

# Testimony

## A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating March 25, 2018

Pax Christi San Antonio does not solicit donations; however, anyone wishing to join should make a donation to Pax Christi U.S.A. and notify Maria Tobin, [matob@aol.com](mailto:matob@aol.com), to receive email messages sent to members. Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas of Montauban, France, by Marthe Dortel Claudot, as a Christian lay organization dedicated to preventing a repetition of the savagery of the twentieth century's world wars.

Please do not respond to this newsletter's address; but send comments on the newsletter to [J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com](mailto:J6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com).

### Editorial

After the calendar, the *Third Reading* commentary is based on the gospel reading for Palm Sunday. Tom Keene's poem is *Reflecting on agony in a moment of peace*. See <http://www.tomkeeneandthemuse.com/index.php> for more of Tom's poems. A discussion document on abortion and the beginning of life was used as the basis of a discussion among members of Pax Christi San Antonio members. The paper follows the poem.

### Calendar

#### In Austin

**Tuesday March 20**, 6:00pm, film screening and panel discussion, "Dolores," about Dolores Huerta. Jones Global Events Center, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

**Thursday March 22**, 5:00pm, Natali Imperatori-Lee, "The Future of the Catholic Church Rooted in the Experiences and Lives of Latina/o Catholics in the United States." Jones Global Events Center, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

**Wednesday April 4**, 12:00pm-1:00pm, "The Church and Transgender Identity." Discussion based on article: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/chuch-transgender-identity>. Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

**Thursday April 5**, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Susannah E. Prucka, former Maryland appellate prosecutor, "Is the Criminal Justice System Really Broken?" Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

**Friday April 15**, 12:00pm-1:00pm, discussion; The Gamer's Dilemma-Are we comfortable with children killing an average of 100,000 people in video games by the age of 18?" Recommended reading:

[https://iainews.iai.tv/articles/the-gamers-dilemma-is-virtual-murder-morally-wrong-auid-827?utm\\_content=buffer890be&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://iainews.iai.tv/articles/the-gamers-dilemma-is-virtual-murder-morally-wrong-auid-827?utm_content=buffer890be&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress.

**Tuesday April 24**, 6:30pm-8:30pm, film by Martin Doblmeier, "An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story." Prothro Theatre, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas Austin.

**Wednesday April 25**, 9:30am-5:00pm, live streaming conference "Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice, Washington, DC (8:30am-5:00pm Eastern Time Zone). To register to view the live stream: <https://catholicismobilizing.org/event/rj-conference>. Scroll down on the site to a form.

### **In Dallas**

**Tuesday March 27**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Russians Meet Mainstream America (meeting and round table dialogues with four Russian women). Hitt Auditorium, Methodist Hospital, 1441 N. Beckley Ave. Park at the intersection of W. Colorado Blvd and N Bishop Ave.

**Wednesday April 25**, 9:30am-5:00pm, live streaming conference "Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice, Washington, DC (8:30am-5:00pm Eastern Time Zone). To register to view the live stream: <https://catholicismobilizing.org/event/rj-conference>. Scroll down on the site to a form.

### **In Houston**

**Tuesday March 20**, 12:15pm, Mary Patillo, "Statutory Inequality: Monetary Sanctions in State Law." Venue TBA—check with Dept. of Sociology, Rice University.

**Thursday March 22**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Susann C. Bon, Ph.D., J.D., "The Ethics of Special Education Leadership: Doing What Is Right for the Student." Jones Hall, University of St. Thomas, 3910 Yoakim Blvd. Fee; register at [stthom.edu/SEHSLectureSeries](http://stthom.edu/SEHSLectureSeries). Park at Moran Parking Center, \$5.00.

**Saturday March 24, 8:45am-evening. Pax Christi Texas State Conference: Paul K. Chappell of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, "Warrior Strategies for Waging Peace in a Time of Nuclear Weapons." Dominican Center for Spirituality, 6501 Almeda, Houston, Texas 77021.** Doors open 8:00am. Program: 8:45am-3:45pm, closing liturgy 4:00pm. Suggested donation \$40 individual, \$50 couple/family. Mail registration check to Pax Christi Texas, 3901 Mattie St., Austin, TX 78723, by March 1. Some single rooms with shared bath available at the Center, \$40 per night; breakfast included. Contact Sr. Adrian Dover 713-440-3708.

