THE ETHICS OF ABORTION:
RETHINKING THE CHURCH'S MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF PHI800
ETHICAL ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI

AUGUST 10, 2012
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The following discussion seeks to address the issues related to abortion from an ethical framework. That said, the author makes several ethical assumptions not argued within the paper. First and most importantly, the author assumes God as the source of and standard for morality. Second, because Jesus is the Son of God, the author assumes the character traits, teachings, and actions of Jesus reflect the character traits, commands, and actions of God the Father. Finally, the author assumes the Church universal should live and demonstrate a morally right way of life because of her relationship to Christ and the mandate to make disciples.

With this in mind, the purpose for choosing this topic came as the result of many personal conversations with Chris Lamberth in regard to the shortcomings of the various ethical systems. In part, this paper serves as the initial formulation of an ethical system as applied to the issues of abortion. While an error-free system may seem idyllic and unattainable because of sin, the author sees the possibility that this kind of system may exist with certain qualifications. For example, perhaps an error-filled system indicates the nature of humanity. If this proves true, an error-free ethical system must take this tendency to err into account. It is the author's opinion in the early formulation of this framework that Christ and the Gospel of grace serve this purpose.

The author hopes this paper will serve to test the proverbial waters with this new infantile framework. Success may only come with time. However, if this attempt fails miserably, perhaps the ideas presented may provide the foundation for other successful attempts. In this way, the rethinking of Christian ethics may continue to grow the Church regardless the conclusion.

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1For a development of this conclusion, see Scott Rae, Moral Choices (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 47-51; Norman Geisler, Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 121.

2Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Ephesians 4:1-16. Because of this nature of morality and the Church and the reason for discussing abortion here, the author will also omit legal details of landmark court cases. If morality truly comes from God, the decision of a court cannot form the basis for morality as well.
CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC OF ABORTION ISSUES

It takes very little research to notice the diversity of opinions on the issues of abortion, even among Evangelicals. The result of a recent Pew Forum survey on the legality of abortion illustrates this point.³ This should cause the concerned believer to question the status of the Church’s role as salt and light in the world. Although average church members may like to think the Church unanimous on abortion, the Pew Forum survey tells a different story.

So then, what causes this diversity of opinion? Do the intellectuals of today fail to interpret and understand the facts about an unborn fetus? Do the traditional pro-choice and pro-life camps fail to understand each other, missing the valid points of each argument? Have they lost sight of some larger issue in search of a victory in the abortion debate? Any approach to the issues of abortion must consider these questions and the reason for diverse opinions.⁴ It must also consider all the factors, both ethical and social, related to the issues of abortion.

Rather than approaching these issues deductively, this paper will attempt to build a framework inductively. This will allow a step-by-step analysis of the issues to determine the reason for the prominence of abortion issues and diversity of opinions. In keeping with Western empiricism, the first step will examine the issues as they stand in the understanding of humanity today. Perhaps a rethinking of the Church's stance will allow a more unified voice to emerge from the Church representing the one source for morality, God.

³In short, 33% of the 9472 Evangelicals surveyed believed abortion should be legal in all or most cases, 36% believed it should be illegal in most cases, 25% believed it should be illegal in all cases, and 6% did not know or refused to answer (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Portrait and Demographics of United states Religious Affiliation -- Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life," Religion in American Culture, http://religions.pewforum.org/portraits [accessed August 1, 2012]).

⁴Undoubtedly, more reasons for differing opinions exist. However, if morality comes from God's standard, the Church should find common ground. Simple explanations of differing cultures and environments cannot provide a reason for the different opinions among the members of the Church.
CHAPTER 2
THE ISSUES OF ABORTION

The issues of abortion may come from, as noted above, different interpretations of facts concerning the development of life and the issues of human rights. This section seeks to present these facts in an objective way so as to determine the source of the different interpretations. If different interpretations come from differing facts, no conflict remains. However, the differing opinions may also see the fact and interpret the fact similarly yet arrive at different conclusions. If the differences come from this source, other presuppositions may become a factor.

Before diving in to the facts, a definition of the term abortion serves to bring the author and reader to use the term with the same meaning. According to C. Everett Koop, Surgeon General under President Reagan, an abortion consists of terminating a pregnancy on demand at any time during the pregnancy. The mother or another person on behalf of the mother may cause this termination. However, the mother remains the only one with the ability to request or carry out the abortion. With this definition in mind, one may approach the facts related to it.

