringing about abortion. It is apparent that Hippocrates himself countenanced abortions and described how they could be brought about. It was only after his medical treatises were gathered together by his successors that there was a change in thinking to the degree that the rather strong statement forbidding abortion was written into the Hippocratic Oath. The Code of Hammurabi from the 18th century B.C. and the

code of Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria, dating from the 12th century B.C. forbid abortion. <sup>9</sup>

Dr. Klotz continues with an historical overview: In the world of early Christianity, the Roman attitude had been permissive about abortion; the Romans, together with the Greeks and the Egyptians, had produced literature about abortive techniques. In the 2nd century A.D., however, Imperial Rome passed strict anti-abortion laws to stop moral decay and strengthen the nation, but primarily this was because of the decline of the population. This attitude melded with the early Christians against abortion and became the dominant influence for western secular legislation until recent times.

The Roman Catholic Church has had various positions about abortion in its history. The early church had been influenced by Aristotle's suggestion that the soul entered the body of a male fetus at forty days and a female fetus at eighty days; therefore abortion before this time would not be considered murder. Pope Sixtus V in 1588 issued a proclamation ordering that view to be reversed and that any abortion was murder; Gregory XIV reverted to the Aristotelian viewpoint, but in 1869, Pius IX changed back to the position of Sixtus. In 1968 the encyclical Humanae vitae allowed for two exceptions for an abortion, in the case of an ectopic pregnancy or in the case of a cancerous uterus. Recent pronouncements in the Roman Church have continued to speak a prolife position.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) has officially adopted resolutions at conventions which hold to a right to life position. For example, in 1989, Resolution 7-14 begins with the following 'Whereas' paragraphs:

Whereas, the July 3, 1989, Supreme Court decision (*Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*) indicates hope in the struggle against abortion and points to the need to develop new and increased strategies for our long-term pro-life efforts; and Whereas, The LCMS is recognized for its strong commitment to pro-life and family concerns as documented in several past convention resolutions; and Whereas, Many LCMS members actively support Lutherans for Life, a pan-Lutheran organization which builds awareness of the sanctity of life through educational materials and ministry based on the Word of God.<sup>10</sup>

The Resolves that follow urge that congregations and districts address life issues and "work toward legislation which upholds the sanctity of all human life, including that of the unborn child."

The Michigan District of the LCMS in its 1991 Convention adopted Resolution 2-05A, with this initial "Whereas":

Whereas, The LCMS has urgently called upon Christians to "hold firmly to the clear biblical truths that (a) the living but unborn are persons in the sight of God from the time of conception (Job 10:9-11; Psalm 51:5; 139:13-17; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41-44); (b) as persons the unborn stand under the full protection of God's own prohibition against murder (Genesis 9:6; Exodus 20:13; Numbers 35:33; Acts 7:19; 1 John 3:15); and (c) since abortion takes a human life, abortion is not a moral option, except as a tragically unavoidable byproduct of medical procedures necessary to prevent the death of another human being, viz., the mother (1979 Proceedings, Resolution 3-02A).<sup>11</sup>

The 1994 Michigan District Convention affirmed the previous resolution and sent a statement about this pro-life position to the Michigan Legislature which was currently reviewing issues regarding life and death. The Scripture texts cited will be examined, together with others that are central to the debate, relative to the understanding of personhood and the sanctity of life.



### Theological Reflections

The revelation of God's Word forms the principles upon which Christians base their beliefs about the sanctity of human life. Their conclusions may not be popular, especially on a liberal campus which promotes feminist positions stemming from humanism, the freedom to make choices, among them the right to choose an abortion to end an unplanned pregnancy. Those who hold to the principle of the right to life are criticized for contending that the fetus is a human being, that abortion is murder, that tax dollars should not be given abortionists, and that it would be appropriate to add a constitutional human life amendment to ban abortion in America.

The Scriptures tell us that God is the Creator of life: Genesis 1:27 and 2:21-24 describe the special creation of Adam and Eve. Job 10:8-12 speaks of God as the one whose "hands shaped me and made me.....molded me like clay, clothed me with skin and flesh and knit me together with bones and sinews.....gave me life." Psalm 51:5 is King David's acknowledgement of being "sinful from the time my mother conceived me," which indicates that one is a person, albeit sinful in the eyes of God, from the moment of conception, not at some later time in fetal development. Psalm 139:13-15 states that God "created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.....I am fearfully and wonderfully made.....my frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place," affirming the creative activity of God, as a person is develops, in a marvelous plan. Jeremiah 1:5 relates God's call to the prophet of his creative power and foreknowledge, "before I formed you in the womb I knew you," and gives an indication that this is true for

all whom God will call into his family of faith. Isaiah 49:1 is the prophet's statement: "Before I was born, the Lord called me." Luke 1:41-44 recounts the action of the baby John in Elizabeth's womb, "leaping for joy," at Mary's greeting; this has been the basis of the concept of 'quickenings' at the time of 5 to 6 months, but also the affirming of life in the unborn, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The value of life is emphasized in the Scriptures, and the taking of life is also severely judged. God's covenant with Noah in Genesis 9:5-6 states, "I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." The Fifth Commandment is the simple statement, Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder." When the Israelites were ready to reinhabit the promised land, God said: Numbers 35:33, "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it." The value of life is certainly evident in such words. When Stephen makes his speech to the Sanhedrin, he recounts the atrocities forced upon the Israelites by Egypt's Pharaoh in Acts 7:19, "he dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die." The words of 1 John 3:15 are directed toward recognizing that our thoughts are as important before God as our actions, "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him." No one can deny that God's Word places high value on life and denounces taking life.

Other Scriptures that are relevant to the discussion of the creation of life include: Genesis 2:7 reveals that "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." Even though this verse is also used by those who would argue that the unborn are not human until they take their first breath, it primarily affirms the creative power of God as he brings human life into existence. This connection of breath and life in God's creative activity is mentioned in Job 33:4, when one of Job's friends says, "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life." This realization is understood in Job 34:14-15 that if God "withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish"; yet that does not make the beginning of life equal to breathing, rather that the absence of breathing means death.

Questions are asked as to the will or providence of God in the matter of conception. The Scriptures teach that God is creator and sustainer of all things. He governs the universe and cares for even the sparrows, and Jesus asks in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:25ff, "Are you not much more valuable than they?" and "Will he not also care for you, O you of little faith?" Psalm 8:4-5 celebrates the special creative act of humans: "You made him (man) a little lower than the heavenly beings."

Children are gifts of God, as stated in Psalm 127:3-5, "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him.....blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them." Also, Psalm 128:3 refers to children as blessings: "your sons will be like olive shoots around your table." Deuteronomy 7:13 speaks of God blessing his people with children, "He

will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb."

But what about handicapped children, or a fetus known to have physical problems? Technology today can make a determination of fetal abnormalities, giving many couples the assumption they have the right to decide to abort, rather than continue to a live birth. But who has the right to decide? Romans 11:34 asks the question: "Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" It is a humble attitude which trusts in God's care and providence. Since the Fall we realize that sin has a dramatic effect on humanity. It is God who permits conception to occur; he has determined the genetic content of the egg and the sperm; but we cannot blame God for defective genes or abnormalities. Dr. Klotz writes:

At creation all life was in harmony and at peace with all other life; there was no conflict of values in which a child might be pitted against his mother. Since the Fall, though, life may be pitted against life; the order of creation has been altered. Sickness and suffering are not the will of God but rather the reverse of the real will of God, even though God still carries out His will. If the bearing of a child actually poses a real threat to the life of the mother, we cannot say that her death is the will of God. If illness were indeed His will, then all medical action would be rebellion against God.<sup>12</sup>

If a child is born with physical defects, it is not a judgment of God against the parents nor an indication of some special sin, rather it is the result of sinfulness in humanity.

God also gives his good gifts in the midst of a burden, with the promise that he tests no one above his ability to overcome the trial, even giving the assurance of support so that one can stand up under it, as

mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "God is faithful: he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." God does not send evil. Christian parents look to God's Word for the good that he can bring about, as in Romans 8:28, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." Deuteronomy 30:19-20 says that, even in the middle of burdens, God's people "choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life."

Attitudes toward the responsibility of parenting have changed in recent years. Parents have always desired to have perfect children, or of a certain number or sex. But now, technology can determine much fetal information. The diagnosis might indicate something other than the parents' wishes. However, the implications of an adverse situation cannot be dealt with through a so-called medical treatment as abortion, without having grave ramifications for the family.

