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Carter, Craig. "Abortion: A Christian Response." In *Life and Death Choices: Canadian Baptist Perspectives on the Moral Dilemmas of Human Life Issues*, by Robert Duncan and Craig Carter, 36-44. [S.l.]: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1991.

*Life
and
Death
Choices*

Canadian Baptist
Perspectives on the
Moral Dilemmas of
Human Life Issues

Life and Death Choices first published 1991 by
The Canadian Baptist Federation

Cover design by Terry Galagher
Printed in Canada

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Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Duncan, Robert, 1956-

Life and death choices

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-921697-04-8

1. Human reproductive technology - Religious aspects - Baptists. 2. Abortion - Religious aspects - Baptists. 3. Human genetics - Religious aspects. 4. Medical ethics. 5. Baptists - Doctrines. I. Carter, Craig, 1956-. II. Canadian Baptist Federation. III. Title.

RG133.5.D863 1991 176 C91-097128-5

Preface

Baptists have declared that personal faith in Jesus Christ must be lived out in every facet of life. The Canadian Baptist "collective silence" on many social issues has, at times, given the impression to other denominations and the world at large that such issues are of little interest to us. In recent years the Public Affairs Committee of the Canadian Baptist Federation has actively sought to address this situation by initiating public responses to social issues. This book is a result of such an initiative.

The publication in this book of some of the discussion papers that went into the preparation of these briefs represents the hope and prayer of the Canadian Baptist Federation that this book will encourage all who read it to reflect seriously on these vital issues and their relationship to faith. *Life and Death Choices* is proof that Canadian Baptists take seriously their faith and witness in Jesus Christ in the public arena of life. It is an encouraging sign that the Canadian Baptist Federation is finding a consensus across our nation in Baptist Life.

A debt of gratitude is owed to Mrs. Janet Atwood of Winnipeg, who chaired the Task Force on Human Life Issues, to Dr. Shirley Bentall chairman of the Public Affairs Committee and the six members of the Task Force from across the regions, whose hard work has made possible this publication. We also wish to acknowledge Peter Atwood who provided his editorial and typesetting skills.

Dr. Richard Coffin, General Secretary
Canadian Baptist Federation
April 1991

Abortion: A Christian Response

Craig A. Carter

One day a teacher of the law came to Jesus to test Jesus' orthodoxy (Luke 10:25-37). He asked the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered by asking him what the law says. The teacher of the law quoted Deuteronomy and Leviticus:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and Love your neighbor as yourself. (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18)

Then Jesus said: "Do this and you will live" (v. 28). This must have made the teacher uncomfortable because Luke says that he "wanted to justify himself" (v. 29). So he asked Jesus another question: "And who is my neighbour?" Many Christians today are asking similar kinds of questions regarding the abortion issue and for basically the same reason. Who is my neighbour? We do our best to pretend that we do not know. We get all tangled up in the long discussions about the complexity of the scientific data, the difficulty of the moral dilemmas and the need to balance the rights of the mother and rights of the fetus.

The teacher of the law would be right at home in one of these kinds of discussions. In fact, this was exactly the kind of conversation he wanted to involve Jesus in when he asked his second question. It would have been a great diversion from the unpleasant task of thinking about his own personal responsibility. But Jesus was not interested in interminable debate over obscure points of legal interpretation. Jesus was interested in action. In verse 28 he says, "Do this and you will live," and again in verse 37, he says, "Go and do likewise." Love in action is worth more than all the learned debates of the theologians, ethicists, doctors, lawyers and politicians put together.

Approximately 80,000-100,000 abortions per year are being performed in Canada. This means that 80,000-100,000 unborn children are being killed per year. Who is my neighbour? It also means that 80,000-100,000 women per year feel hopeless enough, desperate enough and pressured enough to have their unborn children killed. Most women who have abortions do not want to do so. They usually feel that they have no choice. Very few women in the abortion clinic waiting rooms spout pro-choice slogans. For them, "choice" is just a meaningless and empty slogan. Who, indeed, is my neighbour?