The Facts about Pregnancy and Abortion

First, to fully understand what it means to terminate a pregnancy, one must have an understanding of the details of a pregnancy. The best way to describe this lies in describing the development of the fetus from the moment of conception. At this moment, two sets of twenty-

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6The decision of Roe v. Wade in 1973 gave the mother legal privacy in regard to her own womb, paving the way for future legalization of abortion throughout the United States. Cf. Scott Rae, Moral Choices (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 122-3.

7It should also be noted here that the issues related to abortion extend prior to the event of conception to the
three chromosomes come together in egg and sperm, individually called gametes, to form a single cell with forty-six chromosomes.\textsuperscript{8} This cell, known as a zygote, multiplies through nuclear division.\textsuperscript{9} As the division continues, a blastula, a small group of cells, form, part of which become the embryo and part of which become the surrounding membrane.\textsuperscript{10} Within one month, the embryo develops distinctive tissues and precursors for body parts, and by two months, those body parts become definable.\textsuperscript{11} During the next four months, through the end of the second trimester, the fetus continues to develop and grow in size. At this point, with the assistance of modern medicine, the fetus has the potential to survive outside the womb.\textsuperscript{12} Once developed, the pregnancy ends in birth, either natural or through the assistance of medicine.

Understanding this developmental process allows one to examine and understand the different types of abortive procedures. According to Koop, physicians use three types of abortive methods.\textsuperscript{13} Francis Beckwith and Norman Geisler expand the list to six, more specific, methods.\textsuperscript{14} During the early stages of fetal development, the physician uses tools to enter the uterus through the vagina and manually removes the developing fetus by cutting and scraping or


\textsuperscript{9} Chappell points out the union between dying egg and dying sperm results in an abnormal zygote, most of which spontaneously abort (Chappell, 156). This should factor into one's concept of when human life begins.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. This also raises an interesting question for those who consider conception the beginning of life. If a part of the zygote becomes nothing more than surrounding membrane and not an actual part of the human, the zygote may not constitute a human.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 157.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 158.

\textsuperscript{13} Koop, 10.

\textsuperscript{14} Francis Beckwith and Norman Geisler, \textit{Matters of Life and Death} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 31. Koop describes three general types, Beckwith and Geisler describe six specific methods. Neither, however, takes into account the use if intrauterine devices and pills to prevent the implantation of the newly formed embryo in the uterine wall (cf. Chappell, 161-2).
by suction. These two methods results in considerable bleeding and hemorrhaging of the woman and, because of safety issues, remains an option during the first trimester.

Once the second trimester begins, the abortive procedure becomes more difficult. According to Koop, the preferred method during this stage consists of poisoning the amniotic fluid, usually with a saline solution.\textsuperscript{15} This effectively poisons the fetus with working lungs as it breathes in the poisonous material. This method kills the fetus within a few hours.\textsuperscript{16} Physicians also use a method known as dilation and evacuation during the second trimester. Similar to the cutting and scraping away of the fetus during the first trimester, this method involves cutting up and removing the fetus piece by piece.\textsuperscript{17}

Beginning in the third trimester, the risk to the mother increases drastically. Unlike the previous four methods, the methods of abortion during the final trimester must deal with a larger, more developed fetus. These methods include a hysterotomy, the removal of the fetus through major surgery as with a caesarean section, and prostaglandin, the induction of early intense labor through drugs that results in the death of the fetus.\textsuperscript{18}

Understanding these developmental stages and the procedures of abortion throughout the stages provides one with the information to assess the issues of abortion from a philosophical perspective. If the Church must make a decision on the natural facts alone, a utilitarian conclusion results, usually for the benefit of the mother. However, for the sake of objectivity, a philosophical consideration must factor into the decision as well.

\textsuperscript{15}Koop, 10-1. In this method, the skin of the fetus begins to burn away. Approximately one day later, the mother enters labor and delivers a "dead, shriveled baby." Koop, 11.

\textsuperscript{16}However, this does not always happen. According to Chappell, abortions using this method do not guarantee the death of the fetus and live births have been documented (Chappell, 163).

