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# THE ABORTION DEBATE

by Abby Johnson

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# THE ABORTION DEBATE

*"My body, my choice!" "A woman's right." "Safe, legal and rare." "Pro-woman, Pro-Choice."*

Very few issues today provoke as passionate and divisive a response as abortion. Whether in politics, society, or as a matter of faith, the "abortion debate" has not waned since 1973 when abortion was legalized in the now infamous Supreme Court Case known as *Roe vs Wade*. The talking points used to support abortion suggest that abortion is empowering and validating. Opposition to abortion is often viewed as "imposing religion on other people," "depriving women of reproductive freedom," and "denying women access to healthcare." These carefully crafted sound bites suggest that if you are against abortion, you are against women. And no one wants to be against women!

The Catholic Church teaches, "Direct abortion...is gravely contrary to the moral law." (CCC 2271). Is abortion a universal human right and necessary medical care or is it a morally unacceptable tragedy? It can be hard to sift through what sounds like fact to find the truth. Let's take a minute to look at the foundational truths on which the Church's teaching is based and see how these relate to the issue of abortion.

To begin, think of a sculptor making a series of sculpted clay pots. Some pots are small, some are large. Each is crafted with care. Each reflects something of the artistry of the sculptor. Each is unique and special to the craftsman who painstakingly molded each one, who knows each creation's unique shape and appearance. To the master

craftsman, to have one of his creations destroyed, no matter its size, would be devastating. That unique sculpture could never be reproduced, never be replaced.

It is the same with human beings. The “worth” of a life does not change, in fact, according to the Church, it *cannot* change based on any circumstances. Nothing, not age, not ability, not the circumstances surrounding conception, not “wantedness” can alter the value or the dignity of a person. This is why the Catechism states, “God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.” (CCC 2258).

### **Faith and Reason**

So is accepting the Church’s teaching on abortion just a pure act of faith, something we only believe because the Church says so? Not really. We can know by faith that life begins at conception. We can know abortion is wrong because the Catholic Church states that abortion is intrinsically evil. But, we can also know these things because of science.

As doctors and scientists make more and more advancements in technology and medicine it is becoming increasingly clear from a purely scientific and secular point of view, that life begins at the moment of conception and to deny this is not just a matter of faith, but a matter of reason. Reason and logic alone can help us to come to the conclusions that 1) a new life begins at conception and 2) to take that life is wrong.

We know that upon fertilization a new human genome is created. Distinct DNA is identifiable. According to a [Keith L. Moore’s The](#)

[Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology](#), "A zygote [fertilized egg] is the beginning of a new human being. Human development begins at fertilization, the process during which a male gamete ... unites with a female gamete or oocyte ... to form a single cell called a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marks the beginning of each of us as a unique individual."<sup>1</sup> In laymen's terms, this science textbook defines life as beginning at conception. It definitively states that fertilization (what non-scientists call conception) is the beginning of a new and unique individual.

Sometimes people are thrown off by the use of words like "zygote" and "embryo" because they seem to suggest that this life form is less than human and often these words are used by those who are pro-abortion for that reason. The reality is that words like "zygote, embryo, and fetus" are no less dehumanizing than the words "toddler, tween, teenager, and adult." They are words that define an age or stage in the life of human. A "zygote" is a new human being. This isn't a matter of opinion or even faith, this is science.

We also know that to take a life is wrong. We know this on a practical and empirical level. To kill for any other reason besides self-defense, is wrong. There are laws in every state, in every town, even in every country of the world that outlaw and penalize murder. On the human scale, we decry the loss of life when it happens. We balk at violence against children. We go to great lengths to prolong life as it nears its end. As a human species, we value living. It stands to reason then, that if it is wrong to take the life of a person, whether that person is a child, a teenager, or an adult, and if we have established that human life begins at conception, then to take the life of that newly conceived human being is also wrong.