The possibility of abortion on demand as allowed by our current government indicates that it has declined to maintain the description of Romans 13:1-5, "God's servant to do you good.....an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." Jesus warns in Matthew 15:9, "their teachings are but rules taught by men." The challenge for the Christian is to "obey God rather than men" as cited in Acts 5:29. The call of Proverbs 31:8-9 is to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.....speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." This may not always be the popular position, but it enables

God's people to work towards justice and fairness for all humanity, especially the unborn.

The Scripture text, Exodus 21:22-25, is most challenging in the discussion of the sanctity of life in the unborn, and the consideration of humanness of the fetus:

"If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."

The argument is made that there is obviously a difference in value between the fetus and the mother; for the fetus's death, a fine is paid as determined by the husband and the court; however, if the woman is injured or dies, the law of punishment in kind (*lex talionis*) is applied: "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc." Dr. Simmons observes:

The story has only limited application to the current abortion debate, since it deals with accidental, not willful, pregnancy termination. Even so, the distinction made between the protection accorded the woman and that accorded the fetus under covenant law is important. The woman has full standing as a person under the covenant, the fetus has only a relative standing, certainly inferior to that of the woman. This passage gives no support to the parity argument that gives equal religious and moral worth to woman and fetus. The variation in the penalty levied reveals a clear distinction between the fetus in the womb and people included under covenant protection.<sup>13</sup>

This view is challenged by those who say that there is equal value of both mother and unborn child; as a result of being struck in the scuffle the woman gives birth; the *lex talionis* applies to both fetus and mother in case of injury. The contrast is between a situation in which harm comes

to neither mother nor child, and one in which either one or the other is harmed. The Hebrew word for giving birth is *yahtzah*, regularly used for live birth in the Old Testament; in this case then, it is premature birth, not a miscarriage, which is a different Hebrew word, *shakol*. The child born is *yeled*, the usual word for babies, but never for a child who lacks recognizable human form; that word would more likely be *golem*, which means fetus. The Feinbers make this summary:

In sum, given this interpretation, this passage, rather than demonstrating that the value of an unborn fetus is less than that of his or her mother, shows that God places the highest value on the developing life. When the baby is born prematurely but unharmed, a fine is assessed. When there is harm to either mother or baby, the law of retaliation is required. And both stipulations apply in a case where what happens is *accidental!* In fact, this is the only place in Scripture where the death penalty is required for accidental homicide! The obvious condition of the woman should have been a signal for caution on the part of the men, and when they were negligent, the most severe penalty was required. This passage is a special case, but not one that downgrades or devalues developing babies or pregnant women. On the contrary, it shows the extreme importance God places on both.<sup>14</sup>

In any case, the passage does not teach that developing babies have reduced or no personhood, and surely it does not sanction abortion. Rather, human life is valuable, whether an unborn baby, or the mother carrying the child.

Contemporary historical-critical hermeneutics views these passages differently, seeing them from the perspective that the Bible has no single teaching or definition of personhood or there would presumably be universal agreement among biblical scholars. Taking the position that the fetus has moral value, yet is only potentially human, it is not of equal

value with actual persons, particularly the pregnant woman. The Exodus 21 passage would be considered as determining that the pregnant woman has full standing as a person under the covenant law but the fetus has only a relative, obviously inferior, standing. Thus, a definitive statement would hardly be derived from this passage because the writer is not dealing with personhood, rather about punishment for an accident or injury. The fetus and the woman had value, but not equal value and thus not equal protection under law.

The critical methodologists see the creation passages of Genesis as simply providing images of personhood, rather than information about the meaning of personhood. For example, Genesis 1:26-28 tells of the creation of man in the image of God, obviously not a physical likeness but a similarity of powers or abilities, focusing on capacities or characteristics that define a person as a bearer of the image of God, namely, spiritual, personal, relational, moral, and intellectual. Man is like God; introspective, retrospective, and prospective, able to reflect upon the past, anticipate the future, and discern the activity of God in one's personal life and history. Together with Genesis 3:22, where God declares that "the man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil," meaning that humans have the burden and responsibility to make decisions that reflect God's ability to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong. The fetus, it is claimed, does not meet these characteristics and is regarded as only potentially a person. Added to the argument is the acknowledgement of physical deformities or retardation which will not enable full human capacity, nor the potential of growing into the image of God. Thus the abortion question focuses on the personhood of



the woman who takes into account the potential for personhood of the fetus, the concept of the image of God, and her stewardship of the creation of which she is the agent. The following summary by Simmons is an attempt to place the emphasis on conclusions drawn from reason:

In summary, the biblical perspective on the meaning of personhood focuses on concrete instances of people rather than abstractions like conception or substances that may be infused at conception or during gestation. Nowhere does the Bible settle for a biological definition of personhood. The image of God has no biological equivalent. The Bible does not support the parity argument, since the woman is the obvious concern as person. Furthermore, the language of murder cannot be associated with feticide, or abortion. The Bible does not do so, and those for whom the Bible is truly authoritative will not do so.<sup>15</sup>

The closing sentences in the above paragraph need to be carefully examined so that one is not misguided as to Scriptural truth. The Christian perspective is not clouded by rational attempts to discern what pleases God when his will is often cloaked in mystery, especially in the realm of personhood and the meaning of life. One needs to be open to the Holy Spirit's wisdom and guidance in order to follow one's conscience and see the purposes of God at work in one's life.

Compassion for someone in need is an important aspect of Christian life, also in the realm of ethics. The primary desire is to bring a hurting individual into a faith relationship with Jesus Christ, in order that it may be grasped that one's "body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God," 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Jesus calls us to care for one another in love and concern regardless of the circumstances, whether of poverty, race, or personal hazards, as exemplified by the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Paul

encourages in Romans 15:1-3, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak."

Suppose a young college woman becomes pregnant and faces a dilemma of discontinuing studies, possibly losing a scholarship or an important grant to continue graduate school toward a major degree. During the pregnancy the Christian community can provide guidance and counseling to help the woman work through the fears or other emotional concerns. Encouragement is offered to carry the child to birth, with the consideration of arranging for adoption of the baby. This involvement may be costly, both to the support community and to the pregnant woman. Yet this is an instance of putting faith to work, trusting that God has placed great value on the gift of life and calls his people to declare their faith by their works. James 2:14-17 brings this into focus with the words, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." The actions of the individual may be abhorrent to the observer, but the call to living out the faith is not determined by the sinfulness or misconduct of the recipient. We read in 1 John 3:18, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." Indeed, the full testimony of both Law about judgment on sin, and the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ Jesus are necessary, in order that God's power to change hearts may have full opportunity to be accomplished. This must be followed by acts

of love and compassion. In some cases, the young woman may be pressured by the father of the child or her peers, to take the easy way out of the dilemma, have the abortion, and get on with her plans for her career. The Christian community then faces the difficult task of acceptance, the sharing of Law and Gospel, and continuing love and concern. There is also the consideration of subsequent emotional and psychological after-effects to the abortion which need to be addressed, the probability of guilt feelings and fears of failure. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:1-6, "I urge, the, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone...that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

Abortion is unfortunately regarded across the nation as an acceptable birth control method for young unmarried women. The proponents of abortion on demand claim that they are as opposed to this view as prolife people are. Andrew Varga writes:

Abortion as a birth control method, whether outside or within marriage, cannot be justified. The killing of unwanted innocent human beings is here compared with the social and economic problems their birth causes. We have to conclude that killing innocent human beings is a greater evil than the very real social and economic ills of unwed motherhood or unwanted parenthood. The alternative solutions have to come from two directions: (a) prevention of extramarital pregnancies through moral education for responsible sexual conduct; (b) psychological, social and material help for unwed expectant mothers to give birth to their children. If they do not want to give up their children for adoption, they should be assisted in bringing them up. They should be especially helped to be sexually mature and responsible in their future life.<sup>16</sup>

There should be cooperation between those who are pro-abortion and those who are anti-abortion, at least in this area, to provide information

and counseling to reduce the number of premarital pregnancies and prevent a great number of abortions.

There are serious reactions which are reported by women who have had an abortion, identified as *postabortion syndrome*.

Dr. Anne Catherine Speckhard, of the University of Minnesota, recently published a study on the manifestations of stress from abortions performed five to ten years earlier. Although the women she studied came from diverse backgrounds, their reactions were amazingly similar.

81% reported preoccupation with the aborted child.

73% reported flashbacks of the abortion procedure.

69% reported feelings of "craziness" after the abortion.