\textsuperscript{17}Cf. Beckwith and Geisler, 33; Beckwith and Geisler, 32-33. These two methods result in a high rate of live birth after which the fetus dies from neglect.
Philosophical Considerations

According to Rae, "Most philosophers agree that the fetus either has personhood from the point of conception or it acquires it at some point during the process of gestation."\(^{19}\) Although genetically human, the status of person provides the fetus with the same moral privileges as a full adult. One may make a distinction between personhood and humanity, as some philosophers and ethicists do.\(^ {20}\) However, this distinction remains somewhat arbitrary and problematic, according to Beckwith and Geisler, because it confuses function and essence.\(^ {21}\) For the sake of argument, this section will assume this lack of distinction. If no difference between being human and being a person exists, the key to understanding and applying morality to abortion lies in the moment the cell(s) become a person. For some, this occurs at conception, the moment a genetically unique entity begins to exist.\(^ {22}\) Others label the fetus a person from the moment it begins to move, also known as quickening.\(^ {23}\) Finally, still others believe this occurs at birth.\(^ {24}\) When this occurs, the status of the fetus remains crucial for making an ethical decision on abortion.

One must also consider the issues of human rights.\(^ {25}\) This presents the most difficult

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\(^{19}\) Rae, 138.


\(^{21}\) Beckwith and Geisler, 85.


\(^{23}\) Cf. Rae, 140.

\(^{24}\) See Norman Geisler, Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 132-3.

\(^{25}\) If the fetus acquires personhood, the Fourteenth Amendment potentially protects the life of that person. However, one cannot rely on the government as the source of basic human rights or even the protector of human rights. The Declaration of Independence points to the Creator as the source of the rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." As Joe Trull and James Carter note, "Christians must never expect a political ruler to enforce their faith or morals. The church must never become a political power broker." Joe Trull and James Carter, Ministerial Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 143.
ethical dilemma in the issues of abortion. If both the mother and the fetus receive all the benefits of personhood, the benefits clash if one threatens the life of the other, or if one interferes with the privacy of the other. Beverly Harrison argues extensively for the rights of the mother to act in her own best interests in issues of life and death, procreation, and privacy.\textsuperscript{26} However, her conclusion results from the assumption that the fetus does not constitute a full person. On the other hand, those who argue for the rights of the fetus sacrifice, in some way, the rights of the mother. Granted, in the case of voluntary sexual intercourse, one may claim the mother has given up her rights with knowledge of the consequences of that act.\textsuperscript{27} However, this does not account for cases of rape in which the woman becomes pregnant involuntarily. While the personhood of the fetus may remain the most vital aspect of the philosophical considerations, the issues of human rights remain the most problematic and difficult to reconcile.\textsuperscript{28}

If one can overcome the issues of human rights, one must then consider the ethical issues involved in killing or euthanizing a person.\textsuperscript{29} If the fetus remains a person, and if the rights of the mother trump the rights of that person, the mother must consider how best to end the life of this person. In cases of life-threatening pregnancies, the issue seems simple. From a utilitarian perspective, the death of one is better than the death of two. Therefore, one should die to avoid the death of two. In other non-life-threatening situations, one must consider whether or not the

\textsuperscript{26}Beverly Harrison, \textit{Our Right to Choose} (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1983).

\textsuperscript{27}Many who favor the rights of the mother point to this kind of situation, as does Judith Thomson (Judith Thomson, "A Defense of Abortion," in \textit{Ethics}, eds. Steven Cahn and Peter Markie [New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998], 737-40).

\textsuperscript{28}Thomson notes the right to life as highly problematic when dealing with issues of human rights (Thomson, 741).

\textsuperscript{29}The issues of euthanasia lie beyond the scope of this paper. For an excellent summary of the issues, see James Rachels, "Active and Passive Euthanasia," in \textit{Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues}, 778-81; Geisler, 160-79.
killing represents a just cause.\textsuperscript{30}

These philosophical considerations form a complex string of interrelated issues that the Church must work through in order to make a decision about abortion from more than a natural basis and in addition to the teaching of Scripture discussed below. The personhood of the fetus remains primary; if the fetus does not constitute a person, the abortion is philosophically and ethically no worse than removing an unwanted growth. However, if the fetus does constitute a person, the issues of human rights pose a difficult, and as of yet unsolved, problem. Finally, even if one could overcome these problems, he or she must grapple with issues of killing and euthanasia. With these considerations in place, one may examine the conflicts and the attempted arguments of thinkers and ethicists in recent history.