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<sup>1</sup> Langman, Jan. *Medical Embryology*. 3rd edition. Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1975, p. 3

## Abortion and Society

Furthermore, while abortion is often held up as a good for society, social science is also demonstrating abortion's negative consequences. You see, the Church doesn't just care "about the babies" as is often suggested. The Church also cares about the mothers, the fathers, the clinic workers, and our society as a whole. Abortion, does not only end the life of a person, but impacts the entire society. It is like a pebble thrown into a pond, causing ripples that change the entire surface of the water.

Many couples who have an abortion don't stay together, and having an abortion is the catalyst that drove them apart in their relationship.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, couples who do stay together report dissatisfaction within the relationship, especially on a physical level.

Women who have had abortions report nightmares, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, destructive behavior, addictions and "anniversary" symptoms that pop up around the anniversary of their abortion or what would have been their baby's due date. Researchers at the Elliot Institute for Social Science Research report the following of women who have had abortions:

- 90% suffer damage in their self-esteem
- 50% begin or increase alcohol and drug use
- 60% report suicidal ideation
- 28% actually attempt suicide
- 20% suffer full blown post-traumatic stress disorder
- 50% report some symptoms of PTSD
- 52% felt pressured by others to have the abortion.<sup>3</sup>

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2 Ring-Cassidy, Elizabeth and I. J. Gentles. Women's Health after Abortion: The Medical and Psychological Evidence. Chapter 15

3 *HLI Reports* March 1994 <http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/PDF/Articles/Abortion%20and%20Post%20Traumatic%20Stress%20Disorder%20-%20Theresa%20.pdf>

While the baby and the mother suffer the most serious consequences, abortion hurts all involved: the father, grandparents, siblings, and the whole of society. It robs society of peace. Perhaps St. Mother Teresa explained it best:

*"I feel that the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a war against the child, a direct killing of the innocent child, murder by the mother herself. And if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another? ... By abortion, the mother does not learn to love, but kills even her own child to solve her problems. And, by abortion, that father is told that he does not have to take any responsibility at all for the child he has brought into the world. The father is likely to put other women into the same trouble. So abortion just leads to more abortion. Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion."*

### **"But What About...?"**

Even with the above evidence, there are often other questions that arise in regard to abortion. Here are some common objections:

*"Contraception would reduce the number of abortions."*

This is not the case. According to the research arm of Planned Parenthood, 54% of women who have abortions are already on birth control. If contraception actually reduced the number of abortions, these women wouldn't be getting them. In fact, it is often in places that advocate for more contraception that we see more abortions! Many people also don't realize that some forms of birth control cause abortions too. They are called "abortifacients." These include the pill, the mini-pill, DEPO, NORPLANT, RU-486, the morning after pill, methotrexate and misoprostol.

*“What about in cases of rape or incest? Asking a woman to give birth to a baby conceived in rape is victimizing her twice!”*

The truth is, abortion would be victimizing her twice. It is important to point out that cases of rape and incest make up less than 1% of all abortions. Statistically speaking, this miniscule amount should hardly be used to justify abortion on demand. Secondly, the argument is trying to appeal to emotions, but the fact is, abortion hurts women. A woman who is victimized does not need to be further hurt! Thirdly, the baby conceived is not at fault. When do we ever punish (let alone kill!) an innocent person for the crime of another? Yet, in the case of rape, this is exactly what is being proposed.

*But without abortion we would have too many kids in foster care!*

Then why don't we start killing the kids in foster care? Does that sound harsh? It *is* harsh. But it is also exactly what this argument proposes. What is the difference between the life of a child who may have to go into foster care and one already in foster care? Is one worth more than another? Abortion can never be a solution to the social issues that we as a society have to confront. Proposing it as some form of population control is a dangerous and very slippery slope. Once it becomes okay to kill a segment of society, it will become okay to kill for other reasons. If the only thing separating a baby from life or death is whether or not they are born yet, no child is actually safe.

*“My body, my choice!”*

This is an emotional appeal, and emotions don't always tell us the truth about something. The fact is, the baby's body is not, in any way, the mother's body! He or she is a completely unique individual! As already mentioned, from conception a unique genetic code is identifiable. While the baby is inside the mother's body, the baby's body is not the mother's body. Location, whether inside or outside the womb, does not determine the value of someone's life.

