A Christian View on Bioethics

(and the public square)

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Introduction
Stem cell research, human cloning, genetic screening / engineering, the so-called "test tube" babies - one could put together a rather long list of these sometimes controversial topics that are much in the public eye today as well as the subject of experimental work in the medical field. Add to them such older topics as "partial birth" abortion, ecyptic pregnancy surgery, certain birth control methods, surrogate mothers, etc., and the discussion becomes even longer and more intense.

What do they have in common? In one word, these are "life" issues, having to do with initiating, seeking to change, or terminating human life. Since life is a fundamental gift from God, one without which his many other temporal gifts (body, family, friends, citizenship, freedom) cannot be of benefit, the protection of human life has long been a matter of some concern to people everywhere. Christians point out how God is the creator of all things (Gen. 1), human life as well, and it therefore is to be respected highly. The Psalmist puts it this way: "You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." Moses brought down from the Mount the great law of God including one specifically intended to protect human life: "You shall not murder." Nations and tribes without number over the centuries have established laws to protect innocent human life. Americans have recognized this as a "natural right" as in its Declaration of Independance ("Right to life, liberty...") as well as with many federal, state and local laws. Life, human life, is important to God and to us, and is therefore considered worthy of protection.

Life is also special, and is unique. It is a true miracle in that it cannot be manufactured or replicated by human means or spontaneous generation, nor can it be designed from existing non-living materials. "Science" (one probably can attach one's own meaning to that somewhat abused term) has long speculated that life must have been and can be originated by natural means, by accidental occurrence, or perhaps that it will be by some future discovery. Decades of failed effort at accomplishing this, along with scriptural teaching, allows the believer to say with confidence that life has come about by divine intervention in this world. It has also been programmed to carry on "after its own kind." Even with today's attempts at artificial reproduction in 'test tubes' (Petri dishes), medical specialists are basically working with already living material and not truly creating new life. Life is special. It is unique. It is in the original and final sense a miracle of God, although

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1 Ps. 139:13
2 Ex. 20:13
3 Gen. 1
now working through natural means. "I am the Lord who made all things," God tells us through his prophet Isaiah, and this would include the miracle of life.

In what follows with this study of Christian bioethics and its relation to different aspects of God's gift of human life, an attempt will be made to keep things as basic as possible. It will not go into significant detail on all those many areas that one could look into with a subject as broad as this. Here, we will let scripture be our guide to the extent that it speaks to the issues involved. It is hoped that this will bring some clarity to a matter which has many complexities, and that it will be helpful as a guide to our thinking and perhaps to decisions faced on a variety of life-related, often difficult matters in the future.

**When does life begin?**

While we each probably have a general sense of what we mean by "life," attempting to define something so simple and yet complex may tax one's powers of discernment. A working definition coming from a variety of sources usually includes such criteria as: motion, reproduction, consumption, growth, stimulus response, etc. In regard to human life, a definition used by Christian Life Resources of Milwaukee is: "Human life exists when it: 1. contains the unique genetic composition of a human being; and 2. is in a state of biological development that if placed in its natural environment and permitted to proceed without interruption, it would mature as a human being."5

As to the root question, "When does life begin?" one must inevitably look to another: "When did it first begin?" Life of any sort, simple or complex, is limited to this earth and its environs as far as human experience can determine. Science fiction as well as other speculation and theory have held that it probably is to be found also on other planets, certainly in a number of distant solar systems. This has come from the evolutionary premise that since life probably began accidentally on our planet in some still unknown way, it just as well could have begun elsewhere under favorable circumstances. A problem with such reasoning, of course, is the lack of those circumstances that foster life elsewhere, either in our own solar system, or others to the extent anyone has been able to determine. The earth is unique for this. God designed it for the purpose that he himself had in mind - to support human life, the crown of his creation.6 He also had a purpose for the heavenly bodies out there, "to mark the seasons... to give light on the earth..."7 Life is not an accident; the materials used to support life are not either. He created both for his own purposes.

Genesis 1 tells us how life along with everything else began - through the power of God's Word. "God said, let the land produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants and trees..." (v. 11). "Let the waters teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth..." (v. 20). Mankind was to be special: "God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being..." (2:7). Simple, beautiful, totally logical to the mind of faith is

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4 Is. 44:24
5 R. Fleischmann, Medical Ethics Conf., 10/17/03
6 Gen. 1:28
7 Gen.1:14-15
this account of origins, even though beyond human comprehension. It follows the inspired logic of the writer to the Hebrews: "For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything." Again, the words of Isaiah come to mind, "This is what the Lord says, your Redeemer who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord who made all things." "All things" certainly would not exclude life. To each such life form created also is given the ability and duty of reproduction "after its own kind" (Gen. 1).

