

Getting to the Heart of the Abortion Issue

My purpose this afternoon is to share with you some thoughts and ideas that might be useful as you engage others in a discussion or debate on the topic of abortion and other life-related or *bioethical* issues. The title of my presentation is “Getting to the Heart of the Abortion Issue.”

No ethical issue has received more attention over the past 20 years than that of abortion. The ethical implications of the life-issues are discussed widely in classrooms, in Internet chat rooms, at church conventions, and around water coolers at the workplace. I am sure that we have all engaged others in discussion about the issue of abortion.

We Christians often respond to the issue of abortion by quoting Bible passages. We believe that the dictates of the Bible determine right and wrong behavior or actions, especially as it applies to abortion. Scripture provides the laws and principles. We have the Ten Commandments. We have the Gospel. In Jeremiah 1:5 we read: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." We read in Psalm 139:13, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." Based on these verses of Scripture, the issue is settled.

This is an acceptable and necessary response to settling the ethical issue of abortion within our own Christian groups. At church conventions where the issue is being discussed those passages would be very relevant. The Bible provides the specific norms for God's people.

The problem is, we are not debating life-issues with the choir. If we are to confront a culture that is generally unconcerned by what the Bible says and is seeking to remove the Ten Commandments from the public square we are forced to argue at a different level.

It is very important to understand this. We make a mistake in dealing with the abortion issue by saying the Bible says abortion is wrong; I believe it; and that settles it. Praying, singing and reading the Bible outside abortion clinics and in pro-life marches is all well and good. But if we are going to make a difference I believe we have to speak to people where they are at, using good, sound reasonable arguments that are, in fact, built upon a foundation of biblical truth.

If we are to confront people where they are at, we must ask the question, “where are they at?” What do they really believe about the moral question of abortion? What do they really think is the source of life? When do they really believe that life begins? What are the assumptions or the presuppositions that we hold about those who seem willing to kill their unborn?

I offer you three assumptions that I believe are correct:

1. Everybody knows that abortion is wrong.
2. Everybody knows that life is a gift of God.
3. Everybody knows that life begins at conception.

When I use the phrase “everybody knows” I am not necessarily speaking about the conscious knowledge of the mind. The mind is capable of constructing all kinds of arguments or rationalizations to defend actions that the heart already knows are wrong. We do this all the time. I remember counseling a man who

was contemplating leaving his wife in order to be with another woman. He had all kind of reasons for doing this. I asked him, “But in your heart, you know that what are you doing is wrong, don’t you?” He paused and said, “Yes, but I’m going to do it anyway.” In dealing with the abortion issue, we must get to the heart of the person. The 17th century mathematician, physicist and theologian Blaise Pascal made this profound statement, “The heart has reasons which Reason does not know.”

Let us consider my three assumptions:

1) Everybody believes that abortion is wrong!

There is a natural law and innate morality existing in each and every human heart. The Bible clearly teaches that the law of God is inscribed on the heart. Theologically, we refer to this as the *natural knowledge of the Law*. In Romans 2:14 we read: “When Gentiles who do not have the law, do by nature the things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, *their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.*”

The biblical understanding of human nature, including the natural knowledge of the law, is truth. Truth, by definition, corresponds with reality. If the Bible says that every person has an innate knowledge of right and wrong that will be evident. It will be reasonable. We will also discover that truth in the writings of the great philosopher, even those who’s work pre-dates the New Testament era.

The ancient Greek philosophers were the first to elaborate a natural law doctrine. Heraclitus spoke in the 6th century BC of a common wisdom that pervades the whole universe, “for all human laws are nourished by one, the divine.” Plato living in the 4th century before Christ, contended that mathematical equations such as $2+2=4$ and moral principles such as "Do good unto others, injure no one, render to every man his own" were objective truths and existed outside of man in a spiritual dimension.

The first century Romans orator Cicero presented a classic definition of natural law in his *De Republica*. He wrote: “True law is right reason in agreement with Nature; it is of universal application, unchanging and everlasting; it summons to duty by its commands, and averts from wrongdoing by its prohibitions. There will not be different laws at Rome and at Athens, or different laws now and in the future, but one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and for all times.”

Our Constitution and Bill of Rights was framed on the foundation of the natural law position advocated by the 17th century British philosopher John Locke and later embraced by Thomas Jefferson. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are natural rights given to every man by his creator. John Locke wrote, “*The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which [treats] everyone [equally]. Reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind... that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health or possessions.*”

Noted 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant defined objective principles or universal maxims as “categorical imperatives.” For example, he

said, "Always act in such a way that the maxim of your action can be willed as a universal law of humanity." He also said: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." These maxims are universally true.

The fact alone that we are living, self-conscious, rational beings requires that we embrace the basic principle that life is better than death, that existence is better than non-existence. This is at the heart of human existence. The right to life and the preservation of human life is the highest natural moral principle. The essence of the Hippocratic Oath is "do no harm." I contend that every person you encounter, deep down in his or her heart is the realization that abortion is wrong. Our goal is to bring the inner knowledge of the heart into focus.

