

*Upon you I have leaned from before my birth;
you are he who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.
~ Psalm 71:6*

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you...
~ Jeremiah 1:5*

*And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary,
the baby leaped in her womb.
~ Luke 1:41*

As biblically-informed Anglican Christians, we believe all human life is a sacred gift from God and that it must be preserved and protected from the moment of conception to natural death. Life is God's precious gift to us. It is his creation and it is a direct and tangible expression of his profound and unequivocal love for each and every human person. Scripture tells us that, from the moment of our conception, and even before then, God knew us and, in his very personal and real love for each of us, consecrated us as his own. (Jer. 1:5.) The Bible also teaches us that God knit us together in our mother's womb and that we are wonderfully made by a loving God who knows us better than we can ever know ourselves. (Ps. 139:13-16.) Each one of us is unique and special to God.

But, Scripture is also clear that life does not begin at birth, but rather at the very moment of our conception in the womb. While we ourselves attribute the beginning of our lives to our birthday, this is not so with God. The mystery of human life has its origins in the creative will of God, who fashioned us in his own image and likeness, and it is upon him that, from the moment of our con-

ception, we depend for our very existence. (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 71:6.) In God, we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28.) Thus, from the moment of our conception, our lives do not belong to us, or to our mothers or our fathers or any other person. We belong to God, whose will is that we live until such time as he calls us in death.

All human life is consecrated by God and is therefore sacred. And, because life is sacred and is God's to give, God has revealed to us, in sacred Scripture, that we may not intentionally take another's life except in the most limited of circumstances (e.g., self-defense, to prevent the killing of others, etc.). (Gen. 4:10.) In speaking directly to his chosen people, the Israelites, God directed us, in the Ten Commandments, that "you shall not murder." (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17.) Just as life is God's to give, it is also exclusively God's to take. Christians believe, therefore, that the direct, intentional killing of another human being is contrary to God's express will revealed to us in the Bible and, as such, is gravely sinful.

In the New Testament, Jesus, in response to a question as to what commandments should be kept in order to enter eternal life in the Kingdom of God, tells his disciples that, among other things, they must not murder and must love their neighbors as themselves. (Mt. 19:16-22; Lk. 10:27-28.) Jesus, consequently, commands us, as his disciples, to respect the lives of others and to defend the right of others to live as we would defend our own lives. Indeed, during his earthly ministry, Jesus expressed particular concern for the wellbeing of children and spoke of children as being a blessing, telling his apostles that "whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." (Mt. 18:5.) We cannot welcome children in Jesus'

name if they are killed in the womb before they are even born. In fact, the act of killing unborn children violates the very commandments that Jesus himself told us were essential to be worthy of eternal life in God's Kingdom.

So, how does this all relate to abortion? Abortion is the destruction--the direct and intended killing--of an unborn child in its mother's womb. As Christians, we believe (because the Bible tells us so) that an unborn child in the womb is a human person, created, consecrated, and loved by God. An unborn child, just like any other human person, enjoys a right to live until his or her natural death. The direct, intentional killing of an unborn child through abortion is a grave sin--no different than any other form of direct, intentional killing.

This has been the clear and unqualified teaching of the Christian Church from its very beginning. In an ancient document called the Didache, which many scholars date from the first century and attribute to the direct teaching of Apostles, it is written that "you shall not murder a child by abortion." (Did. 2:2.) Indeed, the first Christians saw no distinction between murder and abortion, as both acts resulted in the direct and intentional killing of another person. Both were grave sins. This was the understanding of the ancient Church and, until just a few decades ago, was the shared understanding of the entire Christian world. For most of the history of the west, abortion was, consistent with the Christian perspective on the issue, regarded as a form of homicide and was illegal in every western nation.

However, over the past fifty years, abortion advocates have succeeded in decriminalizing abortion and persuading

many people that abortion, rather than being a grave sin as the Bible teaches and Christians believe, is a fundamental right, a social good, and an indispensable aspect of American liberty. Abortion advocates falsely argue that abortion is a morally neutral medical procedure, no different than a tonsillectomy or an appendectomy, as opposed to being simply another form of intentional killing. In order to make this erroneous argument, they strip unborn children of their humanity, arguing that unborn children, which they denote using the scientific terms "embryos" and "fetuses," are not human beings, but rather biological material that may be excised in the same manner as a cancerous tumor or a diseased kidney. But, as faithful Christians, we know otherwise--the Bible tells us clearly that unborn children are human beings created, loved, and sanctified by God and, thus, entitled to the dignity and respect due any other human person.

As Christians, we are obliged as disciples of the Risen Lord to resist and speak out against the senseless slaughter of millions of unborn children through abortion. Jesus calls each of us, as his disciples, to be the "light of the world" and commands us to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 5:14-16.) We must proclaim the Truth of the Christian faith in our actions, our works, and our words. When innocent children are being put to slaughter through abortion, we must resist and speak out against it. To suggest that a faithful Christian can be "personally opposed to abortion" but support legal abortion is directly contrary to Jesus' command to "let our light shine before others." (Mt. 5:16.) We must in faith, and with the courage of our convictions as faithful Christians, proclaim the inherently evil and unjust nature of abortion, resist it without qualification, and oppose those in leadership

who promote the ongoing slaughter of unborn children through public advocacy and political action. We do so at Jesus' express commandment.

Christian life, particularly in an increasingly secular, pluralistic culture that rejects much of what the Bible says, is a challenge. We must pray for God's grace and the strength to faithfully witness the Truths of the Christian faith to those hostile to us and to God's word. But, we know and accept this challenge, knowing that our Lord, Jesus Christ, is with us always to the end of time. (Mk. 28:20.)

How can I get more information?

Call or write us at:

FIFNA
P.O. Box 210248
Bedford, TX 76095-7248
800-225-3661

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Dr. Michael Howell
E-MAIL: michael.howell@fifna.org

WEBSITE: www.fifna.org

A Christian Reflection

Upon

THE RIGHT TO LIFE



James F. Sweeney