How simple it would be if things just could have been left right there as they were with our first parents in the Garden of Eden. Human existence became immensely more complicated after the Fall, however, and the human mind's understanding of God's will and plan for things both spiritual and material in his creation was now less than perfect. As we are reminded, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

Perhaps a part of this "foolishness" that we attempt at times is trying to determine just when or where it is in the process of fulfilling God's commission to "be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it," that we reach the point where a new human being / life actually begins. Various studies over the years have been able to enlighten researchers on virtually every step of the physical path that leads from a sperm and egg joining together and resulting in fertilization (zygote), to it soon beginning to divide into additional cells (blastocyst), while moving toward implantation (embryo), finally resulting in a child and later an adult. It's around the fifth day or so that the outer layer of this fertilized egg or ovum begins to change into supportive tissue necessary for implantation and continued growth while others specialize into those that soon develop into bone, muscle, brain, heart, blood, etc. This continues until it reaches that stage of development at about the third month and lasting until birth when it is often called a fetus. (During all this time, of course, the parents have a different name for this developing individual - their baby!)

When did the life begin with this little being of a human nature that we each can probably project ourselves back to? Perhaps a more pertinent question might be, when wasn't a living being of a human nature there? At each stage after fertilization of the egg, this developing new life has a human identity by virtue of its DNA, and is obviously alive according to any common sense definition. The only difference is one of degree or stage of development as it receives nourishment. Some religious thought of the past, especially that of Thomas Aquinus in following Aristotle's earlier idea of "quickening," has attempted to equate the onset of true life in the developing child with its "ensoulment," thought to occur around the 40th day of development (60 days for girls), but this is human sophistry. Scripture speaks of the whole person, body, soul and spirit, as a unit and does not indicate a point or stage at which a soul entering our human existence makes a qualitative or quantitative difference to one's entity. Rather, we are recognized as the

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8 Heb. 3:4  
9 Isaiah 44:24  
10 1 Cor. 2:14  
11 Gen. 1:28
special creation of God that we are from the very beginning, as with Isaiah above, and David also in the 51st Psalm: "Surely I have been a sinner from birth ('chil - writhe in pain'), sinful from the time my mother conceived ('yachem - heat of sexual passion') me."¹² (Lit.: "In iniquity I was writhed out, in sin my mother went into heat for me.")¹³ The Hebrew word here for conception, "yachem" is perhaps worthy of note due to certain questions that have been raised in the past. Simply put, does the Hebrew understanding of this term clearly extend to the very earliest life stage of initial fertilization and quick cell division, or might it actually exclude those initial seven days or so of human existence prior to implantation as an embryo? It fact, it appears to go beyond both and point to the earliest stage possible by the term used here which takes us back to the illustration of the "heat of sexual passion" that is involved in the act of pro-creation, which in this context then is interpretively translated as "conceive." (Likewise in the N.T. Greek, another biblical term for conception, "sul-lambano," "take or receive together,"¹⁴ also brings into the picture even this initial act as part of the overall biblical concept of conception.)

In summary, one is inclined to go along with the evaluation of others in the past, that there is not a clearly identifiable moment where human life "begins" to the specificity we may desire. A better way of describing it might be to say that as fertilization takes place, and the beginning of cellular division that leads to human development occurs (sometime after that "heat of passion" so often involved in the act of conception), human life simply starts to "exist" in its most elemental form. Everything else is merely an effort to define or clarify the different stages of the on-going physical development that takes place along side that now existing life. This writer, therefore, is comfortable with the long expressed view in our circles that, in effect, fertilization and the onset of life are essentially synonymous. Different degrees of complexity in this "being that is human" will be observed as time goes by, of course. Our human minds and personal priorities may even be tempted (mistakenly) to place different degrees of value upon that life at one or another stage of development. But the essence of that life, distinctly human, does not change. Perhaps if one accepts the human "tri-part" picture that appears to be indicated in 1 Thes. 5:23 (and less distinctly in Heb. 4:12), one might find in it the thought that when "soma" ("body" - in its initial cellular stage in this context), and "psyche" ("life animation / force" or "emotion / soul") are present, God in both his omniscience and omnipotence also makes available that third component ("pneuma" - true "soul/spirit") as the eternal element of our more complete human existence for this lifetime, and hereafter as well. This is a somewhat unique passage, however, a subject of some debate in our circles, and so probably not determinative. But it still may offer some help in pointing us toward a more complete picture of that unique human life which God himself brings about in each created being.