**Wednesday April 25**, 9:30am-5:00pm, live streaming conference "Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice, Washington, DC (8:30am-5:00pm Eastern Time Zone). To register to view the live stream: <https://catholicismobilizing.org/event/rj-conference>. Scroll down on the site to a form.

## **In San Antonio**

**Tuesday March 20**, 9:30am-11:00am, Centro Alliance education opportunity: “A Compassionate Approach to Homelessness.” Geekdom Events Center, 131 Soledad St.

**Tuesday March 20**, 6:00pm-8:00pm, film: “Dirt! The Movie,” concerning destruction of the natural surface environment. Eco Centro, 1802 N. Main.

**Wednesday March 21**, 11:30am-12:30pm, panel discussion: Chicana Movement—Women-Led Social Justice Action in San Antonio. Ozuna Legacy Lounge, Palo Alto College, 1400 W. Villaret Blvd.

**Wednesday March 21**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Salman Hameed, Ph.D., “The Crescent in the Scientific Age: Muslim Perceptions of Science and Religion.” University Center, Conference Room A, St. Mary’s University, One Camino Santa Maria.

**Friday March 23**, 7:00pm-9:30pm, film and panel discussion: “A Strike and an Uprising (in Texas).” Focuses on the 1938 peacan shellers’ strike and 1987 jobs with justice march. Esperanza Peace & Justice Center, 922 San Pedro.

**Saturday March 24**, 10:00am-5:00pm, Cesar E. Chavez 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual March for Justice. Begins at 1301 Guadalupe. Participants are encouraged to bring a can of food for the San Antonio Food Bank truck.

**Wednesday April 4**, 11:00am-12:15pm, Multi-faith Dialogue Panel: “Beyond the Gender Divide,” on gender inequality and religious traditions. Huisache Hall, Northwest Vista College, 3535 N. Ellison Dr.

**Tuesday April 10**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Lauren Turek, Ph.D., “Religion, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement.” SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook): \$20. Register at <http://www.upsa.org/sol-calendar/2018/4/10/religion-race-and-the-civil-rights-movement-with-lauren-turek>.

**Friday April 13**, 1:30pm-**Saturday April 14**, 5:0pm, interfaith conference “Religion and Climate Change: Taking Our Planet Back.” Featured speakers are Sr. Linda Gibler, Oblate School of Theology; Douglas Melnick, City of San Antonio; Rear Admiral “Len” Hering, Center for Climate and Security (Washington, DC); and Gerald Durley, Providence Missionary Baptist Church (Atlanta). Chapman Center, Trinity University, One Trinity Place. Details at [https://events-trinity.edu/events/religion\\_and\\_climate\\_change\\_conference](https://events-trinity.edu/events/religion_and_climate_change_conference). Free; required registration from the website.

**Saturday April 14**, 9:00am-12:00pm, Rev. Dr. Mitzi J. Smith, “Womanism, Biblical Interpretation, and Social (In)Justice.” Whitley Center, Oblate School of Theology, 285 Oblate Drive, \$40. For information: Thelma at 210-341-1366, ext. 230.

**Tuesday April 17**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Ed Westermann, “Genocide.” SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). \$20; register before April 10 at [www.upcsa.org/registration](http://www.upcsa.org/registration).

**Tuesday April 24**, 7:00pm-9:00pm, Sarwat Hussain, “Causes and Implications of Rohingya Genocide.” SoL Center, University Presbyterian Church, 300 Bushnell (park off Shook). \$20; register before April 17 at [www.upcsa.org/registration](http://www.upcsa.org/registration).

**Wednesday April 25**, 9:30am-5:00pm, live streaming conference “Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice, Washington, DC (8:30am-5:00pm Eastern Time Zone). To register to view the live stream: <https://catholicismobilizing.org/event/rj-conference>. Scroll down on the site to a form.

