

“The Sacredness of Life”

January 21, 2007

I. Abortion – Why is this a natural follow-up to our discussion of creation vs. naturalism?

BECAUSE HOW WE VIEW THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN LIFE WILL HAVE A DIRECT IMPACT ON HOW WE VALUE HUMAN LIFE.

The clash of worldviews is illustrated by Colson’s story about Bernard Nathanson:

Dr. Bernard Nathanson was a physician who was instrumental in bringing about the legalization of abortion back in the early 1970s, and who – as director of the world’s largest abortion clinic in New York City – signed off on more than 60,000 abortions. But then in a dramatic journey which he chronicles in his book “The Hand of God”, Nathanson renounced his pro-choice convictions, and a short-time later converted to Christianity.

II. What should a Christian think of something like abortion?

Though the Bible doesn’t mention abortion, what principles does it teach that would tell us what God thinks of it?

A. Human life is precious because we alone are God’s image-bearers.

Human life is of another order entirely. Bearing the image of God gives a sacred quality to human life, regardless of its viability, or health, or usefulness, or gender or race.

B. Because we are God’s image-bearers, we are called by God to care for the least of these.

Even in the rough and gruff Old Testament we find passage after passage where God calls his people to care for widows and orphans and the elderly and slaves and refugees and the homeless and the sick and the poor. Nowhere does God grant us permission to throw the weak under the cart. And so from the fetus who tests positive for Down’s syndrome to the bed-ridden patient in an Alzheimer’s unit – all are God’s image-bearers, and that life is precious, and that life is not to be thrown away.

C. Unborn life is very precious to God.

1. What do we learn in the story of Mary & Elizabeth?

A human life has value and significance even when concealed deep within the womb. And so when Mary approaches Elizabeth, the baby within her jumped and Elizabeth says, “As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.” John was able, even as a six-month fetus, to have a voice, to point to Jesus as it were and ascribe his worth.

2. How would an ancient Jew regard the modern idea that a baby outside the womb is more valuable than a fetus inside the womb?

Absurd.

3. What did God say to Jeremiah?

Jeremiah 1:5 – “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.”

4. What did David say to God?

Psalm 139:13 – “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb...My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place...Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

5. What did early Christian leaders teach about it?

“Thou shalt not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shalt thou destroy it after it is born” (Letter of Barnabas 19 from 74 AD).

“You shall not procure abortion, nor destroy a newborn child” (Didache 2:1 from 150 AD).

“There are some women among you who by drinking special potions extinguish the life of the future human in their very bowels, thus committing murder before they even give birth.” (Mark Felix, Christian Lawyer, Octavius chap. 30 from 170 AD).

“Now we allow that life begins with conception because we contend that the soul also begins from conception; life taking its commencement at the same moment and place that the soul does” (Tertullian, Apology 27 from 210 AD).

“Women also who administer drugs to cause abortion, as well as those who take poisons to destroy unborn children, are murderesses.” (First Canonical Letter from 374 AD).

How does science contribute to this discussion of the ethics of abortion?

A. What led Dr. Nathanson to renounce his former beliefs?

Seeing baby in the womb through ultrasound. He wrote:

“It was ultrasound, which for the first time threw open a window into the womb. We also began to observe the fetal heart on electronic fetal heart monitors. For the first time, I began to think about what we really had been doing at the clinic. Ultrasound opened up a new world. For the first time, we could really see the human fetus, measure it, observe it, watch it, and indeed bond with it and love it. I began to do that.”

B. What does an examination of fetal development show?

1. Conception

Fertilization, the joining of the sperm and the egg in the fallopian tube (below) to form a unique human being, occurs. Forty-six chromosomes provide the blueprint for the embryo's physical characteristics. Francis Crick, one of the two scientists famous for discovering the double-helix of DNA says about this event: “The amount of information contained in the chromosomes of a single fertilized human egg is equivalent to about a thousand printed volumes of books, each as large as a volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica.”

2. 30 Hours

Still rapidly dividing, the developing embryo, called a zygote at this stage, floats down from the fallopian tube and towards the uterus. When infertile couples seek to use an expensive technology known as ‘invitro fertilization’, multiple embryos are developed outside the womb from the couple's sperm and egg, frozen, then later implanted. Usually, there are leftover embryos once this process is over, which itself creates an ethical conundrum. Right now in America alone there are nearly 500,000 human embryos being cryopreserved at some 430 fertility clinics. Should those embryos be destroyed? This is human life, didn't we just say that? Should these embryos be used for experimentation – as proponents of embryonic stem cell research argue? But this is human life, didn't we just say that? Should these embryos be adopted out to other childless couples? There are currently, more than 2 million couples in the US with fertility difficulties. Tinkering with human life is no small matter, is it.