What follows, therefore, is based upon the premise coming from the scripture passages above, that human life exists ("begins") in a new human at the point of a fertilization that results from an initial joining of egg and sperm (or perhaps by a cloning process), and is a continuum thereafter

¹² Ps. 51: 5
¹³ Westendorf exegesis (see end note)
¹⁴ Luke 1:24,31,36
until God allows an ending to take place. Any attempts at initiating Christian bioethical study on
our part then would follow from what may be called this foundational premise drawn from scriptural
teaching, as well as from the terminology used by the inspired writers that almost seems to take us
back to the procreative act itself as part of this "beginning" process, rather than onward to some
later point. This early stage of personal identity is reflected also in God’s words to Jeremiah: "Be-
fore I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart.”(1:5) Otherwise,
one is required to choose another place, perhaps farther on down the line in human development,
to start from (some do) - while setting forth other scripture and some good reason or purpose for
doing so (some attempt to). We feel bound to use this fertilization / conception / life premise now
as we proceed to deal with a number of those complex life-related situations that people find them-
selves in at times, since we believe what God has provided in scripture is sufficient and clear.

**Christian bioethical principles**

As stated earlier, our intent is to keep this study relatively basic by dealing chiefly with the
principles involved rather than to follow every application or tangent that might come our way. This
will be a challenge, and so we ask your indulgence if not completely successful at this goal.

The two chief "life principles" drawn from Scripture in the context of bioethics here are:
1. God is the author and creator of human life  (Gen. 1-2; Job. 31:15; Ps. 139:13-16; Is. 44:24)
2. God wants human life to be protected   (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 20:13; Prov. 6:16-17)
   (Others also possible: life as a time of grace; life ending when God so determines.)

As with all important issues that are impacted by scriptural teaching (man and woman roles,
capital punishment, etc.), one must be careful that one is working with teachings of principle rather
than simply from examples of application on any given subject. The one, principle, gives a clearer
light and direction to follow; the other, application, can enlighten at times, but in certain contexts
also may be somewhat misleading. Our two main "life principles" in bioethical matters are, that
God creates human life; and, that God wants this life to be protected by his human creatures. In
the context of our own life experience, and the foundational premise that life begins at fertilization /
conception as a continuum, the applications here may not always be carried out perfectly by mere
humans even when attempting to do what is right.

Let us see now how this plays out with some well known issues of past and present in the light of
the two principles. There will not be time, space, or need to cover them all. It is hoped an
acceptable approach for dealing with such subjects as touch on a variety of human life issues at
least can be established, one that then may serve as a guide where we as Christians may be con-
fronted with related issues in the future.
Stem cell / germ cell transfer

There are primarily two types of stem cells that are at issue in our day. One is an "adult" type taken from all sorts of tissues and organs, even from umbilical cords, placentas, or cadavers, most often where a patient's own cells or others are cultured and then transplanted back into his / her own body. These are somewhat specialized already (multipotent) in their ability to turn into specific tissue forms. The other type is embryonic stem cells taken from a tiny living embryo generally at 5 to 10 days and are much more flexible (pluripotent) in that they are not so specialized as yet. The adult type have proven to be very effective over the years in treating 100+ known conditions (e.g.: bone marrow transplants).\textsuperscript{15} The early embryonic cells with their open-ended flexibility have failed to show any true promise in research, quite often resulting in harmful tumors, although some scientists believe that they potentially could be harnessed and directed toward effective use by way of future research. Adult stem cells may be obtained in many relatively safe ways that do not endanger human life. The utilization of embryonic stem cells (or "germ cells" from an aborted embryo or fetus), however, involves the destruction of a "being that is human" in its early developing stage, whether for experimental purposes, or the possible benefit of another.