Jesus' answer to the teacher's second question is very simple. He tells the story of a man who fell victim to robbers and lay by the side of the road, wounded and helpless. A priest passed by and a Levite passed by. Then a Samaritan came along and bound up the man's wounds, took him to an inn, paid for his expenses and generally cared for him. When Jesus asked the teacher who was neighbour to the robbery victim, the teacher had no choice but the Samaritan (v. 37). The point is clear. Our neighbour is the one we encounter, who needs our help.

As Christians we are commanded by Jesus to be neighbours to those who are in crisis pregnancies. If we really wish to do the authentically Christian thing we must care for the women who feel trapped, alone, desperate and hopeless, and for their children, born and unborn. If we neglect this, then nothing else we do will really matter because anything else will be a form of avoiding the primary issue. This applies as much to the "pro-choice" Christians as to the "pro-life" Christians. It is not showing authentic Christian love to offer the pregnant woman nothing but an abortion.

In the rest of this chapter we will examine two issues. First, we will look at our cultural situation and the factors which cause women to seek abortions, for if we do not understand this we will not be able to be of any real help. Then, we will outline the key aspects of a Christian response to the problem. We will need to assess the components of an adequate Christian response, the strategy to be used and the prospects for success.

A Culture of Violence

We live in a violent culture in the sense that violence is glorified, violence is tolerated and violence is seen as a solution to various problems, including social and economic ones. Violence is glorified in our entertainment. It is a regular and popular part of spectator sports, it is a stock-in-trade of television and it is a main theme of the Hollywood movie industry. To put a fine edge on it: violence sells.

Violence is tolerated in our society, not officially of course, but tolerated all the same. It is particularly tolerated when it is directed toward women and children. Rape is part of our culture. Wife-battering is defended, winked at, ignored and, when all else fails, mildly reprimanded. Child abuse has reached epidemic proportions, with child sexual abuse being the ugliest manifestation of this evil.

Violence is also seen as the solution to various social and economic problems. War is seen as acceptable and for the past generation all of us have lived under the shadow of nuclear annihilation. The recent war in the Persian Gulf revealed, once again, how committed we are to solving problems through

the use of violence. Our whole Western way of life has been built on the basis of the brutalization of our environment, and many people would consider more of the same to be good as it will bring economic growth.

Abortion is one form of violence which we try to pretend is anything but what it is. In every abortion a living, human fetus is either burned to death by a saline solution, pulled limb from limb by pliers or has its body pulled apart by a suction machine. Sometimes, in a late term abortion, the fetus is born alive and left to die on a counter. Abortion is an unnatural invasion of a woman's body which interrupts natural bodily processes and has serious physical and psychological consequences. Disguising such violence as medicine would seem to be a particularly perverse form of calling good evil and evil good.

Why has the campaign for liberalized abortion laws succeeded so quickly, so thoroughly and so widely? Is it because society has become so much more concerned about the plight of women? Is it because society has become more just? It could be argued cogently that abortion has become an acceptable and even routine part of our culture because it furthers, rather than changes, patterns of male dominance and control of women. It also fits into the mentality of solving problems through violence. It inhibits rather than promotes the kinds of social changes which are needed if women are ever to become truly equal and children are to be properly nurtured.

Abortion is often portrayed as the solution to the pregnant woman's problem, whereas in reality, it is often the solution to everyone else's problem. In the case of young teenage girls, abortion is often seen by the parents as the solution to their problem of embarrassment and inconvenience. They do not want their teen to have a baby for the same reason they do not want a baby themselves. Many teens get abortions because they are pressured into it by their parents.

Ironically, getting pregnant is often a cry of anguish—a call for someone to pay attention to me. Abortion represents a short-circuiting of the opportunity for dialogue, a denial of the problem. Abortion is so tempting because it seems to offer a second chance, an opportunity to avoid taking responsibility for the past and taking steps to change the future. But this is a dangerous illusion.