Of course, not everyone claims to accept the natural law position. There are those who would say, "I do not believe there is natural law. I believe that right and wrong are determined by the society. Laws are man made." This position is called positivism.

How should we respond?

Truth corresponds with reality and will reasonably explain the way things are? Truth will remain regardless of life-experiences. The biblical statement that it is appointed unto every man once to die is true. Nothing has happened in human experience to counteract that truth.

Positivism is based on the philosophy of humanism. The basic premise of humanism is that people are rational beings who possess within themselves the capacity for truth and goodness. Positivism has been affirmed by many in

response to the natural law advocates. Principles of morality, law, and ethics are man made. At its very basic level, positivists advocate “might makes right.”

If we accept the tenets of positivism and claim that the society determines right and wrong and there are no higher natural moral principles, we are faced with a real dilemma. We must conclude, for example, that the decision of the Nazi government to murder the Jews, based upon the philosophy of Aryan supremacy, was right because the society said it was right. If you deny natural law you cannot appeal to any higher standard than the standard advocated by the society. The person who claims that abortion is right because the Supreme Court says so would also have to conclude that genocide was right for Germans because the Nazis government said so. It was the law of the land!! Just because something is “the law of the land” does not mean it is morally acceptable. Our experience, particularly the Nazi holocaust, has demonstrated that humanistic positivism presents a faulty ethic.

Prior to the events of September 11th our country, influenced by the politically correct, the cultural elite and the moguls of Hollywood, was being held captive by another positivist philosophy called postmodernism. According to the postmodernist, truth and morality are relative. There are no absolute truths. There is no absolute morality. There is no natural law. Patriotism, according to the postmodernist, is nothing more than the power-hungry attempting to impose their politics on others. Truth and morality emerge from the community. It is their truth! It is their morality! The truth and moral standards of one culture are no better than the truth and moral standards of any other culture. The majority must empower the minority so that all things are equal.

This postmodern way of thinking sounded well and good to the ears of our kinder and gentler society until a group of individuals, emerging out of a specific community of faith, led by their own cultural morality, operating on their perspective of truth stole our planes and crashed them into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and into the ground east of Pittsburgh taking the lives of over 4000 people. Now the flags are flying. We hear it clearly stated that we are right and Osama and his band of henchmen are evil. Such statements fly directly in the face of the postmodern/positivist way of thinking.

Before September 11th it was popular to say that the only person who is wrong is the one who says that other people are wrong. That arrogant person is mean-spirited. It seems to me that we are becoming a very mean-spirited nation by saying that Osama and his rag-tail gang are both wrong and evil. On what basis do we have the audacity to say that the events of September 11th were wrong? Who says they were wrong? After all, it was their truth. It was there morality.

Those events were wrong because I know, you know, the woman contemplating an abortion knows, the pro-choice advocate with whom you contend knows, and everyone knows that it is wrong to slaughter innocent human life. Is it wrong because I say so? Is it wrong because the society says so? Is it wrong because the law says so? Or is it wrong because within the heart of every individual is the innate knowledge that killing the innocent is wrong.

There is a natural law inscribed on human hearts that is not silent when it comes to the basic life-issue. Assume it! Is there anyone in our secular culture who would suggest that it is “right and proper” to kill the unborn for no reason?

Would a woman get pregnant for the express purpose of killing her baby? Why would the feminists at Planned Parenthood be disturbed when pro-lifers display pictures of aborted fetuses? After all, Hollywood has produced numerous movies depicting the act of capital punishment to change public opinion. Why is there so much anger when the pro-life gang wants to present a visual depicting the act of abortion? Why do women become so angry when confronted with opposition outside an abortion clinic? Would a woman get angry if someone attempted to persuade her outside a super market to buy Wheaties instead of Corn Flakes? Obviously not. Whether or not you buy Wheaties or Corn Flakes is a matter of choice **but it is not a matter of conscience**. The anger that arises in response to pro-life efforts is an anger prompted by guilt. Yes, we can rightly assume that every person we confront believes in his or her heart that abortion is wrong. As Pascal put it, 'The heart has reasons which Reason does not know.'

Begin with this assumption in all your debates and discussions. Confront the person with the statement – “I believe that in your heart you know that abortion is wrong!” Don’t try to convince them that abortion is wrong. Inform them that you are convinced that they already know that it is wrong. Get to the heart. Keep probing. “C’mon now, be honest, deep in your heart, you know that abortion is wrong. Right?” You already know what the answer is.

Secondly,

2) Everybody knows that life is a gift of God.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:18-21: “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who

suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

A classic example of futile thinking and darkened foolish hearts is the theory of evolution, especially as it pertains to the origin and source of life. Regarding the origin of life, the *Encarta Encyclopedia* says, “One of the central questions about life is how it originated. The generally accepted theory is that early in the history of the earth some system of replication powered by external sources of energy must have been formed.” Where did the earth come from? Where did this system of replication come from? Where did this energy source come from? After all, nothing comes from nothing.