54% recalled nightmares related to the abortion.

35% perceived visitations from the aborted child.

23% reported hallucinations related to the abortion.

Although 72% of the subjects said they held no religious beliefs at the time of the abortion, 96% in retrospect regarded abortion as the taking of life or as murder. (reported by the Christian Action Council)<sup>17</sup>

These serious concerns are often disregarded by proponents of choice but need to be addressed by both sides of the debate. Sins against one's conscience cannot be simply wished away. Dr. Martin Luther spoke to this issue in his address to the Emperor at Worms: "It is a sin to go against conscience." Christians desire to be guided by God's will in all matters of life. When sins have been committed, whether knowingly or unconsciously, God's Word calls us to repent and receive forgiveness through Christ. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:10, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret," thereby enabling healing of both body and soul.

### Bible Study and Discussion Questions -- Abortion

1. The beginning of personhood is a primary issue of debate. Those who advocate abortion view the fetus as having life, but not personhood.

Discuss the Scriptural teaching of personhood, using Job 10:8, Psalm 139:15-17, Jeremiah 1:5, and Isaiah 49:1. Also, Luke 1:41-44.

2. Pro-choice advocates do not regard abortion as murder but as a medical procedure. The Bible places a high value on life and warns against taking life; see Genesis 9:6, Exodus 20:13, and Exodus 21:22-25.

3. The prospect of having a baby with deformities has led many couples to consider an abortion; the Church can offer help; see 1 Timothy 2:1-6. Also 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Romans 8:28.

4. The Christian community must still offer support and love to one who has had an abortion. Discuss Romans 15:1-3 and James 2:14-17. The godly sorrow with repentance is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 7:10.

5. Even though the government may allow abortions, Christians will desire to follow God's Word. See Romans 13:1-5 for the role of government in life; also Acts 5:29 and Matthew 15:9 give teachings for moral living.

### Endnotes for Chapter 3

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<sup>1</sup>John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, Ethics for a Brave New World, (Wheaton: Crossways, 1993), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup>Jean Staker Garton, Who Broke the Baby?, (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1979), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>The National Opinion Research Center, (1992).

<sup>4</sup>Paul D. Simmons, Birth and Death: Bioethical Decision-Making, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 79.

<sup>5</sup>Norman L. Geisler, Christian Ethics, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), p. 136.

<sup>6</sup>Garton, p. 76.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>8</sup>Simmons, p. 82.

<sup>9</sup>John W. Klotz, Men, Medicine and their Maker, (University City, MO: Torelion, 1991), p. 96.

<sup>10</sup>Convention Proceedings, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, (Wichita, KS, 1989), p. 158.

<sup>11</sup>Convention Proceedings, The Michigan District of The LCMS, (Ann Arbor, MI, 1991), p. 59.

<sup>12</sup>John W. Klotz, A Christian View of Abortion, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), p. 36, quoting from, Helmut Thielicke, The Ethics of Sex, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 237.

<sup>13</sup>Simmons, p. 84.

<sup>14</sup>Feinberg, p. 65.

<sup>15</sup>Simmons, p. 89.

<sup>16</sup>Andrew C. Varga, The Main Issues in Bioethics, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p. 71.

<sup>17</sup>Janet Robson, For Life, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1990), p. 33.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROCREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Procreative technology is a bioethical issue that has present as well as future implications for college students, especially those who are involved in a curriculum in research sciences. The technology in procreation is progressing rapidly and this is cause for concern about ethical problems that are related to such endeavors.

The tenets of humanism will affect decisions in such areas as overcoming infertility through artificial insemination or *in vitro* fertilization. The Christian student needs to determine the proper attitude and perspective while in the classroom and the laboratory.

#### Procreation: Artificial Insemination

The technological advances in research in the area of procreation may not be of special concern to the average college student at this time; but in the future it could become important, such as the discovery of a couple's infertility or difficulty to conceive. The procedure of artificial insemination is one answer to the problem. The technique was first accomplished by a British physician in 1785; because of legal and social ramifications, it was not documented nor popular until the second half of the twentieth century. It is estimated that over twenty thousand conceptions a year occur this way.

Artificial insemination is one of the so-called 'slippery slope' concerns in bioethical discussions of procreation, for it puts one on uneasy ethical footing. Moral issues include the procedure of masturbation or the use of a condom to collect the sperm from the husband (AIH) or from a donor (AID). Opposition is raised as these means are against natural law, or involve the use of birth control, as well as the separation of procreation from the unitive aspects of sexuality. Others answer that collecting the sperm from the vagina after the sex act will resolve the moral problem.

A more serious moral concern for Christians is the involvement in AID of a third person, a male sperm donor. In addition to those mentioned above, one concern is adultery; even though that issue would probably not be upheld by a contemporary court. Another concern is that of the minimal screening of sperm donors, especially for disease transmission. Male medical college students are frequent donors to sperm banks; the increased spread of the HIV virus on campuses raises the need for more intensive screening. Doctors who are involved in artificial insemination procedures are expected to screen both the applicants for the process as well as those who donate sperm, but there are no specific regulations. Some concerns are expressed about the number of children conceived from one man's semen in a particular location, and the possibility of those children becoming married in the future, unknowingly being involved as half-siblings. Furthermore, the growing number of unmarried women, and those in lesbian relationships, seeking AID to become mothers directly affects our understanding of the family as the basic unit of our society.



Certain legal and social problems are involved with AID. The child so conceived may have the dilemma of genetic identity when certain illnesses arise, and no one knows the background of the donor father. Some studies indicate that doctors may use sperm from multiple donors, even from the husband, in a single cycle so as to obscure the identity of the genetic father. The opportunity exists for doctors to build perfect babies by selecting certain donors; there are sperm banks with deposits from Nobel prize winners. When donors with apparent superior qualities are used, there can be misuse by those who would attempt to build the ideal human. Others have expressed the view that the sperm donor has become no more than a salesman, with no responsibility for his actions, providing no support for his biological offspring, and regarding it as purely a commercial matter. The Feinbergs note the following:

We are often told that people are to be treated as subjects, not objects to be manipulated for our own ends. While sperm alone is not a person, it is part of the stuff of which persons are made. Buying and selling it strikes many as taking that which is potentially and partially personal and treating it as an object.<sup>1</sup>

Parenthood involves more than conception; there is also the plan of God for love and acceptance, for caring and nurturing in a family. When these aspects are missing, one can indeed question the ethics of a commercial venture, of supply and demand, of regarding sperm and eggs as another commodity in the marketplace. The ideal of a family, with adoption as an exception, is for children genetically related to parents married to one another; this is the standard by which Christians must judge AID. Dr. Edward Schneider, Ph.D. in ethics from the School of Religion at the University of Iowa, writes:

Those who offer contrary arguments in favor of A.I.D. explicitly or implicitly separate the personal from the physical, the unitive from the procreative function of the sex act. They thus fall prey to the destructive dualism that has plagued Western culture, whereby the personal or spiritual is understood as the specifically human and the physical or bodily is frequently depreciated. The personal is too readily understood as a disembodied spiritual reality. I would argue that we cannot separate the meaning of "personal" and "human" from physical, bodily processes.<sup>2</sup>

One then finds those situations wanting where AID is used outside of the bonds of marriage, namely, by single parents, lesbians, or in surrogate arrangements. In the final analysis, AID doesn't meet the ideal for parenthood. Many medical actions are seemingly playing God by use of surgery or organ transplanting, etc.; however, these are generally accepted as procedures for general health and well-being. The ethical concerns about such acts as AID place them in a different category, for they involve moral decisions, as well as practical, psychological and social implications that can be detrimental to marriage and/or personal well-being.

#### Procreation: *In Vitro* Fertilization

The technique of fertilizing eggs in the laboratory in an artificial environment (in glass or test-tube) and implanting them into the womb became successful in 1978 when the world's first test-tube baby, Louise Brown, was born. Since then over 1000 babies have been born in the United States through the process of *in vitro* fertilization, IVF, and is expected to become a routine procedure in overcoming childlessness. The ethical concerns that are raised are similar to those in the procedure of AID. Paul Jersild, Professor at Lutheran Southern Seminary, writes:

The moral arguments for and against IVF tend to proceed either from principles based on the nature of procreation, with their implications for IVF, or on anticipated effects of the procedure and an evaluation of those effects. These two approaches reflect traditional methods of arriving at moral judgments. The one argues that the very nature of things compels one to say that one ought or ought not to engage in a particular action (deontological argument). The conviction here is that the various human relationships embody values intrinsic to those relationships and one ought not violate them regardless how noble the intended goal of one's action. The other argument is based on the end or goal of what we do (teleological argument). Here the value of an act is determined by whether it best serves an ideal end to which other values should be subordinated. Moral reflection must be sensitive to the concerns of both of these approaches. The result may be a continuing tension between competing values that may never be resolved to one's satisfaction. Yet one finally attributes greater weight or priority to one value over another in arriving at a decision.<sup>3</sup>

The debate focuses on moral, social and legal issues regarding the status of the embryo. People with liberal views regard the technology of IVF as the expression of human genius and a humanizing resource, for it leaves the realm of chance and enables us to have control over the fruits of reproduction. One could question, though, the significance of such humanizing, with the result of an assault on human self-consciousness.