\textbf{Conflicts in the Abortion Issues}

When considering the different arguments both for and against abortion, one should note the sincerity of the arguments from both sides. Most sincerely desire good for humanity in one way or another. However, as noted above, the diversity of interpretations remains astounding. One may expect the camps for and against abortion to divide evenly between liberals and conservatives respectively. However, the lines become blurred on closer inspection.

For example, Virginia Mollenkott, who professes Christianity and champions for women's rights and for the rights of homosexuals, firmly argues for the right of women to choose in matters of human rights and procreation. She states, "If Christians truly care about justice for women, for people of other cultures than white, and for the poor as well as the rich, we will restrain ourselves from the coercions involved in civil religion and will work to assure the

\footnote{\textsuperscript{30}For a fuller summary of the ethics involved in active and passive euthanasia as well as just and unjust killing, see Geisler's chapter on Infanticide and Euthanasia (Geisler, 160-79).}
availability of legal, medically safe abortion services for those who need them.  

31 Some conservatives echo this conviction and believe the solution to the issues of abortion lie in allowing the human rights of the mother to trump the rights, if any, of the fetus.  

32 Along these same lines, some liberals, such as Judith Thomson, defend abortion by appealing to the rights of women while granting the personhood of the fetus.  

33 Finally, others, such as Peter Singer, deny the personhood of the fetus until it gains sentience and find no moral issue with terminating a pregnancy.  

34 Those who take up the label "pro-choice" do so in the hope of securing freedom for women and the protection of human rights. Although the solutions range from Peter Singer's denial of personhood to Judith Thomson's hypothetical acceptance of personhood, each chooses to make a stand on the issues of human rights.  

Conservative Christians traditionally join the pro-life side, as do churches that engage in the abortion debate. The arguments offered by this side vary just like the pro-choice side. According to J. Robert Nelson, many abortion opponents ignore theological and ethical considerations and rely on science, facts, and statistics, making human rights the focus and matching their pro-choice opponents.  

35 However, others argue on strictly philosophical grounds, making the personhood of the fetus the issue.  


33 Thomson, 737. Thomson later compares the fetus to a dying violinist connected to a kidnapped individual. In her argument, the kidnapped individual has no moral obligation to maintain the life of the violinist, however, human he may be (Ibid., 738). In the end, Thomson notes her argument does not apply to the early abortion of a fetus, which "is surely not the killing of a person" (Ibid., 748).  

34 Cf. Rae, 140.  


As the two sides approach the issues of abortion, one should note the continual reliance on the above facts and philosophical considerations. Additionally, many on both sides appeal to Scripture, admitting the religious nature of the abortion issues. However, as noted above, the primary issues for all remain the personhood of the fetus; the issues of human rights remain secondary to that issue, and the issues of death follow behind them. Meanwhile, the Church remains in the crossfire with professed Christians on both sides of the debate. The stakes for both sides remain high as each champion for what may be considered ethical absolutes.

In this, it seems the two general sides have reached an impasse. However, they must arrive at a solution because of the severity of the consequences. If the pro-choice conclusion proves valid, the pro-life group has unjustly restricted the freedom of American women and the Church, on the whole, has contradicted the message of Christ. On the other hand, if the pro-life conclusion proves valid, the pro-choice group has unjustly participated in the death of millions, and could turn away from the source of morality they opposed, whether God or natural Law. While these two results may seem extreme, undesirable consequences will, no doubt, result for the Church if either side has the final word. This evokes a further question: Does a final decision that benefits the Church even exist?

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37 Geisler summarizes these appeals in three categories: appeals to the inhumanity of the fetus, appeals to the humanity of the fetus, and appeals to the potential humanity of the fetus (Geisler, 133-4; 135-6; 143-4).

38 One should also note the varying official views of denominations. For example, the Roman Catholics vehemently oppose all forms of abortion (cf. John Paul II, The Gospel of Life [New York, NY: Random House, 1995]).


40 According to Frederick Bauerschmidt, "It is also evident that the debate is one that has, on the whole, gone nowhere, except toward a further hardening of positions on both sides. One might expect that the shared commitment to human rights would provide common ground upon which the issue could be discussed. Yet, what seems like common ground—human beings as possessors of rights, government as the protector of those rights—yields virtually nothing by way of agreement on the question of abortion." Frederick Bauerschmidt, "Being Baptized: Bodies and Abortion," in The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2011), 290.
CHAPTER 3

THE NEED FOR A SOLUTION

Before proposing possible solutions, the Church should, in addition to the conflicts above, examine the solutions put forth by each side and the consequences of those solutions. This will allow the Church to avoid making the mistakes of the past and strategically maximize her potential for proclaiming the Gospel. These attempted solutions come from both the political and philosophical arenas.

