

Abortion is not a right but it could be a wrong

Now there's a headline that's sure to incur the ire and anger of 'Progressive' women and put me on a pro-abortion rights hit list, but it's time that we confront a few unpleasant (for some) facts about abortion.

Fact #1: Nowhere in the Constitution is abortion mentioned. I know that abortion advocates will say that, "Of course it's not mentioned because abortion procedures or 'rights to abortions' weren't even discussed among the framers of the Constitution." If you think that abortions weren't being performed before your birth you had better think twice as pregnancies have been terminated for eons by the administration of abortifacients like herbs, the use of sharpened implements, the application of abdominal pressure and other techniques by women and men alike on many continents and for many reasons by surgeons and even barbers. Depending on the culture, the penalties could be severe.

The only evidence that I could find of the death penalty being applied for abortion was in the *Code of Assura* in Assyrian law in or around 1075 BC. This was supposedly imposed only on a woman who would procure an abortion against her husband's wishes, and the first recorded evidence of induced abortion is from the Egyptian *Ebers Papyrus* in 1550 BC. In India, women were encouraged to sit over a pot of steam or stewing boiled onions to precipitate an abortion. Back in the Greco-Roman times, the Greeks used silphium as an abortifacient. Since then, all manner of herbs and other concoctions were used to abort fetuses such as roots and teas. Even the saliva of camels was employed to relieve women of their 'burden.'

The Stoics (philosophers from Hellenic times that are known for teaching that "virtue is the only good" and those external things like health, wealth, and pleasure are not intrinsically good or bad in themselves, but have value as "material for virtue to act upon") thought the fetus to be *plantlike* in nature and not a living *animal* until the moment of birth when it breathed air for the first time. That's why they found abortion morally acceptable. The romans on the other hand inflicted punishment for abortion because it was a violation of the father's right to dispose of his offspring. Like the Greeks they did not view the fetus as a person and therefore didn't view it as a homicide. However, though abortion was commonly accepted in Rome, things changed around 211 AD when emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla banned it as 'infringing on parental rights.' And the punishment? Temporary exile.

Attitudes really started to change with the spread of Christianity and many pro or anti-abortion Christians have taken their cues on the procedure from the Scriptures. For example, Saint Augustine believed that abortion of a *fetus animates* (a fetus with human limbs and shape) was flat out murder. However, he could neither confirm or deny that such partially formed fetuses would be resurrected as full people at the time of the 'Second Coming.'

Fact #2: Most organized religions oppose abortion in varying degrees, but so do most countries' governments - so abortion is not solely a religious issue as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor would have you believe. Prior to the advent of the women's rights movement in the 19th century, abortions (in early pregnancies) were practiced and deemed legal under English common law, but the movement precipitated many in the English-speaking world to pass laws against abortions at all stages of pregnancy. Interestingly, physicians were the principal proponents of abortion criminalization laws, arguing that if one opposes abortion after 'quickening' (the moment in pregnancy when the woman feels her baby's movement in the uterus), one should oppose it before quickening as well. While English law had penalties for abortion codified as early as 1803, in the U.S. our statutes started appearing in the 1820s.

Parenthetically, the death rate from surgical abortions in the early 1800s in New York alone was an alarming 30%, regardless of hospital setting! It is a widely-held belief that during the mid-19th century, the U.S. had abortion rates of 20-25% of all pregnancies. Something clearly had to be done

to stem the tide of unnecessary deaths and abortion clinics starting appearing, spearheaded by a racially-prejudiced woman by the name of Margaret Sanger who saw these clinics as a way to stop the births of Black babies. The name of the organization she founded? Planned Parenthood.

Laws, too, were changing as a result of the abortion reform movement in the 1960s and the American Medical Association, the American Bar Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the California Medical Association, the California Bar Association, and many other groups changed along with them, announcing their support for protecting doctors from criminal prosecution if they performed abortions under rigid hospital controls. Then, in 1967, Colorado became the first state to decriminalize a doctor performing an abortion in cases of rape, incest or if pregnancy would lead to permanent physical disability of the woman.

The secularization of abortions was underway. The churches lost dominion over the issue on what constitutes human life and who is allowed to take it. The medical community wanted safer abortions. Women wanted more access to them. Legislators feared female voter reprisals if they spoke out against killing babies in the womb and the Supreme Court got involved in what is now a hotly debated case (Roe vs. Wade) that gave women nearly carte blanche to demand an abortion whenever they chose.

Soon the Supreme Court will be deciding another abortion case brought about by the new Mississippi law setting a 15-week limit on obtaining abortions in that state. Many believe that a decision in favor of Mississippi will place the burden and responsibility for abortion regulations on the individual states where many of us believe it should be, especially since a 'woman's right to choose' (an abortion) is not mentioned in the Constitution and therefore empowers the states to regulate such procedures under the Tenth Amendment: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited to it by the states, are reserved to the states, respectively, or to the people."

Fact #3: As long as there are women there will be abortions, and each country and each society composed of fair-minded people of good moral conscience must accept that fact. AND they/we must confront the issues of when life begins, when it should end, who should end it and under what circumstances we should allow it - if at all. It is not a question that can or should be answered only by theologians, doctors, women's organizations or nine black-robed justices. It is perhaps THE most important question facing all of us and as such we must draw on our essential God-given humanity to answer it.

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