### **Third Reading** (Mark 14:1-15:47)

There are actually two gospel readings for Palm Sunday, both from the *Gospel of Mark*. The first is read at the beginning of mass, before the entry into the church for the main liturgy (Mark 11:1-10). It contains allusions to the “minor” prophetic book *Zechariah*. Historically, Jesus may have re-enacted the prophecy to indicate the peaceful nature of his messiahship:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem.  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
Triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on an ass,  
on a colt the foal of an ass.  
I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
And the war horse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
And he shall command peace to the nations;  
His dominion shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)

The context of the passage has themes of war and conquest, creating a curious juxtaposition with the celebration of peace. The juxtaposition also characterizes Zechariah 14, which speaks of the Mount of Olives (14:4), which Mark’s passage also mentions. We can only take this as an exposition of mixed emotions on the part of Mark and Zechariah both—troubled anxiety and peaceful acceptance at the prospect of bringing divine peace to a troubled and troubling world, with the knowledge that the world would turn against the humble king riding a donkey colt.

Jesus seems to have had two followings—his band of Galileans and another group based in Jerusalem. Denominations evidently existed from the beginning of the Christian movement. The Jerusalem band pre-arranged an “upper room” which the evangelist associates with the Christian Eucharistic meal. The meal, described along with the crucifixion in the main gospel reading, has the familiar discourse of “this is my

body” and “this is my blood,” prefiguring the drama to come, wherein the Messiah is both present and absented, imparting life and departing from life. Judas cannot endure the loss of what is valuable and who is valued, and joins the world of the apparent winners. Peter, a stand-in for “everyman” in the narrative, finds himself caught up in the cross currents.

There is no simple flight from the world in this religious expression; the Messiah goes right into Jerusalem. Nor is there an accommodation to the ways of the world. Like a conscience, the Messiah neither stays clear nor forces compliance.

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## Poem

### *Reflecting on agony in a moment of peace*

To stand affirmed and at one  
at the center of person,  
to begin where we are,  
so the future flows out  
from the presence of now.

With Adam  
we walk  
in the garden

Then, inundated by busyness  
and the glittering sequence of things,  
our eyes glance away from the heart  
and our hearing turns out

in our Eden  
erupted by  
Adam made many.

The opening and shutting of vision,  
the cupping and muffling of ears,  
the remembering and forgetting.

Piquant and bland  
is the fruit  
of the tree.

In our thrusting out and shrinking back  
we brave out our fears.

Our cowardice dies in the living of it,  
our courage lives in its daily dying.

From Eden's nourishing womb,  
we climb with Calvary's tree,  
ill content with peace we've known,  
risking it all for an Easter dawn.

Tom Keene 1969

## **Abortion: Beyond Slogans and Placards**

### **Background considerations**

Abortion as a political issue is divisive, and the acrimony associated with it carries over into discussions of such other topics as government regulations over health insurance and stem-cell research. It is not a simple issue that the public can address adequately with the medium of slogans and rhetoric. Even when careful pollsters try to obtain some sense of the public sentiment on the issue, the "results" vary with how the questions are worded. While at times there appears to be a "culture war" going on between the advocates of "pro-choice" and those of "pro-life" positions, much of the public sees merit to both positions, holding views that are more nuanced than those of the culture war combatants.<sup>1</sup> In an endeavor to promote a more rational mode of discourse, this essay explores such matters as the beginning of life, and related to that what is meant by "life," as well as the role of law and morality in society. It summarizes a number of positions that people advocate, but while it seeks to show the rationales behind the various positions, it does not itself advocate any one of them.

Most of the debate pertains to abortions performed where the bearing mother's life is not in danger from the pregnancy and where the pregnancy is not the result of rape or incest. The reasons why these two exceptions are made by many who would otherwise oppose abortions are rarely spelled out. The case of a pregnancy endangering the life of the mother falls under the traditional principle of double effect, wherein there is no alternative to the action of performing the abortion and the intent of those responsible for it is attached to saving the life of the mother and not to taking the

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<sup>1</sup> See the *Resolution concerning Abortion and Ministry in the Local Church* of the General Board of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., 8006.5:12/87: "We acknowledge the diversity of deeply held convictions within our fellowship even as we seek to interpret the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many American Baptists believe that, biblically, human life begins at conception, that abortion is immoral and a destruction of a human being created in God's image (Job 31:15; Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:44; proverbs 31:8-9; Galatians 1:15). Many others believe that while abortion is a regrettable reality, it can be a morally acceptable action and they choose to act on the biblical principles of compassion and justice (John 8:1-11; Exodus 21:22-25; Mathew 7:1-5; James 2:2-13) and freedom of will (John 16:13; Romans 14:4-5, 10-13). Many gradations of opinion between these basic positions have been expressed within our fellowship." It should be noted that considerable interpretation is required to find support for any given position on abortion from the biblical citations that are provided.