The respect for embryonic life must be addressed. There will be a problem of having more embryos than can be implanted in a woman; when five or more embryos are implanted and all continue to thrive, the question must be answered as to which and how many are aborted. The process of IVF involves the experimental risk of damaging the embryo and thus the developing child; there is no opportunity to gain informed consent, and thus personal rights are violated. Laboratory research of IVF continues, with one aspect being the use of embryos grown

specifically for tissue repair; this is obviously acceptable to those who hold that an embryo is simply a group of cells and not a person. As with the concerns of sperm banks in AID, the possibility exists of embryo banks, to be sold to an infertile couple, or a lesbian couple, or to a couple who engage a surrogate woman to bear the child.

An article in the Ann Arbor News of October 13, 1994, on "Fertility Trouble" reports on the reactions and after-effects of what doctors call "multi-fetal pregnancy reduction." Up to six embryos are implanted; "for the health of the mother and her developing fetuses, all but two are sacrificed." Some women report a popping noise and a baby crying when a needle is inserted in the chest of the fetus and salt water injected; but the therapist indicates it was only their rush of emotions during the pregnancy reduction. One woman talked of her sadness because she had four potential children and two of them have to get the bullet; but you have to tell yourself, "They're not children. They're a bunch of cells." Of the many women who spoke of sadness, only one said that she regretted having the procedure.<sup>4</sup>

The above cited article continues, Ann Arbor's University of Michigan Medical Center is experimenting with a new drug regimen that has reduced the risk of multiples virtually to zero, reports Dr. William Hurd. One of the nation's largest fertility clinics, the Ann Arbor Fertility Associates, offers extensive counseling prior to treatment to screen those who would be too traumatized. Even so, the report stated that the procedures left a trail of distress; all but one of the women experienced anxiety; 69% reported depression, and 57% said they felt guilt at the time of the reduction.

The advancement of IVF technology is noteworthy, but moral concerns indicate the slippery slope of the procedure: one considers the donor's identity or lack thereof, the experimental research on embryos, multiple embryo implanting, the so-called 'fetal reduction' (or culling) process which is a pseudonym for abortion, the probability of freezing extra embryos and the risk involved, the availability for use of surrogate mothers, the availability of embryos for lesbians, and primarily, the status of the personhood of the embryo and its right to protection.

### Theological Reflections

The Scriptures do not speak directly to the current concerns of reproduction in the cases of artificial insemination or *in vitro* fertilization. Scriptural study does provide Christians with a direction for considering these processes. The belief in the creation of mankind by God according to Genesis 1 and 2 places humanity on a moral level, in Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The blessing spoken in verse 28, "Be fruitful and increase in number," is considered as a promise rather than a command. Husband and wife are joined as one flesh, Genesis 2:24, and accorded the opportunity to produce children. Children were considered a blessing and therefore an indication of the favor of God, Psalm 127:3, "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them." The situation of barrenness was considered a tragedy in the Old Testament, and while it was not explicitly described as a sign of God's displeasure,

the affected woman would interpret it to be so, as exemplified by Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:11 as she reflected on her misery. When infertility was replaced with conception, it was regarded as the fulfillment of God's promise, as in the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 21:6. The "surrogate motherhood" of Sarah's maid, Hagar, who bore Ishmael to Abraham was a human attempt to fulfill the promise, Genesis 16; but there is no indication this was acceptable to God. In fact, the resulting disharmony in the family, and the years of ensuing family and tribal rivalry are indications of consequences of sinful acts.

The Bible does not deal in a systematic way with a contemporary response to human fertility, especially in recent developments in AIH or AID or IVF. Janet McDowell, Professor at Roanoke College, writes:

The sophisticated scientific understanding of the biological process of reproduction was absent in biblical times, and intervention to relieve childlessness was unheard-of except in the most basic of ways, such as the offering of a substitute for one partner. Nevertheless, the Bible contains substantial guidance regarding the relative importance of procreation and parenthood for those within God's covenant community and indicates a remarkable sensitivity to the psychological and social stresses faced by those who desire children and cannot have them.<sup>5</sup>

The need to have children can lead people into moral dilemmas, so moral concerns need to be addressed. The family is held in high esteem by Christians and the monogamous union of one man and one woman is the core of family life. There is no objection to surgery and/or medical treatment to make conception possible. However, the processes of AID and IVF are viewed as demeaning to the act of begetting children, and even focusing on the process as overruling God's will.

Can couples to accept the situation of childlessness as God's will? They promised in their marriage vows to be faithful in sickness and health, and are expected to support one another in times of long-term chronic conditions, even terminal illnesses. The Scriptures would lead a Christian couple to understand and recognize its significance in serving God and others for ultimate meaning and fulfillment. Therefore, if the need or desire for children jeopardizes the relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, and the family becomes a substitute for God, it becomes a problem of allegiance, as Jesus states in Matthew 10:37, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." The corrective power is from the Holy Spirit who leads us into repentance and renewal of faith in Jesus Christ; thus our relationships are restored in a God-pleasing manner. Dr. Klotz writes:

The intense desire of a childless couple to have children must be recognized. It is interesting that just at a time when women are seeking to be liberated from "church, kitchen, and children" the desire to have one's own child still remains very strong. There must be understanding and support in the Christian community. What complicates the situation today is the lack of babies available for adoption because of abortion on demand. It is tragic indeed that couples are encouraged to resort to *in vitro* fertilization when their strong desire for parenting might have been satisfied by adoption.<sup>6</sup>

The words of 2 Corinthians 1:4, indicate that God "comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." The Church is called upon to declare the Law and Gospel and to assist Christians in declaring to the world that only in Jesus Christ can there be true value, love and acceptance.

Bible Study and Discussion Questions -- Procreative Technology

1. God's plan for the family is outlined in Genesis 1:27-28. Discuss how the process of AIH or AID can avert God's plan, in reference to several points: means of obtaining sperm, or parental rights, or a child's rights.
2. The words of Genesis 2:24 speak of the unity of husband and wife; how does AID interfere with that divine concept?
3. In vitro fertilization presents several concerns that have reference to the Biblical concept of conception, Genesis 4:1; discuss the availability of sperm banks, frozen embryos, multiple embryo implantation, disposal of extra embryos, and the effect this can have on the marriage relationship.
4. Abraham and Sarah were promised a son; they became involved in a non-marital, human means of producing a child, Genesis 16:1-16. Discuss how God's plan was subverted and the hardships that resulted.
5. The desire of having a child can become so consuming that Christians may be tempted to divert their loyalty from Jesus Christ. How does Jesus speak of that claim in Matthew 10:37?



## Endnotes for Chapter 4

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<sup>1</sup>John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, Ethics for a Brave New World, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), p. 215.

<sup>2</sup>Edward D. Schneider, Questions about the Beginning of Life, "Artificial Insemination", (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Paul T. Jersild, Questions, "On Having Children: A Theological and Moral Analysis of In Vitro Fertilization," p. 39.

<sup>4</sup>"Fertility Trouble", Ann Arbor (MI) News, 13 October 1994.

<sup>5</sup>Janet Dickey McDowell, Questions, "Surrogate Motherhood," p. 56.

<sup>6</sup>John W. Klotz, Men, Medicine and Their Maker, (University City, MO: Torenion, 1991), p. 150.

## CHAPTER 5

### ENDING LIFE

Every year there are reports of college students who take their own lives, sometimes without giving any hint or warning to others. Suicide is a serious issue; as is euthanasia, which may affect a student who has elderly grandparents who may be suffering terminal illnesses. The Christian in such circumstances needs to review the Scriptures which provide insights into appropriate understanding and personal responses toward the value of life and matters of ending life.