The Consequences of Political Arguments

These attempted solutions carry consequences for both sides as noted above. For instance, Marcia Pally notes the previous generation of Evangelicals opposed abortion through "harassing women at family-planning clinics [and] threatening or killing doctors who perform abortion."\(^{41}\) However, she continues, "'new evangelicals' hold that the Christlike relationship to pregnant women is one of service, requiring that evangelicals provide financial, medical, and emotional support for pregnant women pre- and postpartum."\(^{42}\) The earlier generation of pro-choice opponents, both from inside and outside the Church, engaged in activist solutions that spoke in public places and others labeled them as radicals.\(^{43}\) As a result, the pro-life position becomes a position of ignorant activists who fail to value human rights. The latter generation, those Pally calls "new evangelicals," propose a loving and active solution. However, this results in a society that relies on the Church for provision during pregnancy. While this may or may not

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\(^{42}\)Ibid.

\(^{43}\)According to Burton Pierce, "The Church's position on pro-life has been sadly weakened as a result of its identifying with or refusing to dissociate itself from radical opponents of abortion." Burton Pierce, *Ministerial Ethics* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1996), 149; Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:3-4; Ephesians 6:12.
lower the abortion rate, a society that relies on the Church for provision turns the Church into a political and economic power. This may not prove beneficial for the Church as time continues. In addition, as Bauerschmidt noted above, none of these solutions have progressed the debate.

On the other side, pro-choice proponents offer political solutions as varied as the pro-life proponents. Those, like Thomson and Harrison, believe the solution to the issues lies in providing women with the choice and empowering them to take their place in society as equals with men. When this occurs, the pro-life proponents will, in their arguments, stop persecuting the rights of women. Some look at the psychiatric effects of continuing an unwanted pregnancy and believe these, at times, negative effects trump other arguments. However, just like the pro-life proponents, the pro-choice proponents still hold to a solution that comes from one of the above factual or philosophical considerations. According to history, solutions from this source have proved ineffective as of yet.

The Consequences of Philosophical Arguments

Unlike the activists, those who pursue philosophical arguments fail to engage the general public in a visible manner. However, like the activists, they fail to make any significant progress. There remains no distinctive philosophical proof for the personhood of the fetus. Because of this, philosophers argue on the basis of human rights. However, because the moment of personhood of the fetus remains undeterminable in the realm of philosophy, the issues of human rights remain unclear and problematic as the rights of the mother and the fetus clash. It seems, as noted above, no solution exists for the near future as arguments from philosophical

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44Cf. Thomson, 746; Harrison, 55-6.


46Cf. Tribe, 197.
grounds produce a continual stalemate.

The results from political and philosophical conflicts point to the need for a solution to the issues of abortion, if only to stop the results of the conflicts. While the consequences of the act itself present a grave issue and merit consideration, the bombing of abortion clinics or the killing of physicians hardly merit acts worthy of the followers of Christ. According to Trull and Carter, the first question a believer engaged in these solutions should ask is: "Will the public perceptions of what we are doing through the protest so poison people's perceptions of Christians that the cause of Christ will be hurt?" These acts represent human attempts to solve the issues. Could the solution to the issues of abortion come from human reasoning, philosophy, or even biblical interpretation? So far, the answer seems to be a resounding negative.

So far, this paper has discussed the facts and philosophical considerations that factor in to the issues of abortion. It has also examined the various conflicting views that result from these considerations and determined the need for a solution to the issues of abortion. Despite this bleak conclusion to this point, this paper will now attempt to formulate a possible model for a solution. Although society may reach no decision on the issues of abortion, the Church may yet find a way to approach the issues of abortion for the benefit of fulfilling the mandate Christ gave before returning to the Father.