life of the unborn. In 1991, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America social statement on abortion provided such a rationale for the second exception:

A woman should not be morally obligated to carry the resulting pregnancy to term if the pregnancy occurs when both parties do not participate willingly in sexual intercourse. This is especially true in cases of rape and incest. This can also be the case in some situations in which women are so dominated and oppressed that they have no choice regarding sexual intercourse and little access to contraceptives. Some conceptions occur under dehumanizing conditions that are contrary to God's purposes.<sup>2</sup>

The statement, in effect, bases its reasoning on justice for the bearing mother.

Law itself is not a simple matter. There are criminal law and civil law, and these two work in quite different ways. Criminal law is an intervention by a legitimate government in order to prevent and substitute for private revenge; rather than aggrieved partisans of a victim wreaking vengeance on a perpetrator, the government prosecutes a case against an alleged perpetrator and must convince a neutral judge or jury beyond a reasonable doubt that a statute had been violated and that the accused perpetrated the deed that violated the statute. In the matter of an abortion, differences arose historically over reasonable doubt, not usually over who was responsible but over whether a life had been taken. Differences also arose over whether government has any business criminalizing abortion procedures; in American law the Tenth Amendment speaks of powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution nor prohibited to the States being reserved to the States or to the people. The courts hold that at least *some* abortion decisions are reserved to the people. This is popularly termed a "right to privacy." Since the courts have established this precedent, it is unlikely that it will be reversed because of the principle of *stare decisis*: because of that principle, it is simply unfair to convict someone for something that had been declared by the courts beforehand not to be a crime at all. Since the Supreme Court established the precedent on constitutional rather than statutory grounds, the passage of laws re-criminalizing the kinds of abortion in question will not ultimately change the state of the legal situation, since the new laws too would be declared unconstitutional and set aside.

Civil laws often provide benefits to the people collectively, as in provisions for the common defense, or to people individually, as in such programs as Social Security and Medicare. Early in the history of the Republic, for example, Congress imposed a payroll tax on mariners in support of hospitals for their medical needs. What benefits are to be provided and which categories of people are covered by any given program is up to Congress, provided that there is no discrimination in violation of the equal protection of the laws principle as articulated in the Fourteenth Amendment. Congress has legislated that federal appropriations not fund elective abortion procedures. In this sense, there is no "right to an abortion." The civil statute in question, popularly known as the "Hyde Amendment," can be changed by Congress; however, there is good reason for not legislating such a change, since doing so would require people who have moral objections to abortion to help fund it, contrary to their own consciences.

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<sup>2</sup> *A Social Statement on Abortion*, adopted by a more than two-thirds majority vote at the second biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, meeting in Orlando, Florida, August 28-September 4, 1991.

In past centuries, whether an act of infanticide took place, as opposed to an occurrence of a still birth, was ascertained by removing the lungs and seeing whether they would float in water. The thinking was that if it were not a still birth, the new born would have taken a breath and therefore filled its lungs with air. Medical science would not hold that procedure to be accurate today, but it had a certain reasonability about it. If the new born manifested one or more vital signs, it was deemed to have been alive at some time; however, if there were no evidence of one or more vital signs, it cannot be determined that there had been a live infant and hence any conviction of infanticide could not be made beyond a reasonable doubt. One of the medical reasons for rejecting the procedure is that the time of birth no longer marks the moment after which one can observe whether or not there are vital signs. Prior to birth, it is possible in our technological age to observe movement, pulse, nutrients and oxygen being supplied through the blood circulatory system, and growth. Statutes and court rulings have sought to indicate the presence of such vital signs prior to birth with the admittedly crude measure of the number of weeks a pregnancy has run its course.