If we accept the foundational premise from scripture that human life from conception is to be recognized as human,\textsuperscript{16} as well as the scriptural principles that this life is created by God and of worth, and is to be protected where possible, it would not be right or ethical to destroy such embryonic life (even in its very early stages) for the possible benefit of another. The use of adult stem cells for therapeutic purposes, especially that drawn from a relatively neutral source such as afterbirth, is to be encouraged. Harvesting living embryonic cells is morally wrong even where approved by government as now in California\textsuperscript{17} or when carried on in other countries or privately elsewhere. It is destruction, not the protection of human life as God directs.

Use of miscarriages, the aborted, eecotic embryos, etc.

There are times when "adult" stem cells or certain body parts may become available with lives that have ended prematurely, whether intentionally as in abortion and tubular (eepic) pregnancies, or not (miscarriages). Even though such termination of human life may not have taken place specifically for the purpose of harvesting useful tissue, should such sources be utilized for possible therapeutic application in order to help those with specific medical needs? What moral or ethical principle might be used for guidance in such situations? This may bring to mind similar questions raised a few decades ago brought on by the new ability to transplant body organs (heart, kidneys, etc.) available from those who had died by accident or other causes. Significant theological or ethical objection generally has not been raised to utilizing such body parts themselves. Personal feelings on the practice will differ, of course, and individual consciences should be respected.

\textsuperscript{15} www.marrow.org
\textsuperscript{16} Ps. 51:5, Is. 44:24
\textsuperscript{17} AP, 9/23/03
With aborted body sources, however, a different circumstance prevails. An innocent life is taken (unless the life of the mother was truly involved as with ecopic situations where a child in effect is "threatening" that life). To utilize the circumstance of abortion in order to harvest body or tissue parts for the use of another may give the appearance to many of a possible justification for the original evil act. While such utilization in itself might not be wrong, the circumstances that these parts came out of, and the implications resulting from them, simply cannot be ignored. That alone would move many, Christians and others, to take the ethical and moral stand of refusing such use if connected in any way to abortion, perhaps seeking another approach for help. God wants his people to protect human life. Even the appearance of doing otherwise by utilizing aborted products would tend to undercut that principle and so should be avoided. (Then too, there is the "slippery slope" argument here as illustrated by past news accounts of the Chinese army "taking orders" for properly matched organs or parts from their prisoners for transplant use by foreigners - and scheduling prisoner executions to accommodate that need, at a price!)\(^{18}\)

**Genetic therapy / engineering**

The subject of genetic therapy is one that is not as well known in our circles as perhaps in rural areas where it has aroused some controversy in the development of improved lines of grain, livestock, etc. While opposed by some, this opposition has come more from objection to the unknown and a possible environmental danger than from deeply held moral or scriptural principles. Can there be any objection to attempted genetic additions or changes in a human being created by God in order to deal with a weakness of some sort, perhaps life threatening? The question again needs to be answered in the light of our two main principles and whether human life is being taken or even threatened in the process. Simply put, if a human life in some stage of development is not endangered here or the value of it minimized, one may have difficulty finding reason to object to such a procedure. But, as in certain other life-related circumstances, the motive for taking this step may need to be taken into consideration. A plainly self-seeking or self-glorifying motive (e.g.: "Two lesbians deliberately conceive deaf son to be like them")\(^{19}\) may call into question such proposed changes from what God has created or allowed to take place in human bodies and lives.

**In Vitro (test tube) babies / Human cloning**

One of the privileges of this writer's position with Christian Life Ministries of the Twin Cities has been the opportunity to speak to various groups on life issues locally as well as in outlying areas. This once included the unique and special experience of holding a beautiful little two year old girl born to a WELS couple as a result of an in vitro or "test tube" conception process whereby the mother's egg was artificially fertilized with the father's sperm, re-implanted in the mother, and a healthy little girl resulted. But, along with the joy of the parents came a concern that later was realized. Seven eggs in total had gone through the fertilization process; not all were utilized, and a number consequently were disposed of. In other situations there has been the problem of multiple implantations "taking" and the advice of a physician to bring about "therapeutic reduction"\(^{18}\)

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\(^{18}\) New York Times, 2/25/98

\(^{19}\) Newsweek, 1/26/04
by terminating one or more in order that the other(s) might have a better chance to reach full
term. What is a Christian couple to do when faced with such now accepted medical practice?