3. Week 5

The embryo's tiny heart begins to beat by day twenty-one. The brain has developed into 5 areas and some cranial nerves are visible. Arm and leg buds are visible and the formation of the eyes, lips, and nose has begun. The spinal

cord grows faster than the rest of the body giving a taillike appearance which disappears as the embryo continues to grow. The placenta begins to provide nourishment for the embryo.

4. Week 7

Major organs have all begun to form. The embryo has developed its own blood type, unique from the mother's. Hair follicles and nipples form and knees and elbows are visible. Facial features are also observable. The eyes have a retina and lens. The major muscle system is developed and the embryo is able to move.

5. Weeks 8-12

The heart is almost completely developed and the heart rate can be heard on a Doppler machine at the doctor's office. Most major organs and tissues have developed and red blood cells are now produced in the liver. The face is well formed and the eyes are almost fully developed. The eyelids will close and not reopen until the 28th week. Arms, hands, fingers, legs, feet, and toes are fully formed. Nails and earlobes start to form and tooth buds develop in the gums. Fetus can make a fist with its finger.

6. Week 16

The brain is fully developed and the fetus can suck, swallow, and make irregular breathing sounds. Fetus can feel pain ([New England Journal of Medicine](#)). Fetal skin is almost transparent. Muscles tissue is lengthening and bones are becoming harder. Liver and organs produce appropriate fluids. Eyebrows and eyelashes appear and the fetus makes active movements including kicks and even somersaults.

7. Week 20

“Quickening” (when the mother can feel the fetus moving) usually occurs around this time. Finger and toenails appear. Lanugo, a fine hair now covers the entire body. The fetus can hear and recognize the mother's voice. Sex organs are visible on ultrasound devices.

8. Week 24

Rapid brain development occurs during this period and the nervous system is able to control some bodily functions. The fetus' eyelids now open and close. At 25 weeks there is a 60% chance of survival if born. The fetus is considered legally viable at 28 weeks and there is a 90% chance of survival if born at this point.

9. Week 29-32

There is a rapid increase in the amount of body fat the fetus has. Rhythmic breathing occurs, but the lungs are not yet mature. The fetus sleeps 90-95% of the day. At this point there the survival rate is above 95% if the baby is born.

C. *In spite of all this science, opposition to softening or restricting abortion laws remains fierce. Examples: The refusal of allowing parental notification laws.*

The difficulty passing the Unborn Victims of Violence act which require 2 counts of a crime to be charged in the woman is pregnant.

The failing to pass “Fetal Pain” laws which would require women seeking an abortion to have the option of administering anesthesia to the baby before aborting it. (Most recently in December 2006).

D. *Why this madness? In the end, this is not about science. What’s it about?*

In the end, this discussion is not about science. It’s about philosophy. It’s about *worldview*. You can have all the science staring you in the face, telling you you’re wrong, but if your worldview says otherwise, rare is that person who will change his worldview. And in the end, the abortion struggle in America is all about worldview – how one views the origin and value of human life.

E. *How should we respond?*

In his classic book, “A Christian Manifesto” the great and late Christian thinker Francis Schaeffer wrote this back in 1981: “The basic problem of the Christians in this country in the last eighty years or so, in regard to society and in regard to government, is that they have seen things in bits and pieces, instead of totals. They have very gradually become disturbed over permissiveness, pornography, the public schools, the breakdown of the family, and finally abortion. But they have not seen this as a totality – each thing being a part, a symptom, of a much larger problem. They have failed to see that all of this has come about due to a shift in world view – that is, through a fundamental change in the overall way people think and view the world and life as a whole. This shift has been *away from* a world view that was at least vaguely Christian...*toward* something completely different – toward a world view based upon the idea that the final reality is impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present form by impersonal chance.”

So how do we respond? Schaeffer would say we need to recognize the enemy – a defective and dangerous worldview which truly opposes everything Christians say they stand for. Schaeffer would say we need to get our own worldview in order through prayer and study. Christians are not doing a God

job of connecting the dots. Schaeffer told us a generation ago where all this was heading. That it wouldn’t stop with abortion. The mindset that allows for abortion on demand is the same mindset that will call for mercy killing of the old, assisted suicide for the sick, for fetal experimentation, for human cloning, for genetic screening for the purpose of eliminating the handicapped.

It’s a Brave New World, my friends, that we are entering. Now is not the time to put our Christian worldview on the shelf. Schaeffer would urge us to get in the fight, and commit to it for the long haul. By fighting we never mean violence.

But we mean a loving, determined proclamation of the truth.

By fighting we mean using our political freedom to implement change.

By fighting we mean being visible and vocal.

By fighting we mean showing compassion for both mother and child caught up in this terrible human drama.

By fighting we mean pleading before Almighty God to save us, to help us, to forgive us before it’s too late.

Since 1973, more than 30 million little lives have been snuffed out. An entire generation has been silently and systematically erased. How much more will God endure of this?