Abortion is often seen by the male partner as the solution to his problem. If the relationship is an abusive one, then the male gets to cover-up his crime and perhaps even continue the abuse. In the case of a boyfriend, the threat is often made that if the girl does not have the abortion the boy will terminate the relationship. The sad truth is that after the abortion the relationship usually ends anyway. Often the girl cannot forgive her boyfriend for forcing her into the abortion. It is, after all, very difficult to have any respect for a man who refuses to take full responsibility for the children he fathers. From the boyfriend's point of view, the child is nothing but an inconvenience and abortion is viewed as safe, simple and easily available. It is the perfect solution—for him.

Abortion is often seen as the solution to social and economic problems by governments. It is easier to fund abortions than it is to address the deeper underlying social problems involved in the welfare cycle. When one considers the desperate plight of single mothers on welfare and how demeaning that lifestyle is, it becomes obvious that the government is not doing enough to encourage women to have enough hope to have their children instead of aborting them. If society had its priorities straight, a much greater investment in child-raising would be made and child poverty would not be tolerated. Children should be seen as the hope for the future instead of being viewed as economic liabilities.

Abortion is also seen as the solution to the problems of employers, and especially large corporations. Anyone who thinks that big business has no influence on government social policy in Canada today is naive. During the past thirty years women have entered the labor force in huge numbers. They have constituted a large, stable pool of labor which can be used to fill lower paying jobs. Labor costs have been kept down as women have been exploited as cheap labor. In addition to this, abortion has been seen as a woman's duty if she wants to compete with men and advance in her career. The (sexist) assumption has been that if women want to do "men's work" then they have to fit into male patterns of behaviour, patterns which have very little room for children and parental responsibilities. Women should be able to work and pursue any career they choose and society should be flexible enough to accommodate both their career obligations and their parental obligations, the meeting of which are of vital interest to society in the long run.

Liberalized abortion laws do not represent the empowering of women. They are a means by which women are manipulated by those in positions of power: parents, male partners, governments and big business. The true empowering of women would involve their being able to fulfill all their legitimate aspirations instead of having to choose between their children and their career or between their boyfriend and their child and so on. Abortion is not the solution to the problem of the oppression of women. It merely denies, avoids and perpetuates the problem under the dubious and misleading slogan of choice.

A Christian Response

How, then, can Christians respond to this problem? First of all we have to recognize that the problem is far more complex than the political activists in the "pro-choice" and "right to life" camps often make it out to be. Legislation is important but it is only one part of an overall solution. As Christians, there are many things we can and must do apart from political lobbying for anti-abortion

legislation. We can offer alternatives and information to women in crisis pregnancies, educate our own young people on the Christian view of sex and marriage, develop self-help groups and counselling programs for women who suffer from the psychological effects of abortion, support Christian health care professionals who conscientiously object to participating in doing abortions and, finally, work in various ways to eliminate the pressure on women to have abortions. We can also work to encourage governments to tackle some of the root causes of abortion such as child poverty, fathers who default on child support payments and discrimination against women who choose not to have abortions.

In all that we do we must keep as our highest priority the biblical mandate to be witnesses to Jesus Christ. We believe that he is God and we believe that God is the Holy One who has revealed His great love for us by sending His only Son to die for our redemption. The challenge is to witness adequately to both the holiness and to the love of God in a balanced way so that the full and pure Gospel is heard.