Again, following the principle that God creates life, and that protection of human life is God's will,
not the endangerment of it, one cannot say that an in vitro conception in itself is wrong so long as
that life which results is respected and protected. What clearly would break this principle would be
to abort one or more of the growing babies in the womb in order to theoretically give the other(s) a
better chance to come to term. Likewise wrong would be to destroy that life at an earlier embry-
onic stage because it was an unneeded "extra." Fortunately, there are good solutions now in
place, such as implanting only the number of embryos that could safely be carried to term. Or,
perhaps utilizing the service of a "Snowflake" type group that maintains the life of unneeded
embryos for future use by the mother or another couple. (A questionable practice here would be
"designer babies" with outside donor parent characteristics chosen to meet a personal goal.)

Somewhat related to this, serious proposals are now being made to clone people by utilizing
human eggs fused with cells from a donor in order to obtain a close genetic match. While the
actual cloning process in itself may not be wrong if the new life that results is protected, the ethical
questions that come to mind would be, what is the purpose in doing this? Is it just vanity? Is it to
obtain stem cells or rejection-proof body parts that could be taken for therapeutic purposes to
potentially help out another? Also, dare one overlook the often negative results in past cloning
experiments with animals ("Dolly the sheep," 1 of 220 lived) when applying that process to
humans? Finally, is human life, protected as it is by God, here being threatened or lost once again
simply for the intended benefit of another? How can that be accepted from a Christian perspective
using the principles established before? For these and other reasons, Christian bio-ethicists for
the most part have condemned cloning proposals to produce a "being that is human." The US
government likewise has shared this concern and is now leading an initiative toward an
international treaty against the practice, although the desire of some to maintain the cloning option
for stem cell research is holding things up at this time. While many are weak on life-related issues,
the idea of cloning another human being apparently strikes most people (not certain scientists
striving for research grants!) as going "a step too far." Would not the N.T. admonition, "No one
should seek (just) his own good, but the good of others," also be applicable here?

**Birth control techniques**

One might not expect birth control to come up in a topic related to Christian bioethical matters.
Yet, over the years, this may have been the most difficult application of all to deal with for many
couples simply because it is the one that the majority have been affected by personally. In
general, the WELS has not raised the type of objections to artificial birth control methods as with

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20. www.fertilitydocs.com
21. www.snowflakes.org
23. 1 Cor. 10:24
others such as found in official Roman Catholic (but not Eastern Orthodox) teaching and papal decrees. Rather, as CLR'S Robert Fleischmann puts it in his "Motive - The Christian and Birth Control" article: "In summary, a Christian married couple can practice some form of birth control. It falls within the realm of Christian freedom and stewardship. But, as with all such issues, a careful exploration of the heart and motives is necessary in order to do what truly glorifies God."24

While an exploration of what might or might not be God-pleasing motives may be of interest, our chief concern here comes in connection with those birth control methods that do not just prevent conception (barrier type), but perhaps may actually endanger a small "being that is human" in its early stages of development in the womb. In general, there are three ways that the most common hormonal approach of the "pill," also patches, injectables, etc., work. 1. They chiefly work to suppress ovulation and the actual release of an egg. 2. They thicken the mucus plug whose function is to restrict sperm from passing through the cervical area. 3. They tend to "thin" the lining of the uterus which could impede implantation if a conception were to take place. Here, of course, it is not any concern over the first two preventive actions of this common hormonal method which may raise concerns with conscientious Christians, but a possible abortificant action of the third.

What, then, are Christian couples to do when in spite of their best efforts they are faced with unclear or imprecise information on this subject that has such major personal and practical implications both for their relationship and for a potential family? Perhaps the best answer is that, after prayerfully examining their own motives and goals in family planning, they should not hesitate to seek the most complete information available on birth control methods in order to satisfy both their minds and consciences. Any method that would clearly function as an abortificant (IUD, "morning after pill") of course, would be unacceptable. With methods that appear to be mainly contraceptive in nature as best as one can tell (natural family planning, barrier, pill), while acknowledging that one can never be 100% certain about just what exactly is taking place within the body, individual consciences then become the guide. Here, some will be directed one way, others to another approach. Just a "convenience of use" argument, of course, ought not be determinative in this matter. Then too, such a decision made by an informed conscience ought to be respected by others, whether Christian lay people, or pastors when asked for their counsel. In this, we each pray for understanding and guidance while seeking to protect human life as God commands us to, even with those smallest of "beings that are human" - as once we all were ourselves.

