

¹ www.aei.org/publication/on-abortion-tv-shows-its-conservative-side/

² www.nytimes.com/2013/05/16/us/kermit-gosnell-abortion-doctor-gets-life-term

³ www.nationalreview.com/corner/343460/unmourned-mark-steyn

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *New International Version* (2011).

What Next?

The Transformation of a Worldview

When Member of Parliament William Wilberforce championed a bill that led to the end of the slave trade throughout the British Empire in 1807, he accomplished more than the simple passage of a law. According to biographer Eric Metaxas, Wilberforce transformed an entire worldview.

No less than the transformation of that society's worldview could put an end to an age-old evil. Until then, slavery was viewed as a normal institution, as intrinsic to human existence as marriage and commerce. A similar change will be necessary to revolutionize our perception of the unborn child.

The road to cultural redemption always starts with the radical transformation of the individual. Just like it has always done throughout its history, the greatest contribution the church can make is to offer forgiveness in Christ to our generation.

But that is not enough. Christians must also learn to reoccupy the public sphere. We need to learn from such people as Baptist missionary William Carey, William Wilberforce and Martin Luther King, Jr., who addressed the seminal issues of their time (respectively, the rite of sati, slavery and racism) with clarity, courage and passion.

Pastors, theologians and ordinary Christians should affirm the unborn child's right to live and promote life-affirming alternatives to abortion. This could include pairing expectant mothers with older women for support; helping single mothers access diapers, carseats and cribs; or volunteering or fundraising for a local pregnancy care centre.

The historic peace churches such as the Mennonites and Brethren in Christ should be particularly concerned about this issue. The dismembering of a child simply because he or she had the misfortune to have been conceived in less than ideal circumstances represents an unqualified act of injustice and brutality. Abortion represents the ultimate act of violence: a death sentence imposed on a perfectly innocent human being.

Men and women need to rediscover the profound significance of human sexuality. Because sexual

intercourse between a man and a woman has the potential to create life, it should be engaged in with great care and forethought. It is far better to act responsibly in the first place than to contemplate the termination of a human life to escape a difficult situation.

Feminists should vigorously speak on behalf of the unborn, for abortion victimizes both girls and boys. In China, where sex-selective abortion is common, the procedure has virtually become a war on females.

Scientists, especially physicians and biologists, should affirm the dignity of the unborn, for they know best the real nature of what is sheltered in the womb. If knowledge creates accountability, they will one day be held to the highest standards by God himself.

Jesus once said, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you..." (Matthew 7:12). When we are considering an ethical decision, Jesus demands that we imagine its consequences on ourselves.

I deeply value my life. And I am immensely thankful that my mother and father chose to value it as well. Doesn't the unborn child deserve the same consideration? Who among us would advocate an abortion if in fact we were the ones targeted by the procedure? We would be little concerned by the circumstances surrounding our conception and our birth. We would desperately want to live.

Recommended Resources

Randy Alcorn, *ProLife Answers to ProChoice Arguments* (Colorado Springs, CO, 2000). Available at www.colsoncenterstore.org

Linda Cochran, *Forgiven and Set Free: A Post-Abortion Bible Study for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996). Available at www.colsoncenterstore.org

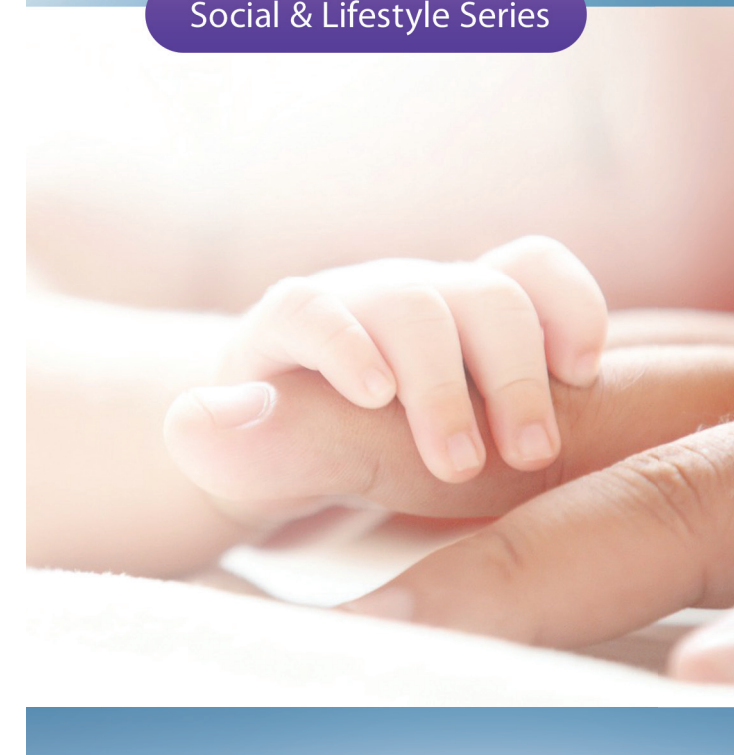
LifeCanada (a Canadian association of educational pro-life groups) www.lifecollective.io

Care Net (an American resource centre for people facing pregnancy) www.care-net.org

LifeNews (an American pro-life news agency) www.lifenews.com

Life before Birth

Social & Lifestyle Series



Canadian Conference
of Mennonite Brethren Churches

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Faith and Life

Reconsidering the Status of the Unborn

A Cultural Consensus

Abortion remains one of the most emotionally loaded and divisive issues society faces today. Popular culture dictates that until it is born, a fetus is not a person and has therefore no inherent rights. What happens in a woman's body concerns her alone.