In order to witness to the holiness of God we must take a stand for justice and righteousness in the midst of a sinful and violent society. Like the Old Testament, we must speak up for those who are being oppressed and who cannot speak for themselves. The prophets spoke of justice denied in the law courts (Amos 5:12), of calling good evil and evil good (Isa. 5:20) and of the exploitation of the weak by the strong (Isa. 58:6-7). They also spoke of those who are "swift to shed innocent blood" (Isa. 59:7). The book of Proverbs spells out our responsibility most clearly:

Deliver those who are being taken away to death,
 And those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back.
 If you say, "See, we did not know this,"
 Does He not consider it who weighs the hearts?
 And does He not know it who keeps your soul?
 And will He not render to man according to his work?
 (Prov. 24:11-12)

Witnessing to the justice of God will involve the straightforward condemnation of abortion as a great evil and as a sin against God. Abortion is bloody violence and an attack upon the image of God in humanity. But we should be careful not to let our clear stand on the wrongness of abortion lead us to an unbalanced and harsh moralism which is divorced from love.

Witnessing to the love of God will involve the proclamation that Jesus Christ has died for our sins and that all of us can be forgiven if we confess our

sins and place our faith in him for our salvation. It will also involve open and honest acceptance of those who have committed the sin of abortion. It will also involve practical action on our part to help those who feel trapped in a pregnancy they do not want and for which they are not prepared. Finally, it will involve being concerned for women and their children long after birth occurs.

In the past, Christians have been criticized for talking about right and wrong but not being willing to get involved with people who need help on a personal basis. We sometimes have condemned without offering alternatives. We sometimes have appeared to be harsh, legalistic and uncaring. There is no doubt that we need to repent corporately for our failure to witness to God's love adequately enough, but we must not yield to the temptation to soften our stand against abortion. Rather, we must let our Christian and biblical conviction spur us to a new commitment to act as we believe Jesus would have us act on this issue. Let us consider a five point strategy which would constitute an adequate response to this problem.

Conscientious Objection

First, we must get our own house in order. If all Christian people in Canada ceased their involvement in doing abortions tomorrow, the number of abortions would drop significantly. Clearly we have a credibility problem on this point. How can we say that Christians are against abortion when many Christians are involved in doing the procedures?

Several specific things need to be done. First, nurses need a freedom of conscience provision, either written into their collective agreements or legislated by provincial governments, guaranteeing them the right to refuse to be involved in doing abortions on the grounds of conscience. Secondly, pastors need to lovingly, but firmly, counsel doctors in their congregations on the Scriptural condemnation of killing innocent human life. Thirdly, money needs to be raised for a legal defense fund for those who refuse to be involved in abortion and thereby suffer for the sake of their consciences. Even hospital administrators, politicians and civil servants who incur the wrath of the pro-abortion lobby need our support and encouragement. Christians as individuals and as churches must disassociate themselves from abortion in every possible way.

Biblical Sex Education

Secondly, the church must get serious about sex education that is relevant, frank, biblical and realistic. Our youth are bombarded with messages from music, advertising, television, many public schools, celebrities and peers about

how much fun sex is—how you should do it anytime with anyone or miss out on the most important thing in life.

Where do we start? In the home, in church, in youth group, in Sunday School? It has to happen in all these places, but someone has to do the research on current trends, problems and so on. Someone has to apply sound communication and educational theory to the development of curriculum resource.

Much secular sex education is centered on the need to use contraceptives whenever you decide to become sexually active. Biblical sex education will focus on the decision to become sexually active and will encourage young people to choose to wait for marriage. Of course this approach is derided as “unrealistic” by secularists, but it is no more unrealistic than it is to expect romantic, immature, insecure teens to make adult decisions and plans regarding contraception. The whole emphasis on “safe sex” is unrealistic and ineffective. The only real protection against deadly sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy is abstinence before marriage and faithfulness within marriage. We do not have “Safe drug use” campaigns; we have “Just say no” campaigns. We also need to teach teens practical skills to help them to say no to sexual pressure.

Alternatives to Abortion

Thirdly, we need to roll up our sleeves and get involved in the hard work of offering viable alternatives to abortion for those inside and outside the church who are experiencing crisis pregnancies. The United Baptist Convention of the Atlantic Provinces has officially endorsed the ministry of Christian Action Council affiliated Crisis Pregnancy Centers. There are three such centers now operating in Atlantic Canada, about twenty-five in Canada and over four hundred and fifty in North America.