Abortion / Partial birth abortion / Eugenics

With traditional abortion, or that more recent horror of the "partial birth" variety, the issues are clear in that the life of a "being that is human" is taken. The WELS has spoken.25 More importantly, God's word has also: "You shall not murder." There is no ethical question or dilemma here except in certain situations where the mother's life may be truly at risk. The same is true with

24 christianliferesources.com (2.Library)
25 1979 WELS convention report
eugenic infanticide, newborns judged less than perfect being allowed to die. God's will is clear - human life is to be protected. (A different question, one where consciences will differ, is just how far a Christian may or should go in taking active measures as certain radical anti-abortion groups would, to pro-vide that protection where the lives of so many unborn are being taken daily.)

**Bioethical matters in the public square**

As Christians, we live in two kingdoms - God's kingdom, his church, with no geographical boundaries; and that political, geographic and civic entity with identifiable boundaries that we call America. As citizens of God's kingdom, we as individuals (and as a church body) are bound by his teachings including those principles he has revealed on life matters as noted earlier. Here we have been given the gospel to use as our chief tool to effect the greatest and most lasting change as God may grant - not we ourselves, of course, but the Holy Spirit working on hearts and minds through that word. As American citizens, however, we find a different set of principles at play. We find ourselves guided, at times bound, by laws and statutes that are decided on, oft-times over our objection, by the political and legislative process of the state. To some degree, this civic process reflects the moral law at work, though imperfectly, in the heart of man. To a great degree, however, these laws mainly follow the ever-changing culture of the times in which one lives.

How is a Christian to operate here, perhaps in attempting to support legislation that reflects God's will as revealed in Scripture including the high priority he would place on human life even at its most helpless stages - both at the beginning as already noted; also at the end where motive and intent are important in action taken or treatment suspended? That is a real challenge when working within the bioethical concerns we reviewed before that are or should be important to Christians. Do we specifically seek legislators who reflect scriptural values? What should we expect of them when they are in place? Can our God-fearing representatives be forgiven for compromising in some ways in order to obtain the larger good in the public square of politics? (As Jerry Falwell once put it, "I would give in on cases of rape and incest (2%) - if I could help end abortion for all the other reasons (98%).")

How can Christian citizens or church members properly support the hands of concerned and well-motivated legislators in getting out basic information on matters that have a clear biblical and moral side to them (embryonic stem cell research, same sex marriage, etc.) for the benefit of that society that will influence the lives of their own families and children? These are not simple questions, but complex and multi-faceted issues where the answers are not always apparent. It would take another with more insight than this writer possesses to guide us through them. In the end, these matters too can be important by way of application in leading us to do what we can as individual citizens (speak out, vote, protest, etc.), while participating in those civic "second kingdom" responsibilities where we are guided by conscience and that principle on life issues we noted before: "God wants human life is to be protected."

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26 TV debate
Conclusion

It is obvious that not all the issues of our day having to do with Christian bioethics and sanctity of life matters that might interest us have been dealt with here, nor could they be. Surrogate motherhood, the "chimera" developments\(^{27}\) taking place, and others too may come to mind. Each of these many and varied issues could provoke a fair amount of relevant discussion. Yet, in each the same principles from before would be applied: Is human life recognized as a creation of God and important? Is it being protected? And, in each of these cases, are there relevant ethical questions that must be worked through which also may impact these clearly life-related issues? Simply letting "science" lead as an article of blind faith is misguided, dangerous, and unscriptural.

It is clear that in all bioethical and sanctity of life matters, there is to a great degree a spiritual battle to be waged in our day that goes beyond the political one. Consequently, it is a spiritual solution that will be needed if there is to be any positive effect as this conflict goes on, one where the Spirit may change the hearts and minds of those involved. Our God, as we know, has given us the tools for that battle: "My word," he promises, "will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire..."\(^{28}\) What moves us to use that word in order to engage this battle where Satan himself is the chief opponent? "Christ's love compels us..."\(^{29}\) is Paul's encouragement.

Then, finally, when the battle is over, when our own time has come - this to be in accord with God's calendar and not a human time frame\(^{30}\) since "my times are in your hands"\(^{31}\) - there will come a fuller realization of one more life-related principle that was just touched on above. It is that this time of life on earth granted to all is also a time of grace. A time to "fight the good fight of faith..."\(^{32}\) in preparation for that final, more glorious and perfect life and place which God again in his grace is preparing for his own. While individual consciences may differ here on just how to carry out one's civic responsibilities to the society in which we find ourselves, our calling as church leaders is clear. It is always to point others both to God's law, and to his gracious promises in Christ through the gospel. But, while pointing others forward to that great and final day, we dare not overlook its promises for us personally, or fear its coming. By God's grace, it is the promise of a new life then, as well as a truly glorified and perfected (not cloned, reincarnated) body. But for now, we pray for his help and guidance as the struggle to be faithful, and ethical, in our service to him, in sanctity of life matters as well as all others, goes on.

