

Sanctity of Life: NO EXCEPTIONS

You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb.

I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.

My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret,

And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.

And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me,

When as yet there were none of them.

Psalm 139:13-16



For far too long, far too many Christians who hold conservative views on abortion have defended the right to abort preborn babies who are the products of rape or incest. The logical and moral error that this position represents must be exposed publicly. The belief abortion constitutes murder cannot be sustained if Christians continue to make exceptions for pregnancies that result from rape or incest.

The pro-life position depends on acceptance of the following assumptions:

- Life begins at conception.
- Humans are created in the image and likeness of God.
- All human life is sacred.
- All human life possesses infinite value.
- Incipient life has its own unique DNA, meaning that at every developmental stage, the baby is a unique individual, distinct from his or her mother.
- Dependency status (i.e. the state of being dependent on another) does not abrogate the right to life. The preborn, newborns, toddlers, the aged, and the infirm all share in common an inability to survive on their own. The physical location of the preborn is insufficient justification for abrogating its inherent right to life.

Given that pro-life people of faith accept and defend these propositions, how does the unjust manner of conception justify the deliberate destruction of the incipient life that is produced through this unjust manner of conception?

Those who defend exceptions in cases of rape and incest believe that compassion dictates such exceptions, but that position represents terribly misguided compassionate impulses. These misguided impulses depend on and reflect logical inconsistency and result in tragic moral error that ultimately undermines the pro-life position.

For anyone to conclude that compassion for the victims of heinous crimes permits slaughter of the unborn, who then suffer an even greater moral evil than the one that their mother experienced, means that they had to have rejected the assumptions they claim to believe.

One cannot truly believe that life begins at conception; that all humans are created in the image and likeness of God; that all life is sacred and infinitely valuable; that the product of conception is distinct from its mother; and that those who are dependent on others are equally deserving of life, while also claiming that killing a baby who is the product of a crime is morally defensible.

At least one cannot make that claim with any logical or moral consistency.

It is never morally defensible to extinguish a baby's life* even if he or she is the product of a violent, horrific crime—a crime, of course, for which this baby bears no responsibility.

Could carrying an unwanted baby that is the product of rape or incest involve terrible suffering? Yes. But the noble ends of alleviating the suffering of girls or women who become pregnant through rape or incest must never involve the means of taking an innocent life.

Compassionate people of faith must come alongside the victims of rape and incest, praying with and for them; providing the emotional care and counseling they need; and providing for their physical needs.

Compassionate people of faith must never be complicit in communicating to victims of rape or incest that the destruction of innocent life is a morally defensible response to a terrible crime.

Preborn human life is precious and sacred. The babies who are produced by criminal acts should never become the victims of compassionate but misguided impulses and sloppy moral reasoning. When the baby's right merely to exist—after all, a mother does not have to raise her baby—comes into direct conflict with the “reproductive rights” of the mother, existence must take precedence. The right merely to exist is a right of a higher moral order than reproductive rights. It is, in fact, the right upon which all others depend.

Christian blogger and book reviewer Tim Challies writes this:

It is my conviction that some evangelicals and pro-lifers have given away the moral high ground by making a false and irrational distinction between children who are conceived by choice (or at least by the choice to engage in sexual intercourse) and children who are conceived by rape or incest (though, of course, most incest is also rape)....The argument from Scripture is simple: a fetus is a human being. A fetus has the same “humanness” as an adult and thus has the same right to life. A fetus is fully human. A fetus is as fully human if she is conceived by choice as if she is conceived by brutal force. Of course I affirm that rape is a horrific crime—undoubtedly one of the worst crimes a person could commit and one whose full spiritual, physical, mental and emotional impact I am sure I cannot adequately understand. But the brutality of the crime does not change the fact that is indisputable from Scripture—even a child conceived by rape is fully human.

A moral life and a morally consistent life is a difficult life—a life of sacrifice that is ultimately richer, more satisfying and more God-pleasing. Please choose and defend life even in cases of rape or incest. And serve compassionately and sacrificially those mothers who choose to sacrifice their comfort in order to give life to their babies.

*Most pro-life advocates agree that in those extraordinarily rare circumstances in which a mother faces imminent death due to, for example, a rapidly spreading cancer, it is morally permissible to pursue treatment that may result in the death of her unborn baby. But that is entirely different from deliberately taking the life of the unborn.

Former United States Surgeon General C. Everett Koop stated “In my 36 years of pediatric surgery I have never known of one instance where the child had to be aborted to save the mother's life.”

In 1967, Dr. Alan Guttmacher, past president of Planned Parenthood, stated that “Today it is possible for almost any patient to be brought through pregnancy alive, unless she suffers from a fatal illness such as cancer or leukemia, and if so, abortion would be unlikely to prolong, much less save, life.” ■



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