### **Morality versus Law**

What morality may require and what law may require sometimes differ. The historic peace churches, for example, find that the two kinds of imperative require contrary lines of action when a war has been declared. This does not mean that the two kinds of imperative are mutually irrelevant; the law often serves as the teacher of non-believers. Where believers would have all citizens refrain from what a law may permit, they may engage in prophetic discourse. In the example of the peace churches, those in other traditions who are not pacifists may hold those churches in high regard and find the world safer and saner where the voices of the members of the peace churches argue and caution against war, lest the nation enter into conflict too readily. In effect, the peace churches serve as a teaching voice in society, lest daily life be reduced to the minimally acceptable behavior that is required by law. Similarly, where law permits abortions under some conditions (usually expressed in terms of a number of weeks of pregnancy, danger to the life of the bearing mother, or after a rape), the prophetic voice of those who object morally to abortion under some or all of the legally permitted conditions urge people to aspire to a higher level of morality, as they see it, than what is minimally acceptable under the law.

One important facet of morality holds that one should refrain from an action where there is doubt. A host should not serve food if there is doubt over whether or not it is contaminated, or use an infant car seat if there is doubt over whether it is safe. In contrast, as noted above, criminal law does not convict where there is reasonable doubt. Consequently, there is a gap between what morality requires and what criminal law requires. Reasonable people would not want a moral code to be propagated that discourages people from refraining from possibly causing harm under circumstances of reasonable doubt, and reasonable people would not want a legal code to convict under circumstances where there is reasonable doubt that harm has been caused. Consequently, the legal status of a given abortion procedure does not determine its moral status, and its moral status does not determine its legality. There is a space between the criteria for moral action and the criteria for legal action, a space in which some abortion procedures may be located.



## Implications of Religious Pluralism

Statutes that criminalize categories of action, such as murder, fraud, assault, and tax evasion, can certainly be enacted on moral grounds. The fact that they may parallel religious proscriptions does not render them invalid. However, within a constitutional framework that allows for no establishment of religion, proscribing an action because of a uniquely religious tenet would be invalid. Criminalizing the teaching of evolution because of a literal reading of the creation poem in the biblical book of Genesis would not be a valid law. Similarly penalizing a public educator under civil law for teaching evolution would be unconstitutional. Conversely in public schools, teaching intelligent design as science (as opposed to a proposition in the history of philosophy) uniquely on the basis of the Genesis creation poem would be unconstitutional. The United States is a religiously pluralist society, and since the time of the adoption of the First Amendment to the Constitution federal law has respected a separation of church and state. The Fourteenth Amendment extended this separation to the several states.

Applying this same framework to abortion procedures, laws can validly proscribe the taking of pre-natal life where it can be demonstrated that a life would be taken, without recourse to uniquely religious tenets that a life and not something less than a life is in question (and the life of the bearing mother is not in manifest danger). In saying this, it is not maintained that there should or should not be such laws, but only that the religiously pluralist nature of American society and a Constitution so written to respect that pluralism appear to disallow proscribing the taking of a life where only a uniquely religious tenet would hold that a life is in question in the first place. For this reason, it is important to specify when life can be shown to exist *on non-religious grounds*.

## Stages in the Early Development of a Life

### *The Moment of Conception*

Some people hold that life begins at the time of conception. In terms of abortion, a first issue is whether traditional religious teachings pertain to “the moment of conception.”<sup>3</sup> A very early Christian teaching (*Didache* ch. 2) articulates a commandment not to kill a child by abortion, but it does not specify when a life is present so that a killing would be taking place. Modern parallels say much the same thing: Pope Pius XI, for example, says that “taking of the life of the offspring hidden in the mother’s womb” is a “very grave crime” (*Casti Conubii* 63), assuming that a life is already there to be taken. Similarly, the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et Spes* 51) said—“So therefore life from a conception must be guarded with utmost care; abortion and also infanticide are abominable crimes”—it did not say how close to the time of conception a life is present to be guarded.<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II tried to be very precise: “...a procured abortion, *however it is accomplished, is indeed a direct killing of a human in its initial time of life, which runs its course between conception and birth*” (*Evangelium*

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<sup>3</sup> A Southern Baptist Convention meeting passed a resolution that said in part, that “the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Columbus Ohio, June `6-17, 2015, affirm the dignity and sanctity of human life at all stages of development, from conception to natural death....”