End Notes

13. J. Westendorf exegesis (requested by CLM / CLR, 11/04; complete study available on request)

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\(^{27}\) chimeras (see end note)

\(^{28}\) Is. 55:11

\(^{29}\) 2 Cor. 5:14

\(^{30}\) Pastor Deals with End of Life Issues (see additional end note)

\(^{31}\) Ps. 31:15

\(^{32}\) 1 Tim. 6:12
The Scriptural View on When Human Life Begins - A Brief Study of Psalm 51:5

"Surely I was sinful at birth" [literally, Behold, in iniquity I was writhed out.]

When the NIV reads, "I was sinful at birth," it really is paraphrasing the Hebrew which is very hard to translate directly into English. In the Hebrew, David is the subject of a verb that describes his mother writhing in labor pains. There is not, of course, any English verb like "writhed out," but with this made-up verb I was trying to show what the Hebrew is saying.

The word I translated "iniquity" here means sin in the aspect of something that incurs guilt and demands punishment… David is not describing something sinful about the way his mother gave birth to him. Throughout the psalm he is speaking of his own sin. Yet the way David describes his birth, focusing on his mother writhing in pain as she gave birth to him, reminds us of the painful consequences of sin that the LORD revealed to Eve in Genesis 3:16: "I will greatly increase your pains in childbirth; with pain you will give birth to children..." The writhing of David’s mother reminds him that she was sinful, and that she passed this sinful human nature on to him as well.

"Sinful from the time my mother conceived me." [literally, in sin my mother went into heat for me]...

If we thought that David was less than dignified when he described his mother as writhing in pain when she gave birth to him, the verb he uses here is downright crass. David’s choice of words is not the usual word used in the Bible for becoming pregnant. This word actually means to become hot, and is almost identical to our phrase, "to come into heat." We use this phrase to describe the reproductive cycle of female animals. And the Bible does the same. This is a rare word in Biblical Hebrew. It is only used five times. All the other times are in Genesis 30-31 where the subjects are Jacob’s sheep conceiving offspring… It almost reduces that act by which David’s mother became pregnant to a pornographic, thoughtless act of sex for sex’ sake. This is not a pretty picture. David hardly could have made his point that he is a sinful man born of sinful parents any more vividly...

The last thing we wish to look at in this verse is the arrangement of the verse… David looks back. Going backwards to a time before his first sinful acts, David arrives at the time of his birth. He was a sinner then. But he can go back further yet. He can go all the way back to his conception, the very time when he came into being as an individual separate from his mother and father. David seems to be completing his thought with the final clause, going back as far as he possibly can go. At that time already he was a human being, answerable to God for his sinfulness and in need of the LORD’s unfailing love and compassion...

If David’s guilt before God began at conception, that is the time when he became an individual human being, answerable to God for his guilt. A person’s existence begins at conception.


"We do not have the right to terminate life prematurely (or) prolong the dying process either… In general, there are three examples where care could rightfully be withheld or withdrawn. They are: 1. The treatment is futile. 2. Death is imminent. 3. The treatment has accomplished its purpose… The decision to 'pull the plug' is not an easy one.”
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*The Preacher's Apprentice - Study on Psalm 51:5*. m.cordes@comcast.net or www.pointofpower.com.

Web Sites (for additional background information)

www.christianliferesources.com (best resource for biblically based information)
www.family.org (Focus on Family site, Carrie Gordon Earll, bioethicist)
www.cbhd.org (Ethics in Medicine resource site)
www.donumvitaecenter.org (Fr. Tadeusz Pachoczyk, bioethics speaker)
www.lutheransforlife.org (Pan-Lutheran, offers pro-life bioethical information)
www.mcl.org/resource.htm (Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life resources)
www.mfc.org (Minnesota Family Council resources)
www.ncbcenter.org/access_links.html (Catholic site for Bioethics links)
www.nih.gov/sigs/bioethics (National Institute for Health site)