But from time to time, a small crack in the ideological consensus unexpectedly appears. While it was mostly unnoticed and likely unintended, one such event happened in an episode of the popular CBS sitcom "The Big Bang Theory."

Syndicated columnist, Jonah Goldberg, writes, "One of the show's characters, Bernadette, recently got pregnant. In the episode that aired April 7, 2016, Bernadette, her husband, Howard, and their friend Rajesh use a home ultrasound kit. When they hear the baby's heartbeat, Rajesh exclaims, 'You guys made a person!' Howard replies, 'We did!'"¹

That such a scene could slip into a popular show provides an insight into what people really think when they are not thinking too hard.

Imaging technology reveals that what is in the womb is anything but a clump of cells. From the moment of conception, the few cells that have been miraculously infused with life contain the information needed to produce a fully developed baby. What many people punctiliously call a fetus is infinitely more than a lump of flesh. Those who insist otherwise do so for reasons other than a lack of information.

This document is not intended to outline the specific reasons that may motivate women to terminate a pregnancy. The decision often arises from and results in a complex mix of difficult emotions. While the primary purpose of this essay is to speak on behalf of those who can't be heard, it's important to remind those who have elected to undergo this tragic procedure that, through Jesus Christ, God offers unconditional love and forgiveness.

Some Inconvenient Facts

Abortions are performed on a scale that defies imagination. In the United States alone, a total of about 50 million unborn babies have been aborted since *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. In Russia, the number of abortions surpasses live births (about 1.3 million a year). In China, official data put the number of abortions at around 330 million since the one-child policy was enacted in 1978 (the majority of them girls!). In 1988, the Supreme Court of Canada removed all restrictions on abortion. Since then, two million unborn children have been aborted.

Mainstream journalists pay virtually no attention to this phenomenon. The media will tend to ignore even the most shocking examples that may come before the courts; the 2013 trial of Kermit Gosnell being a case in point.

Gosnell was an abortion provider who was charged with killing seven newborns. The procedure usually involved severing their spinal cords with scissors.² He was eventually convicted of murdering three babies born alive. But it wasn't until political analyst Kirsten Powers denounced the media for ignoring this case that journalists began to show some interest in the trial. As Canadian journalist Mark Steyn noted at the time, "This is a remarkable moment in American life: A man is killing actual living, gurgling, bouncing babies on an industrial scale – and it barely makes the papers."³

Why?

A number of factors account for the acceptance of abortion in Canadian culture.

First, while Western society gives much attention to human rights, it is in effect promoting a hierarchy of rights. And sadly, the unborn find themselves on the lowest rung of the rights ladder, in great part because each termination is a silent tragedy pitting the almighty power of the abortion industry against a defenseless victim. Even the much touted Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg contains no exhibit highlighting the controversy surrounding the status of the unborn.

Second, secular humanism provides no theoretical framework to affirm the intrinsic value of all human life. While some put forward each person's unique DNA as the foundation for such a framework, it should be noted that this biological fact is true of all living creatures. Even the cockroach has a unique DNA sequence. Does that fact impart the insect with intrinsic worth and dignity? Of course not!

Others appeal to what is sometimes called human exceptionalism. They point to humanity's accomplishments as well as the remarkable traits that uniquely characterize humans.

There is at least one major problem with this approach. Every child born with a severe disability raises the question of whether every human life has value. Some disabled children show little evidence that they can love, be creative or even think. Are such children deemed to have intrinsic value anyway? Judging by the number of physicians who routinely advise an abortion in cases where the child may be affected by Down syndrome, for instance, the answer would appear to be no.

Third, if bad ideology set the foundation for the present situation, it is materialism and the notion of personal fulfillment that must surely be blamed for building the rest of the edifice. As people become more prosperous and comfortable, they are often less willing to make sacrifices for a greater cause. For some, having children represents an intolerable demand on their resources.

When push comes to shove, pragmatic considerations will often sideline ethical and moral sensibilities, even concerning human life. In this respect those who promote abortion on demand are in a similar position to those who fought to maintain the right to own slaves during the American Civil War.

The arguments for the one and the other are similar. Black people, like unborn children today, were not considered to be human beings in the strict sense of the term. Just as Southerners believed emancipation would cause irreparable economic damage to their way of life, those who value abortion on demand may view a challenge to it as a threat to economic wellbeing and personal choice.

The Biblical Witness

When the conditions are just right, human life can be as cheap as dirt. Throughout history, totalitarian regimes have sacrificed millions of people to advance their agenda. If the lives of those we can see and hear can so readily be eliminated, how much more so will it be for those who are unheard and unseen.

In order to provide adequate protection for all members of society, Mennonite Brethren affirm the intrinsic value of all human life.

The most foundational affirmation of the sanctity of human life is found in Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."⁴

This passage proclaims the innate worth and dignity of all human beings, not on the basis of some distinctive DNA structure or special attributes, but by virtue of the simple fact that they are made in the image of God.

Psalm 8 echoes the same truth: "...what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:4–5).

This text, written centuries before the rise of modern science, speaks more truthfully about our humanity than the average biology textbook. It consigns the human race to the highest position in the cosmos, next only to God himself. The psalm also creates the kind of distinction between humanity and the rest of nature that is necessary to maintain a high view of human nature.

The incarnation of Jesus Christ represents the third and perhaps most critical factor to consider: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

By becoming one of us, Christ also exalted humanity. The incarnation provides infinite resolution of the notion of the image of God in men and women. When Christ took on our humanity, he transposed the notion of human dignity to an infinite scale that compels us to extend its full weight to the very first moments of human conception.

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