#### Suicide

The principle that life is valuable guides any consideration about ending life. The secular humanism that pervades higher education regards man as the center of his universe and denies the existence of God or divine sovereignty; each individual has sovereignty, with the right to live and the right to die. Paul Kurtz, the humanist, writes:

We, not God, are responsible for our destiny. Accordingly we must create our own ethical universes. We should seek to transform a blind and conscious morality into a rationally based one, retaining the best wisdom of the past but devising new ethical principles and judging them by their consequences and testing them in the context of lived experience.<sup>1</sup>

The quality of life is valuable and is encouraged, but the humanist says, each person has the right to end one's life by suicide, if one so chooses.

There is no after-life, according to the humanist, as well as no judgment against an action of taking one's life. Thus there is no moral judgment about suicide, whether it is right or wrong, only that it is a personal response to the question of when to end one's life. Thomas Mappes writes in Biomedical Ethics:

The more liberal view on the morality of suicide may be explicated in general terms as follows. Suicide, to the extent that it does no substantial damage to the interest of other individuals, is quite morally acceptable. Moreover, even in cases where suicide has some impact on others, no person is morally obliged to undergo extreme distress to save others some smaller measure of sadness, etc. In accordance with this line of thought, it is argued that suicide is morally acceptable even in some cases where a person has some rather significant social obligations, e.g., the duty to care for minor children. Suppose that a person has fallen unaccountably into a profound and inescapable depression. Suppose further that psychiatric counseling provides no relief. If the person becomes so undermined as to be incapable of caring for the minor children anyway, then, the argument goes, the suicide is morally acceptable.<sup>2</sup>

This attitude has an effect on students who are under pressure of campus life. Suicide becomes an acceptable alternative to living, when it appears that life is not tolerable. It even has taken on a romantic notion, as in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet."

The increase of suicide among college students has raised great concern for administrators, as well as church leaders and health care professionals. The stresses of campus living include the need to succeed, the fear of rejection, the ache of loneliness; these situations can be the cause of depression so that some students consider suicide as the answer to their problems. A common view is that young people regard the world as having deteriorated to where there is no hope for recovery;

they thus despair for their future and that of the world. Little thought is given to the pain that suicide causes family or friends. It may seem to be 'the easy way out' but leaves many questions unanswered. It gives no opportunity for anyone to give aid and assistance for the one who feels one's troubles are too enormous to handle.

Suicide has been debated for centuries, from the pre-Christian philosophers as well as current humanists, as Simmons summarizes:

The moral acceptability of suicide has been debated among philosophers from Pythagoras to Camus. Many argued that suicide was immoral. Pythagoras' objection was religious--without God's command one has no right to kill God's property. Plato said it was the person's duty to stay alive for service, and Aristotle objected on the ground of civic obligation. The Stoics generally accepted suicide as a cure for life's burdens. Some moved from approving it under exceptionable circumstances to making it a duty should one conclude death was advisable. The Epicureans regarded death as an evil but acknowledged that suicide was acceptable when life became an even greater evil.<sup>3</sup>

In the Church, the concerns have been that suicide is breaking the Fifth Commandment, "You shall not kill," and also the fact that it precludes forgiveness for such an act and incurs God's judgment. However, since humans are not capable of knowing all the implications of a person's life that lead to suicide, one must be reticent in making a judgment.

An individual who takes his life is acting irrationally; ordinarily humans make every conscious effort to stay alive, and a suicide is acting contrary to this strong inner compulsion. Thus, one would be hesitant to make a judgment about another's self-destructive act who may be doing so in irrational depression or despair, or under side effects of medication.

The principle of autonomy is argued by some in our society as giving an individual the right to take his life; a young person has the

right of self-determination, assessing the value of life, and concluding whether or not to end it. A policy of non-intervention is regarded as giving respect to a person's rights. Others will respond that not showing any concern for another's problems is a failure to exercise love and care, and indicates a diminished sense of moral responsibility for others.

Talk of suicide must be taken seriously; to dismiss it as just talk may lead an individual to follow through. A threat of suicide is a call for help in a crisis or depression. The Christian community must recognize its part in dealing with such need by showing compassion and support. Churches that once refused to grant a Christian burial to a suspected suicide have altered their position and will provide services for the grief-stricken family.

### Euthanasia

Related to suicide is the matter of euthanasia. It is based on the Greek words *eu* and *thanatos*, meaning 'a good death.' When a person with a terminal illness takes one's life, it is regarded as acceptable by those with a humanist philosophy; the individual saw no need to continue to suffer, or to cause more expense for treatment, or to delay the inevitable. Some doctors have become known for assisting in suicides, such as Dr. Jack Kevorkian in Michigan, who has assisted a number of people to take their own lives in recent years. The debate about euthanasia continues regarding those who are considered in a terminal situation compared with those who may be enduring intractable pain or a diminished life-style. Some physicians respond that it is possible to manage pain and to give a healthier outlook so that one can continue living even though it may be less than desirable.

There are two distinctions made in euthanasia, "passive" means refraining from an action that will keep a dying person alive, and "active" involves some action in terminating another's life. The danger of the 'wedge' or 'slippery slope' enters when one argues that the former, namely, when death occurs because certain performing life-sustaining methods were omitted, can lead to the latter, when death is the result of certain actions like the administration of a lethal dose of a drug.

Cases of young people who have become comatose because of accidents have made headlines, including Karen Ann Quinlan and Nancy Cruzan, both of whom were kept alive with breathing machines and tube feeding. The parents eventually sought and obtained court orders to disconnect the machines that kept them alive; Nancy died shortly thereafter while Karen stayed alive for a number of years. During the court sessions the topics that were debated were, death with dignity, or would a person want to continue to live in this condition, or had there been expressions made which indicated the individual did not want extraordinary measures taken to sustain life. Some states are passing laws on subjects of 'living wills' or the 'right to die.' The Christian still needs to wrestle with the concerns of God's will in the matter of life and death.

Death with dignity is a current topic, namely, the right to die without prolonging the process through extraordinary or unnatural means. A student may face this situation when a grandparent is diagnosed with a terminal illness, or when a friend is critically injured in an accident. In passive euthanasia the intent is not to kill but to relieve the patient of an unnecessary burden and to permit nature to take its

course. Basic needs of food and liquid are provided, along with pain medication, but no life-sustaining machines are hooked up to the person. This may be voluntary, at the request of the patient, or it may be involuntary, made by the family if the patient is comatose. An important aspect of the discussion involves the application of a life-sustaining apparatus and when it may be removed should it appear to be non-productive. The state of Oregon in the fall of 1994 adopted legislation dealing with assisted suicide, although a judge has issued a stay until further discussion is held.

A patient suffering a terminal illness needs to decide whether to submit to treatment, surgery, transplants, etc., as Geisler writes:

While there is clearly a moral obligation to accept treatment to repair life, there is no absolute obligation to accept treatment that would sustain life artificially. We should accept treatment that would preserve life, but need not accept treatment that really will only prolong death. There would be, for example, no moral duty for a Christian to take a pill (were it available) to double his life span. Likewise, there is no absolute moral duty to take kidney dialysis treatment or even chemotherapy. It may be desirable or even wise to accept such treatment, but it is not morally necessary as such.<sup>4</sup>

The situation becomes more difficult when the patient may not be able to decide about accepting treatment, and the family or doctor must decide. Other determining factors may be the cost of the procedure, or its availability, or if it will be beneficial. Critics express that efforts in a research hospital appear often to indicate many extra procedures are ordered by doctors to satisfy medical research over and above what one might consider normal. A patient usually expects the doctor to act in accord with his duty to preserve life and to alleviate suffering.

Sometimes those acts conflict, as in the question to administer medication which may relieve pain but will cause addiction or even hasten death. The moral view is difficult to resolve. The determining factors include the desire not to prolong one's suffering, to enable a person to die, and especially for a Christian, to let God call one of His own home to heaven, without conscience qualms or regrets.

Active euthanasia has been classified in several categories:

a) voluntary and direct, which is chosen and carried out by the patient;  
b) voluntary but indirect, in which a person indicates in advance by means of a living will how life should be terminated; c) involuntary but direct, in which a person's life is ended without specific prior requests, also known as mercy-killing.

All types of active euthanasia have been called suicide, for which nearly all states consider it a crime to aid or encourage another to take one's life. Some state legislatures are working on changing those laws to coincide with a rise in popular opinion about accepting assisted suicide in the case of a terminal illness. The most publicity has been about the above-mentioned Dr. Kevorkian who has assisted a number of people to take their lives. He claims to be available for those who wish to die because of excessive pain or terminal illnesses because no other doctor has shown these patients this consideration.

