

## **ABORTION OVERVIEW**

More unborn children (over 1,600,000 according to Right to Life) are killed in the United States each year than the combined populations of Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Miami. A nation so divided on the abortion issue should know the arguments on both sides. In the 1973 Supreme Court decision in Roe versus Wade, abortion-on-demand was legalized in the U.S. The ruling characterizes the fetus as a "person" only after birth. In 1983, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down even minor restrictions against late-term abortion. Abortion is now legal, for any reason, throughout a woman's entire pregnancy. These laws are among the most permissive abortion codes in the world. Thus, the debate continues.

The Roman Catholic Church, crusading fundamentalists, many scholars, and other pro-life supporters are fighting to protect the lives of those who cannot defend themselves. They view abortion as murder and the ultimate form of oppression. They scorn the hypocrisy of "justice-conscious" advocates who have fought for so many rights, but who seem to care so little about an unborn baby being thrown into a trash can.

In summary, anti-abortion, pro-life groups argue:

- For sanctity of all life.
- From the perspective of the fetus as a developing person.
- For the unborn rights of the child.
- Against a trend of general moral decline.

Feminists, lesbians, liberals, and many practitioners who see the young in clinics, work with poor mothers, and deal with people in pain believe that a woman must have the right to decide what is best for her and her family. These people wonder about the sincerity of those who spend so much energy to preserve the rights of the fetus, yet seem to pay so little attention to the woes of the young and the poor.

Succinctly, pro-choice groups argue that legislation against abortion

- Is unconstitutional.
- Infringes upon freedom of religion.
- May endanger the mother.
- May propagate child abuse.
- Increases the number of deformed or retarded children.

- Perpetuates illegal and dangerous abortions.
- Discriminates against the poor.
- Adds to overpopulation.
- Is based on uncertain and contradictory definitions of the beginning of life and personhood.

Few believe that abortion is a good thing. However, the dilemma that many face is whether or not abortion may sometimes be the lesser of two evils in a difficult situation.

Obvious questions underlie the debate:

1. When does human life begin?
2. Who has the right to determine when life begins or the competing rights of fetus and mother?
3. How do government, religion, science, and power groups interact on such issues?
4. How can laws be made that deal justly with rich and poor alike?
5. To what extent does this issue drive people to consider the moral and religious bases of their personal and social lives?

Tension may exist between increasingly liberal laws permitting abortion and the scientific progress allowing younger and younger fetuses to survive. The viability of young fetuses would seem to be a factor in the determination of when human life begins.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

1. Women, young people, parents, physicians, counselors, teachers, and youth leaders need to increase their understanding of this issue so that they can discuss it with those who are uninformed or who hold opposing views.
2. Most people agree that the termination of a fetal life is a serious event, often with long-term emotional consequences. Nevertheless, extreme dogmatism should be avoided so that people can be open to much-needed help in dealing with this complex debate.

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