The story goes that God and Darwin were together at creation. God said to Darwin, “Let us create man from the dirt of the ground.” Darwin agreed and reached out his hand to grasp some dirt. God slapped his hand and said, “Get your own dirt.”

With the advent of high-power microscopes, scientists are learning more and more about the utter complexities of life. Michael Behe from Lehigh University wrote the book “Darwin’s Black Box.” In that book he contended that Darwin did not have the equipment to view a living cell. Behe argued that a living cell couldn’t evolve. A living cell is like a mousetrap. It is irreducibly complex.

You either have a mousetrap or you don't. If you remove some of the part you don't have a mousetrap.

Even at that, some scientists will embrace any foolish notion rather than have to acknowledge that God is the source of life. Sir Francis Crick who, together with American biochemist Dr. James Watson, won the Noble Prize for their discovery of DNA embraces the fact of intelligent design. But rather than acknowledge God, Crick believes that a spacecraft from another planet dumped their garbage on our planet and that garbage contained living cells. Talk about futile thinking and a foolish darkened heart.

We know that life is a gift of God. The person considering an abortion knows that life is a gift of God but refuses to acknowledge that truth. The person might rather cling to the irrationality of the *Encarta Encyclopedia*.

So again, we must probe the heart with the assurance that God has made himself known to all people and that this truth has been suppressed by the wickedness of men. "Are you really telling me that the miracle of life is not a gift of God? Do you really believe this?"

3) Everybody knows that life begins at conception.

If you have studied the issue you know that there is a wide-range of discussion on the issue of when human life begins or when that human life attains personhood.

I have never heard a sound reasonable argument for life beginning at any other stage than conception. While it is certainly true that the fertilized egg must be implanted in the womb in order to grow, it is also true that during the journey up

the fallopian tubes the cells are already beginning to multiply. Life is being generated.

Nothing is ever added to the fertilized egg in order to cause it to become a fully developed human being. The only variable is the environment in which that human being will continue to develop. But, is it not true that human beings are always dependent upon their environment if they are going survive?

Some suggest that the fetus becomes a human person when it is self-conscious. Are we to assume that people in a coma are not human?

Some suggest that the fetus becomes a human person when it is able to sustain life and is no longer dependent. Are we to assume that Christopher Reeves or “Superman” is not a human being because he requires artificial life-support?

I have heard it argued that a fetus is a potential human person, not an actual human person. The philosopher Aristotle first established the concepts of potentiality and actuality. They are accurate concepts.

We could properly say that a lump of coal is a potential diamond. Is this applicable to the relationship between a fetus and a human person? No! Coal is inanimate. There is no life in it.

We could properly say that a caterpillar is a potential butterfly. Is this applicable to the relationship between a fetus and a human person? No! Metamorphosis that causes a caterpillar to become a butterfly is a part of caterpillar/butterfly life. It is certainly not a part of human life.

A pro-choice argument states that a *potential* person is not an *actual* person. In other words, if A has the potential to become B, then it follows that A

is not B. An acorn is not an oak tree. You cannot climb the limbs of an acorn, build a tree house in an acorn, or rest in the shade of an acorn. And you certainly are not chopping down a mighty oak tree by removing an acorn from the ground.

It is accurate to say that an acorn is a potential oak tree. But, once a small sprout appears out of the acorn, it is no longer a potential oak tree. It is now a very, very, very tiny oak tree. You cannot build a tree house in it. You cannot rest in its shade, but it is still a tiny oak tree. Once the cell is formed and begins to multiply it is no longer a potential human being. It is a very, very, very tiny human being.

If what I am saying is correct, and obviously I believe it is, those who have had abortions are living in guilt even though that guilt has been suppressed and rationalizations are serving as defense mechanisms. While there is no doubt that the Bible teaches a natural knowledge of the Law and a natural knowledge of God, this knowledge is not sufficient for salvation. Once you touch the heart of a person regarding the issue of abortion you must be ready to introduce the clearly revealed knowledge found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Years ago I visited with a young woman who was a Sunday School teacher in the congregation I was serving. She told me the sad story of getting pregnant at the age of 16 and having an abortion. She said that she could not sleep nights. She had dreams about this child who would now be five years old. She was convinced that God could not and would not forgive her.

I clearly spoke the Gospel to her. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Jesus bore in his body the sin of abortion. We must be ready to offer and to clearly explain the basic truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those

burdened by the guilt of abortion – a guilt that must be brought to the surface before healing can take place.

-

I thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you today. Do not be afraid to confront those who cling to the notion that a person's right to choose takes precedent over another person's right to live. In their heart they know they're wrong. Begin with that assumption and speak to the heart of the person contemplating an abortion. Speak with love, kindness and compassion. Remember the profound statement of Pascal, "The heart has reasons which Reason does not know." Many have said that the events of September 11th have softened the heart of America. Let us pray that this is true.

But, be also ready to declare the truth of the Gospel.

Dr. Donald G. Matzat
Lutheran for Life, Pittsburgh
October 14, 2001