George Kieffer, Professor at the University of Illinois, writes:

The attitude of the medical profession toward the dying patient also presents a problematic situation, but in general it may be characterized as an emphasis on cure to the exclusion of care.....Perhaps a more important reason is the ever-increasing number of malpractice suits being brought against physicians. It may be that in the absence of laws to the contrary, physicians feel



they must do all they can to prolong the existence of even dying patients beyond any reasonable expectation of recovery in order to escape this threat.<sup>5</sup>

The arguments for or against active euthanasia are often heated and tend to obscure the issues of compassion for the terminally ill and the concern for human dignity and personhood. The Quinlan and Cruzan cases raise the issue of the manner in which one dies, namely, artificially supported life beyond the point of natural death. There must be concern, however, that if it appears in the best interests of a patient to die, it becomes irrelevant how that death occurs. Dr. Klotz writes:

It is also possible to argue that to authorize killing patients for their own benefit when they are suffering excruciating pain or have only a bleak future to look forward to would open the door to a policy of killing patients to reduce the financial burden on society. Easy resort to killing to relieve pain and suffering may also divert attention and resources from other strategies more in keeping with Christian principles such as the hospice movement. There is no doubt that if rules permitting active killing were accepted into society, society over the years would move increasingly in the direction of active euthanasia. Rules against killing in a moral code are not isolated moral principles; they are threads in a fabric of rules that support respect for human life. The more threads we remove the weaker the fabric becomes. Respect for life is one of the characteristics of our western world, but it is being rapidly eroded by those supporting euthanasia and abortion on demand.<sup>6</sup>

The value of life and the concept of personhood from the perspective of the image of God are to be highly prized. When one promotes the quality of life as more important, then it is possible to argue that the end justifies the means when that quality is eroded by suffering or terminal illness. Such a consequentialist view is an opening not only to the acceptance of active euthanasia toward an elderly person, but also to bring about the death of a newborn deformed infant. The list can be

extended to those who are mentally deficient, or whose continuing care is a severe drain on a family or society, or even lead to genocide.

### Theological Reflections

In matters of life and death, the Scriptures state that life is precious and that the Lord is the one who gives life and the one who takes it away. Job 10:12 states, "You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit." And in Job 14:5, "Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed." Still, humans cannot read the mind of God and know for certain the length of one's days. Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, reads, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die." God speaks through Moses in Deuteronomy 32:39, "I put to death and I bring to life.....and no one can deliver from my hand." Also, in Job 1:21, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised." Such faith indicates a humility toward God and a reverence for the life he creates.

The Fifth Commandment, "You shall not murder," in Exodus 20:13, is the basic statement of God regarding the value of life. The punishment for taking a life is death, as in Exodus 21:12, "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death." Yet the Bible does point out some exceptions; for example, as in an accident or unintentionally, in Exodus 21:13, "However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate." The institution of human government has the authority of

capital punishment, in Genesis 9:6, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." The concept of the *imago Dei* is important for the understanding of the value of life, even in the acceptance of the fallen state of humanity, as was discussed in the chapter on abortion.

The Old Testament accounts of the patriarchs give details about a satisfactory death. Abraham was promised in Genesis 15:15, "You will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age." Isaac lived to be 180 years old and according to Genesis 35:29, "he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years." These patriarchs concluded that after a normal life span, and that one had children for posterity, one could die a peaceful death.

Nonetheless, death is judgment for sins and all must die, Romans 5:12, "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." The death of Jesus on the cross was a redemptive act, although it bore a curse, as Paul writes in Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" Now through faith in him, we have assurance and hope for eternal life when we confront death. Paul writes in Romans 14:7-8, "None of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."

The Bible gives reference to occurrences of suicide without offering an evaluation of them, although the implied perspective is negative. King Saul in 1 Samuel 31:4 took his own life by falling on his sword, because

his armor-bearer refused to obey the command of Saul to kill him so that he would not fall into the hands of the enemy. Abimelech in Judges 9:54-56 receives assisted suicide from his armor-bearer to save him from disgrace. The text states: "Thus God repaid the wickedness that Abimelech had done." Samson caused his own death by pushing the main support pillars of the temple of the Philistines in Judges 16:30; his cry to God was for adequate strength but it is not indicated that God had complied and was supportive of his plan, it simply states, "Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived." Judas Iscariot took his life after he realized that he had betrayed Jesus into the hands of the religious rulers; no comment is given as to divine conclusions. Acts 1:18-20 reads, "(With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, 'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and 'May another take his place of leadership.'"

The principle of the sanctity of human life is violated in suicide and indicates a failure to take responsibility for the life God has entrusted to us. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:29-30, "No one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church -- for we are members of his body." The belief that we are members of the body of Christ is an incentive to protect and care for our physical bodies, even in times of stress or pain. We offer support to other members of the body and encourage them in their struggles, as we know Jesus supports us,

Hebrews 2:14-15, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." It is important to listen to those who are depressed and to intervene when they speak of suicide; the need may be for a compassionate friend who can share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and lead to a meaningful life through faith.

Christian ethics are needed also in the discussion of euthanasia. By allowing some forms of passive euthanasia one may appear to give allowance to other instances of mercy-killing, or active euthanasia. There are similar concerns in the discussion of abortion that apply to euthanasia, as Norman Geisler observes:

A society cannot engage in the wholesale slaughter of innocent life without paying a sobering price. The value of life is significantly cheapened by such callous disregard for human beings. When we do not respect life before birth, it affects our attitude toward life after birth. When we do not respect the dying, it affects our attitude toward the living. Human life is a continuous and communal web. "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone" (Romans 14:7). Hence, what affect one member of the race affects all.<sup>7</sup>

Extraordinary efforts to sustain life can then be understood as working against God; the time comes when one needs to 'let a person go' to death with the prayer for God's love to receive that person's soul into the joys of heaven. The Christian's belief in life after death, and in the resurrection of the body, 1 Corinthians 15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive," gives comfort and hope in the time of death of a believer in Jesus Christ.

In a Report on Euthanasia published by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, several principles are outlined to give guidance whether extraordinary means of life support may be refused or discontinued:

- (a) when irreversibility is established by more than one physician;
- (b) when a moment in the process of dying has been reached where nothing remains for medical science to do except to offer proper care;
- (c) when possible treatment involves grave burdens to oneself and to others; and
- (d) when there are no means left to relieve pain and no hope of recovery remains.<sup>8</sup>

Christians are encouraged to seek God's will in prayer when faced with a death-crisis, for healing, in his time and manner. James 5:14-16 states, "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up....confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." The procedure of anointing with oil is understood by some as referring to use of medication, yet it is the encouragement to prayer that is highly important. Believers trust that God is able to perform miracles, even in a secular, scientific environment that denies such possibilities. In the end, after fervent prayer, when it appears that a miracle is not in keeping with God's will, and after consultation with doctors, it is appropriate to stop unnatural efforts to prolong the process of dying.

The Christian believes with certainty that God wills the good of all, even for those who suffer, as stated in Romans 8:28, "We know that in all

things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." We are not given to understand every facet of his will in allowing suffering to come to his children, although we are sure that God is not the cause of human tragedy. Such situations are the work of the adversary, Satan. In Job 2:7, "So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores." In the midst of pain and suffering, or any temptation that would draw us from the mercy and love of God, we are encouraged, 1 Corinthians 10:13, "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." The final 'way out' may be a departure from this 'veil of tears' to himself in heaven, which as Paul says in Philippians 1:23, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." Through faith in Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, there is hope, and there is the outlook that death may be welcomed as the termination of life on earth, but to be continued with God in heaven.

The Christian student desires to be guided by God's revelation in matters of life and death. In those times when questions are raised about suicide or euthanasia, it is wise to seek the medical opinion of a pro-life doctor or to talk with the campus pastor. Since no one knows the future about a recovery from illness or even if a miracle may take place, it is important to prayerfully consider the value of God's gift of life. Even then, the obligation is to do what is moral and reasonable to preserve life and relieve pain. The outcome is left in the hands of the Creator who will eventually call everyone out of this world through death, those who believe in Jesus Christ into glories of heaven.