<sup>4</sup> The common English translation gets this wrong: “Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception....” The Latin reads, “Vita igitur inde a conceptione, maxima cura tuenda est; abortus necnon infanticidium nefanda sunt crimina.” If the intent were to indicate life is present “from the moment of conception,” the Latin would have read “de puncto conceptionis.”

*Vitae* 58).<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the traditional Christian belief is that there is life before birth, but no formula specifies at what point life begins prior to birth. The phases of development prior to birth have been observed to have implications for the morality of a given abortion.<sup>6</sup>

With the benefit of science, one can identify the moment of conception as the usual point in time that genetic individuation begins to occur. The conceptus has different genes from those of the bearing mother, and in that sense it is not a “part of her body.” But is genetic individuation “life”? If by “life” one means protoplasm that can undergo cell division, there is life. However, well after birth a severed limb has life in that sense, but it is not “alive” in the same way that the person who lost the limb is alive. Even when someone dies, there are live cells that survive for a while. Moreover, there is the phenomenon of twinning; when would there be one life and when two? There is also the rare occurrence of two concepti merging to become one; has one of the “lives” been lost? While it is possible for some to believe that life of a kind that merits protection can begin at conception, such a conviction would come from religious grounds (other than Christian tradition) and not knowledge based on observation and reason. As noted above, in a pluralist society a law, in contradistinction to a moral stance, must be based on something other than a uniquely religious tenet.

Whether one takes the moment of conception to be the beginning of life has a practical implication. Those who hold this view have a rationale for regarding some methods of birth control as abortifacients. The “morning after pill,” for example, prevents the implantation of a conceptus into the uterine wall. While one issue arises whether the use or even manufacture of such a pill should be allowed under law, another is whether federal governmental funds could be used for such pills. Those who believe life begins with conception could argue, logically, that using federal funds in that way would be contrary to the Hyde Amendment. Another issue involves the free exercise of religion provision of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution; some argue that a governmentally mandated participation in an insurance plan that covers such pills infringes upon the free exercise of a religious stance that opposes the pills. As of this writing, the Department of Health and Human Services has accommodated religious

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<sup>5</sup> Again, English readers have been at the mercy of a faulty translation: “...procured abortion is *the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth.*” The Latin of the key phrase reads “inter conceptionem decurrit et partuitionem; *inter* clearly means “between,” not “from...to.”

<sup>6</sup> The *Social Statement on Abortion* adopted by a more than two-thirds majority vote at the second biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) meeting in Orlando, Florida, August 28-September 4, 1991: “Although abortion raises significant moral issues at any stage of fetal development, the closer the life in the womb comes to full term the more serious such issues become. When a child can survive outside a womb, it becomes possible for other people, and not only the mother, to nourish and care for the child. This church opposes ending intrauterine life when a fetus is developed enough to live outside a uterus with the aid of reasonable and necessary technology. If a pregnancy needs to be interrupted after this point, every reasonable and necessary effort should be made to support this life, unless here are lethal fetal abnormalities indicating that the prospective newborn will die very soon.” See also the Minutes of the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 2006 of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), p. 905: “We may not know exactly when human life begins, and have but an imperfect understanding of God as the giver of life and of our own human existence, yet recognize that life is precious to God, and we should preserve and protect it.” And: “We affirm that the lives of viable unborn babies—those well-developed enough to survive outside the womb if delivered—ought to be preserved and cared for and not aborted.”

institutions that object to participating in such coverage in their mandated medical insurance plans, but the objection remains that those who object on religious grounds should not even be required to fill out forms to seek the exemption.<sup>7</sup> This bears some analogy with pacifists who decline to even register as conscientious objectors, which gives occasion to a protest more than it prevents military action from taking place.

### ***After Implantation into the Uterine Wall***

Until the conceptus has attached itself to the uterine wall, it has not grown; it has only subdivided into ever smaller cells. After implantation, however, a support system supplying nutrition and oxygen develops, ultimately becoming the umbilical cord. Significantly, growth and minimal vital signs occur from this point in time. It can be said that there is embryonic structure and function, and that is usually what is meant in biology by a living multicellular organism. Some would argue that a greater degree of integration among the bodily functions is necessary for there to be genuine life, and others note that the genetic code, while not that of the mother or of the father, is not fixed yet. Others would look for the first central nervous system activity, brain development, and cardiac activity.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless the presence of signs of life parallels the indicators used to determine whether humans near death are or are not alive. So clearly, there is human life inherent in the fetal developmental process; the issue for some is whether it is sufficiently person-like to merit protection.