These centers are organized, run and staffed by Christians who have a concern for women in crisis pregnancies. The Greater Moncton C.P.C., for example, is located in a medical arts building and is listed in the yellow pages. Many clients come by referral from pastors, doctors, public health nurses and other professionals in the community. Others learn of the center by word of mouth and still others just find it in the yellow pages.

When a client calls the twenty-four hour hot-line an appointment is set up. When the client comes in, a trained volunteer peer counsellor talks to her and fills out an information form which is retained for the client's file. A free pregnancy test is done and if the results are positive the volunteer helps the client work through her crisis. If the test is negative the volunteer talks to the client about her feelings about her sexual activity. The volunteer's objective is to help the client identify her real reasons for engaging in sexual activities. Quite

often the client realizes that she does not really want to be sexually active and is being pressured into it. In any case, she has a chance to talk about her feelings in a non-judgmental and caring environment.

Clients often return for regular appointments to talk with their volunteers. Sometimes a friendship develops which allows the counsellor to share Christ with the person. Clients also sometimes come back even after the birth of their babies for further help and encouragement. Baby formula, furniture and clothing are given free of charge as needed, as well as maternity clothing and informative pamphlets in everything from nutrition to child development.

The Greater Moncton C.P.C. is funded by church mission budgets, individuals, businesses and the Convention and Association. Other denominations participate in the C.P.C. ministry so that costly and unnecessary duplication can be avoided. The C.P.C. has won the respect and cooperation of most of the social agencies, professionals and churches in the area. It's witness is positive, balanced and winsome. With two paid staff and over fifty volunteers it is having a tremendous impact on the community.

As Christians, we need to get behind the crisis pregnancy center ministry. Canadian Baptists could start such ministries in every population center in Canada if they chose to make this ministry a priority. What better way to build respect for our anti-abortion stand and witness to both the justice and the love of God at the same time?

Post-Abortion Counselling

Hundreds of thousands of Canadian women have had abortions and many of them have suffered emotionally and psychologically for it. Here is a vast unreached group of people who need the good news of Jesus Christ. The church needs to target these women and make their needs a priority.

The crisis pregnancy centers have developed a post-abortion counselling program. It includes a Bible study, a leader's guide and a training manual for volunteers involved in this aspect of the ministry. In addition to the eighteen hours of training each volunteer must undergo in order to work in the C.P.C., there is a further training seminar available for the post-abortion counselling programs. The goal of the program is to help the client find forgiveness, peace with God and emotional healing. Our churches need to develop a strategy to reach women who are survivors of abortion.

Political Action

Finally, we come to the area of political action. Christians need to be involved in this area in addition to the four areas mentioned above. There needs to be a long-term commitment to this cause, for the reversal of liberal abortion

laws will take a very long time. However, in the meantime, there are meaningful things which can be done in the political area.

We need to address a wide spectrum of issues which relate to our concern for women and children, some of which have been mentioned above. If Canadian Baptists are to be effective in evangelism and church growth in the twenty-first century in Canada, we must learn to relate the gospel to the major issues of our day. And we must do it in such a way that our witness to Jesus Christ is clear, winsome and balanced. When we speak in the political realm we must avoid being perceived as raving fanatics, as a single issue group and as just another right wing group with a "made in the U.S. agenda." We must focus on issues which involve the interests of the poor, the oppressed and the voiceless, rather than focussing on issues which affect us. We must also avoid making grand pronouncements on what others should do unless we ourselves are involved in doing what we say should be done.

Conclusion

As Christians we cannot simply ignore the abortion problem and claim to be obedient to our Lord. We must be neighbours to the women and children who are victims of the abortion tragedy. We must get involved in the nitty gritty, everyday personal aspects of this issue if we want to bear a credible witness to our Lord.

Further Reading

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