### Bible Study and Discussion Questions -- Ending Life

1. When a friend mentions suicide, even casually, it is wise to take it seriously. Discuss the emphases in 1 Corinthians 10:13, as they relate to the problems which can cause depression and to God's power to help.
2. There are several accounts of suicide in the Scriptures, yet there is no specific statement that it is displeasing to God. Discuss this in the light of pro-life passages, such as, Job 10:12 and Exodus 20:13.
3. Passive euthanasia is regarded by Christians as allowing a person to die without extraordinary measures. Note the Scripture passages that indicate God's will: Deuteronomy 32:39 and Job 1:21.
4. Active euthanasia, or assisted suicide, is regarded by some as mercy-killing when the quality of life appears questionable. St. Paul leads us to consider the value of life in connection with faith in Jesus Christ; discuss the hope of Romans 14:7-8.
5. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead offers the promise of new life by faith in him as Savior, both in coping with suffering in this world and the comfort of eternal life; see Romans 8:28 and 1 Corinthians 15:22.



## Endnotes for Chapter 5

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Kurtz, Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1988), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas A. Mappes, ed., Biomedical Ethics, "Suicide and the Refusal of Lifesaving Treatment," (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 307.

<sup>3</sup>Paul D. Simmons, Birth and Death: Bioethical Decision-Making, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 116.

<sup>4</sup>Norman L. Geisler, Christian Ethics, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), p. 171.

<sup>5</sup>George H. Kieffer, Bioethics: A Textbook of Issues, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), p. 217.

<sup>6</sup>John W. Klotz, Men, Medicine and Their Maker, (University City, MO: Torelion Productions, 1991), p. 75.

<sup>7</sup>Geisler, p. 166.

<sup>8</sup>Report on Euthanasia, Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: LCMS, 1979), p. 15.

## CHAPTER 6

### GENETIC ENGINEERING

Genetic engineering is an area of bioethics on a research campus that is exciting and is making headlines with astonishing regularity. The ethical concerns also abound due to the moral implications of such research. Gene therapy is now available whereby positive genes can replace the defective gene that causes the illness. Problematical studies involve the use of fetal and embryonic tissue to treat diseases, as well as the discovery of abnormal genes in the fetus or embryo, with the questions of whether or not to have an abortion or to bring the child to term. Students are often involved in laboratory research as part of studies, or as an employee of the professor, or are studying to be counselors in the area of genetics, and therefore, are in need of moral guidelines.

#### The Science of Genetics

Genetic studies and gene therapy is relatively new, even though some basic groundwork was done by Gregor Mendel in 1865 when he reported on his work on heredity in garden peas to the Natural History Society in Brunn, Austria. It was in 1900 that his work was rediscovered and given acclaim; since then, significant progress has been made, with major announcements coming frequently from research laboratories.

The report that changed the progress of genetic research was the discovery in 1953 of DNA, deoxyribonucleic acid. DNA is described as "a double stranded molecule built much like a ladder twisted around its longitudinal axis so that the sides form a long double helix."<sup>1</sup> The DNA molecule is a length of several hundred to several thousand genes; these carry the genetic code that determines specific species and individual traits. In 1973 the technology was in place to manipulate genetic material in the laboratory; the procedure is called recombinant DNA research or gene splicing.

The concerns arose quickly regarding establishing regulatory means for monitoring research. Governmental committees were formed and hearings were held; university boards of regents sought to regulate the procedures in their research laboratories; conferences were held to form advisory committees; a President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research was established in 1980; all for the purpose of studying the ethical issues of these new genetic breakthroughs. A moratorium was imposed from 1975 to 1977 on experiments involving various viruses and toxins until risk factors could be tested in producing new organisms via recombinant DNA techniques; the moratorium was lifted when it was determined that risks were minimal. The concern is important, for there are possibilities that genetic engineering or manipulation can have grave implications for humanity. Research laboratories can be exciting places to discover means of affecting heredity and environment: surgery can be performed on fetuses *in utero* to correct abnormalities; the sex of a child can be chosen before conception. However, there are worries about the

possibility and potential of "playing God" in developing a super-race, or disposing of embryos with abnormalities, or selection of preferred sex, or eugenics. The positive aspects are the increased understanding of the ongoing creation of God and the involvement in correcting abnormal genes through engineering, to reduce suffering and to bring about an increase of the quality of life.

### Genes and the Human Genome Project

Within the nucleus of every human cell are chromosomes that carry the genes that determine heredity. Each cell contains twenty-three pairs of chromosomes, an equal number from both the mother and the father. All are identical except for one pair, the sex chromosomes, which are responsible for sex determination. These chromosomes would extend to a distance of six feet if stretched into a straight line, and interspersed along this line are approximately one hundred thousand human genes. About 15% of the genes express themselves in hereditary characteristics, such as height, color of eyes and hair, etc., while 85% are labelled 'junk genes' because they are mainly involved in regulation processes of heredity. Everyone has four to six lethal genes which may or may not express themselves during one's lifetime.

The Human Genome Project began in 1985 with a goal of mapping every genetic chemical in human DNA. It is an awesome task, thus far only one percent of the one hundred thousand genes have been identified. Nearly three thousand genetic disorders had been identified, but not specifically located. Several conferences of scientists, clergy, attorneys and insurance representatives have come to the conclusion

that the main application of the HGP is the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of these genetic disorders. Other voices of caution are raised regarding the threat of eugenics, which has the goal of the improvement of the gene pool through selective mating, as well as the elimination of those with defective genes.

### Genetic Screening and Counseling

As these genes are identified and located, there are attempts made to screen and counsel people about the diseases that may affect them and/or their unborn children. Genetic diseases are transmitted through different ways: 1) by a dominant genetic trait that is possessed by one parent, such as Huntington's Chorea; 2) by recessive genes which are carried by both parents, such as cystic fibrosis; 3) sex-linked or x-linked diseases, such as hemophilia; 4) multifactoral inherited disorder, such as spina bifida; 5) when chromosomes are broken or rearranged, such as the condition of Down's Syndrome.

The screening that is now available can inform people of the potential, and the counseling can guide them in making appropriate decisions. The ethics of the counselor are expected to be value-neutral, for it will affect the information offered about not getting married, contraception, artificial insemination, abortion of a fetus, allowing newborns to die, available treatment, even suicide. Moral dilemmas are involved in areas of confidentiality, in the welfare of family members, in the emotional stability of affected individuals. Christian students in a program of studies leading to becoming counsellors should be alerted to the implications of such a position. In cases where the information is

important for a patient's well-being, or for appropriate treatment, or that one is a carrier of defective genes, then the counselor needs to share it; it would be immoral not to bring it to a patient's attention.

### Gene Splicing

Laboratory hybrids are now being produced by splicing the genes of one organism into another. Some of these are being patented as new products. James Burtness, Professor at Luther Seminary, explains:

Recombinant DNA research has thus far been done primarily on bacteria.....the chief vector, or vehicle, for DNA research is *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), genetically and biochemically the most completely analyzed organism on earth, having been grown and studied in laboratories for more than 50 years.....By using restriction enzymes, it is possible to open up a plasmid (a self-replicating circular piece of DNA) and then match it up with a piece of DNA from any source that has been acted on by the same enzyme. These two pieces are cemented together by the action of another enzyme, called a DNA ligase, and the new recombinant molecule, or plasmid, is inserted into an *E. coli* bacterium. When the cell divides, it reproduces the recombinant plasmid in each new cell. This technology thus makes it possible to produce not only the recombinant DNA, but also unlimited quantities of new organisms created in the laboratory.<sup>2</sup>

One is a redesigned bacteria that is capable of feeding and multiplying in oil, changing a spill into protein and carbon dioxide. Scientists are designing bacteria which can produce medically important substances like insulin, interferon, or human growth hormones. Natural disease-fighting antibodies have been engineered in the lab to be used to carry drugs to kill unhealthy cells, for example, a drug for colds in a nasal spray; or the most recent breakthrough: a spray which contains corrective genes for cystic fibrosis. Compounds have been manufactured

which destroy cancer cells without harming normal cells. These important advances will benefit people, from their food, to the environment, to the prospects of healthier bodies and treatment of diseases.

### Fetal Tissue Use

After a ban of five years on fetal tissue research, a presidential declaration allows such controversial research to continue. The unique properties of fetal tissues are regarded as the potential to save lives that are devastated with brain disorders and terminal diseases. Yet at the same time many ethical questions are raised about using the stuff of life to save a life. Governmental funding is now added to the privately funded research that has been continuing; one area is a four and a half million dollar grant to study the effects of fetal tissue implants on the brain-debilitating effects of Parkinson's disease. The fetal tissues are seen as having medical advantages over ordinary adult cells: they keep growing rapidly after being transplanted, they appear to secrete chemicals that boost growth, and in some cases they don't cause rejection by the immune system. Another disease that appears to benefit from such treatment is Huntington's Chorea, a genetic illness that causes loss of muscle control and death. Research that is showing promise is the treatment of fetuses themselves; for example, through injection of a snippet of fetal liver to treat sickle cell anemia in a fetus younger than three or four months.