*“Why are you legislating morality?”*

All laws are moral in their nature. They exist to uphold the common good. Laws that prohibit theft, murder, indecency, discrimination against the handicapped, etc. are all moral. Legislating against abortion accomplishes the same thing these laws do – making society just and safe for all citizens, particularly the vulnerable.

*What about the life of the mother? Or ectopic pregnancy?*

In Ireland an exhaustive study was done about abortion and saving the life of the mother. Do you know what was found? That under NO circumstances was it necessary to kill a baby in order to save the life of the mother. None. Either nature took its course and the baby passed away by natural causes, or by a secondary cause because the mother’s life was being saved by medical intervention, or the mother was induced and delivered a (sometimes premature, but viable) baby. In other words, there was no medically necessary reason to directly take the life of baby in order to save a mother’s life.<sup>4</sup>

In the case of ectopic pregnancy, a pregnancy outside the uterus, there are several ways to address the situation. One involves methotrexate. This would be a direct abortion. According to the Church, this is not morally licit. According to science, it’s not entirely effective either. Methotrexate also burns the inside of the fallopian tube often rendering it hostile, which can lead to fertility problems. There are procedures that can preserve the fallopian tube or ovary (wherever the ectopic pregnancy is located) while not directly ending the life of the baby. In a very few cases a whole tube has to be removed. The result is that the baby will pass away, but the procedure itself is not directed at ending the bay’s life. It is not a direct abortion.

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4 [Dublin Declaration on Maternal Healthcare](#).



Some say this is semantics - word games - but in fact it has a name: The Principle of Double Effect. This very important principle is the difference between a licit medical procedure and an illicit one in the eyes of the Church. <sup>5</sup>

## **The Father of Mercies**

So does the Church condemn everyone who has been involved in an abortion? Not at all. The Church is never without mercy. Even for something as serious as abortion there is a path of mercy and healing. John Paul II spoke directly to women who have had an abortion in his encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*,

*"I would now like to say a special word to women who have had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. To the same Father and his mercy you can with sure hope entrust your child" (EV 99).*

It is okay to regret having an abortion or helping someone to have an abortion. There is a way to find healing and peace. The Church wants to help those who have been wounded by abortion to find healing and freedom.

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<sup>5</sup> Weigel, George. *Clarifying the Principle of Double Effect*. First Things. February 2002.

## The Debate Continues

The abortion debate is not going to end in the immediate future. Emotional appeals, talking points and misinformation are going to continue. That is why it is important for you to know not only what *you* believe, but to understand why the Church says what she does regarding abortion. The Catholic Church never teaches anything arbitrarily. When she says something is wrong, it is always with good reason. We have just reviewed the foundational issues behind the Church's teaching on abortion and demonstrated that abortion is an irrational choice, it is bad for society, it is unhealthy for those who go through the procedure, and it has negative effects that span generations. Abortion is the intentional taking of a life. The greater question now is, when presented with the evidence, with facts, and with sound teaching, what are you going to do about it?

### Additional Reading and Resources:

[Unplanned](#) by Abby Johnson

[Evangelium Vitae: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html)

[A Special Word to Women Who Have Had an Abortion: http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/post-abortion-healing/a-special-word-to-women-who-have-had-an-abortion.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/post-abortion-healing/a-special-word-to-women-who-have-had-an-abortion.cfm)

[Post Abortion Healing:](#)

[Project Rachel](#)

[Rachel's Vineyard](#)

[Surrendering the Secret](#)

If you or someone you know works in the abortion industry, there is hope and a way out: <http://abortionworker.com>



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## **FOCUS Equip**

'FOCUS Equip' is based on Ephesians 4:12 "for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ." These materials seek to equip you for lifelong Catholic mission. We would love to hear your feedback at: [focusequip@focus.org](mailto:focusequip@focus.org)



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