A fetus reaches a significant threshold when “quickening” occurs. The nervous system has become sufficiently coherent for the limbs to move. Anecdotes suggest that memory occurs before birth, albeit not the conscious making an object of one’s past that characterizes recollection; people have been able to reproduce lines of music that had been sung by bearing mothers, without their having heard the music again after birth. It might be asked whether a right to protection depends upon a higher form of consciousness than unreflective memory; the answer would appear to be “Yes” since the right to protection is not generally denied to people who are soundly asleep, who are under an anesthetic for purposes of surgery, or who are in a non-permanent coma. Consequently there is widespread opposition to late term abortions except where serious threat from the pregnancy to the mother’s life is the concern. For example:

We oppose the use of late-term abortion known as dilation and extraction (partial-birth abortion) and call for the end of this practice except when the physical life of the mother is in danger and no other medical procedure is available, or in the case of severe fetal anomalies incompatible with life.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Under traditional moral doctrine, filling out forms for purposes of seeking an exemption is a case of mediate material cooperation that is permissible, rather than immediate moral cooperation, which is not permissible. The form-filling itself does not enable what is thought to be an abortion to occur.

<sup>8</sup> “Many regard conception (up to 72 hours after coitus), others implantation (7 days), as the beginning of an inviolable life. But while such life is human in origin and potentially human in character, the integration of bodily functions and the possibility of social interaction do not appear until later. Alternative candidates for the beginning of significantly human life are the final fixing of the genetic code (3 weeks), the first central nervous system activity (8 weeks), brain development and cardiac activity (12 weeks).” *United Church of Christ General Synod Statements and Resolutions Regarding Freedom of Choice*, Eighth General Synod, 1971, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Social Principles: The Nurturing Community. Abortion*. United Methodist Church webpage.

## **Social Context**

For some people, the presence of human life is a very important but not completely decisive factor. "An ethical view does not require an *undifferentiated* concern for life," says one church's statement. It argues that factors other than the existence of life "may appropriately be given equal or greater weight," citing "the welfare of the whole family, its economic condition, the age of the parents, their view of the optimum number of children consonant with their resources and the pressures of population," among other factors.<sup>10</sup> The statement goes on to observe that many would not agree with this assessment.

The social context is particularly important in suggesting governmental legislation. The well-being of families needs to be promoted through just wage legislation, the guaranteed provision of medical care, and physical and educational infrastructures that support large populations, educate the young about responsible sexual behavior and the value of life, and provide forms of population control other than abortion.

## **Conclusion**

There are undoubtedly important issues that have not been dealt with in these pages, but hopefully the latter contain the kind of reasonable discourse that is required for the formation of public policy. Simply selecting a preferred conclusion and marshaling arguments in support of it does not do justice to the values that inform the reasoned considerations that people have made. Unborn human life cannot be simply dismissed as the obsession of conventional people who have not thought about the issue; well-thought out sophisticated considerations support the value of life. Similarly, our legal system is an impressive civilizational achievement; there are good reasons to keep government limited and protect privacy, and to avoid legislating morality, mixing government and religion, and refraining from convicting people of murder where there is reasonable doubt that a life has been taken.

## **Links**

Pax Christi International  
<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.  
<http://www.paxchristiusa.org>

Pax Christi Texas  
<http://www.paxchristitexas.org>

Pax Christi Dallas

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<sup>10</sup> *United Church of Christ General Synod Statements and Resolutions Regarding Freedom of Choice*, Eighth General Synod, 1971, p. 2.

<http://www.Paxchristidallastx.org>

Pax Christi San Antonio

<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative

[www.msjc.net](http://www.msjc.net)

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee

<http://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center

<http://www.sanantoniopace.center>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)

<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty

[www.txccedp.org](http://www.txccedp.org)

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio

[www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/](http://www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/)

Climate Change

[www.creation-care.com](http://www.creation-care.com)