The ethical problems that are raised include the possibility of the intentional conception of fetuses so that their cells might be put to

medical use, even though this is now prohibited by federal regulations. The best solution to the problem would lie in understanding exactly what makes the fetal tissue so special. If the specific healing substances could be isolated, then created in the lab, the process would eliminate worries about tissue contaminated with viruses and bacteria, and would also take care of the morally difficult practice of relying on aborted fetuses.

### Cloning

The ability to clone cells has been utilized in horticulture to produce healthier and disease-resistant plants. The same has been possible with amphibians, as tadpoles have been cloned from adult frogs. The research has been continuing with human cells. The Feinbergs write about this procedure:

Cloning as a procedure is the artificial reproduction of an organism which is the exact genetic copy of a living organism. The nucleus of a mature but unfertilized egg is removed by microsurgery or is incapacitated by radiation. Then, the cell is provided with a nucleus from a donor body cell, often taken from the intestine.....each somatic cell (as opposed to germline cells, i.e., sperm or egg) in any living organism contains the complete genetic blueprint for the organism.....the cell is stimulated to develop, and if all goes well, the donor nucleus controls the development of the egg, and the embryo begins to develop.<sup>3</sup>

The possibility would exist for a person to have oneself cloned, or to produce a clone with the transplanted nucleus from another person with desirable traits. Concerns are numerous: the deterioration of the gene pool that limits variety and increases frequency of defective genes; production of a clone may be for the primary purpose of providing organ transplants; the experimentation of cloning often results in abnormalities



or unsuccessful implanting in a donor womb, with abortion as a result. The capability of cloning an individual, no matter how worthy of replication, does not mean that it is moral. The view of personhood and value of an individual must be taken into account, and cloning appears to negate that attitude.

### Theological Reflections

The contemporary technology which involves genetic engineering or manipulation touches some very basic Christian tenets. The Bible states that God is the creator of all living things in a perfect condition, including humans: Genesis 1:26-31, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness'.....God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Although created holy, without any imperfections, spiritually or genetically, the first humans sinned against God and brought judgment upon themselves and the entire human race; with sin came disease, suffering and death. Warnings have been sounded which would interpret Genesis 2:16-17, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die," to mean that genetic mysteries are 'forbidden knowledge.' Such judgment has not precluded the use of medications to ease suffering, or to undergo surgery to correct a condition, or to have an organ transplant. Christians generally accept such medical procedures as within the realm of activity to preserve or enhance life. The issue under discussion, genetic engineering, is however, a new technology which has ethical and moral implications for the Christian.

In Genesis 1:28, God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it." The proper understanding of 'subdue' or 'have dominion over' will have a bearing on the motives of God's people in respect to bioethical issues. The question needs to be addressed as to whether one can include in 'subdue' the control of the genetic pool or the manipulation of genes through therapy or transplant. The doctrine of original sin cannot be replaced with the idea of genetic defects as the cause of man's problems or illness, so that a dose of beneficial genes will transform and renew one's personhood. The Christian Sacrament of Holy Baptism is the only means of true regeneration and renewal of our human spirit, stated in Titus 3:5, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior." Baptism connects us with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Romans 6:3-4, "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." His gift brings healing to our sinful soul, with the presence of the Holy Spirit for power to live a holy life.

The concept of Christian stewardship must be incorporated in the ongoing debate about the ethics of genetic engineering. God calls us to responsibility, with the realization that our bodies are valuable, for Jesus came into the world and took on humanity, Philippians 2:7, "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled

himself." The way we treat our bodies is captured in the words of Ephesians 5:29, "no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--for we are members of his body." Also, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." Earlier in this letter, chapter 3:16ff, Paul had written, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" Then, after a discussion of wisdom versus foolishness, Paul says, "All things are yours....and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God." Christians desire to maintain a proper balance between utilization of new technologies in genetics and the acknowledgement that availability does not necessarily mean they are right to appropriate. We respond to the love of God for us through Jesus Christ, by loving him in return and can love ourselves and our neighbors, working for the good of all. Motives for such use are important in the concept of descriptive ethics versus prescriptive ethics. The understanding of "how it is", namely, through the Gospel, are balanced with the grasp of "how it ought to be", and for Lutherans this is found in the third use of the law. Thus the whole counsel of God is sought.

The ethical concern lies in the humanistic arena of the ends justifying the means, that the goal of eliminating diseases or at least of lessening suffering is a noble achievement, regardless of the process. The fact that not only can minor modifications be made, but also the allowance to create entirely new forms of life, becomes a major concern for all who are involved in such research. The philosophy of humanism

assumes that life is the result of millions of years of chance and that scientists can use their intelligence to redesign life in their sophisticated laboratories. They usurp the role of the Creator and play God.

College students who are on the cutting edge of genetic research will need to be on the alert to recognize the problems when Christian morals are in conflict with their experiments. Here is new knowledge which the child of God sees as an opening into uncharted paths. The excitement of new discoveries must be balanced with the correct way to utilize them for the benefit of human personhood. Knowing that one's heart is evil from youth, and the inclination to abuse God's gifts, as God says in Genesis 8:21, "every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood," there must be encouragement to develop regulations against abuse. The desire to do all things to the glory of God, as expressed in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God," will enable Christian scientists to focus on their motives for the benefit of mankind.

### Bible Study & Discussion Questions -- Genetic Engineering

1. The study of genetics has enabled scientists to discover the intricacies of human life, together with learning more about genetic diseases. A Christian balances this challenge by asserting that God is the Creator of life, Genesis 1:26-31, and that the fall into sin, Genesis 3, brought the problems of sin with disease and finally death.

2. The Human Genome Project is an attempt to map every genetic chemical in human DNA. Discuss how this knowledge will affirm the value of humans, which is also what God affirmed in sending Jesus Christ to take on humanity, Philippians 2:7; also that Christians have an understanding of value of the human body in 1 Corinthians 6:19.

3. Gene splicing is a possible means of overcoming defects to bring about health and human well-being. Discuss how a Christian views the warning of Genesis 8:21; also the recognition of the encouragement of 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

4. Fetal tissue for implants in the treatment of certain diseases brings a strong concern regarding the morality of using aborted fetuses, even in the prospect of overcoming debilitating diseases. The value of human life is emphasized in Ephesians 5:29, and made more so through Baptism, see Romans 6:3-4 and Titus 3:5.

## Endnotes for Chapter 6

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<sup>1</sup>John W. Klotz, Men, Medicine and Their Maker, (University City, MO: Torelion, 1991), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>James H. Burtness, "Genetic Manipulation," Edward D. Schneider, Ed., Questions About the Beginning of Life, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, Ethics for a Brave New World, (Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 1993), p. 249.

## CONCLUSION

The foundation for the Christian perspective of bioethics is in the Scriptural text of Psalm 139:14, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." The Christian rejoices that God is the almighty Creator of life and places high value on humanity. The New Testament proclaims this value in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, especially in Philippians 2:5-11, where it is stated that Jesus, "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!" The bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the assurance of the bodily resurrection of all who believe in him, 1 Corinthians 15:20, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.....For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him." This places tremendous value on life here on earth. In addition, the believer recognizes the truth of 1 Corinthians 6:19 that "your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you.....you are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

The progress in genetic studies is moving at an astonishing rate. Major breakthroughs are occurring that make life exciting. But the

concerns are problematic in respect to the philosophy of secular humanism which is contrary to the value and sanctity of life that Christians have drawn from the Scriptures. The voices of Christian students must be raised in the ethical discussions in the classrooms of universities in order that life-issues are heard and that love, justice, and fairness are integrated from a Christian perspective.

There are grave concerns in the debates that focus on the process and the implementation of bioethical research that pertains to genetic engineering, fetal tissue transplants, euthanasia, and abortion. Christian ethicists can provide guidance through the search for value and meaning of human personhood through reflection in theological perspectives, based on Scriptural doctrines of Law and Gospel. Those who are involved, from the science disciplines and the realm of theology, need to discover a partnership in the taking of responsibility for life, with the goal of giving all glory to God, through Jesus Christ.



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