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47 Trull, 149.
CHAPTER 4
POSSIBLE MODELS FOR A SOLUTION

Rather than seeking a new model to formulate a fresh response from the Church, this paper will now examine several ethical models and then overlay the teachings of Scripture to formulate this response. This does not mean the response will come from the same sources as the proposed solutions mentioned above as they have proven ineffective. Instead, the author hopes to demonstrate the response of the Church through examining Scripture and applying it through familiar ethical models. 48 These models include Joseph Fletcher's Situationism, Rae's definition of Divine Command Theory, and Virtue Theory as defined by philosophers and by Peter Kreeft.

Situationism

According to Geisler, Fletcher's ethical model comes from a fear of both the radical left and the radical right. 49 The former seeks to establish a norm-less relativism while the latter seeks to establish a "legalistic absolutism." 50 For Fletcher, the key lies in establishing a single moral imperative for ethics, love. This becomes practical as the person faced with ethical decisions utilizes the single absolute to make a loving decision. For example, according to Rae, Fletcher uses the story of the woman in a Nazi concentration camp that commits adultery for the sake of love for her family to gain release from the camp. 51 Love constitutes the only moral absolute. As

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48 According to Rae, Scripture uses different models. However, none become all sufficient in dealing with ethical problems (Rae, 96).

49 Geisler, 35.

50 Ibid.

51 He notes, "Unless she were ill or pregnant, she knew that she would remain in prison. So she decided to become pregnant to be reunited with her family. Situationists will argue that her illicit affair was justifiable, since love for her family motivated her act. In determining the morality of her actions, the situationist views the act of adultery as irrelevant." Rae, 86.
long as the individual chooses the loving option, he or she has carried out her ethical duty to the moral absolute. While this loving option remains relative to the situation (some attempt to label situationism as a form of relativism), Fletcher does hold to a single absolute.

In examining this model one should ask, "What benefit does this have for the Church's response to abortion?" First, according to Geisler, this model allows the believer to move around the issues of conflicting absolutes, an issue for those who hold to a theory of absolutism. Second, Fletcher's model attempts to create a norm for ethics. In every situation, do the loving thing. In this way, the Christian has some direction for every ethical situation. This becomes important for the Church's response to abortion because it establishes a single motivating norm for all responses. Third, and most important for the Church's response to abortion, it stresses the value of persons. According to Geisler,

In view of this and from a Christian point of view, it is quite difficult to criticize the preeminence Fletcher gives to Christian agapic love. Implied in this stress on loving others is the fact that they are to be treated as persons in the image of God and not as mere things. The neighbor is a thou, not an in. The other is a person to be loved, not a thing to be used. Others are ends in themselves and not merely means for our own ends. Fletcher's emphasis that humans are persons (like God) who have God-given value is commendable from a Christian perspective.

This stress focuses on the command of God for every believer. Jesus summarized the Law and the prophets by focusing on loving God and loving one's neighbor. Thus, Fletcher's model contains some benefits for the Church's response to abortion.

However, Fletcher's model for ethics contains several flaws that make it a poor sole choice for the Church's response. Because Fletcher holds to a single norm, that norm must contain a certain amount of ambiguity for the sake of universality. This prevents the Church from

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52 Cf. Geisler, 46.
53 Ibid., 47.
applying the norm to particular cases of abortion. For example, one may consider the abortion of a highly deformed baby a loving act by saving that person from a lifetime of hardship and possible ridicule. On the other hand, one may consider it loving to allow this deformed baby to demonstrate the power of God to use any individual for His purposes. According to Geisler, "Unless there is advanced cognitive content to the term love, then one does not really know what one is being commanded to do."\(^55\) In addition to this flaw, Fletcher's specific model focuses on the utilitarian aspect of the single loving norm.

For this reason, the Church cannot use situationism as a model for a response to the issues of abortion. However, a modification of this model may provide the Church with a motivation for a response. Whichever response the Church decides to make, love should be the singular motivating factor behind that response. In this way, one could argue for a single norm in the response to the issues of abortion. However, this does not provide the Church with enough information to formulate a response. Perhaps a different model may provide assistance.

**Divine Command Theory**

"A divine command system is one in which the ultimate foundation for morality is the revealed will of God, namely, the commands of God as found in Scripture."\(^56\) According to Rae, the model of Divine Command Theory should play an important part in Christian ethics because Scripture asserts that God's people should obey His commands.\(^57\) Setting the usual issues of

\(^{55}\)Geisler, 47.

\(^{56}\)Rae, 47.

\(^{57}\)Ibid.
essentialism and voluntarism aside, these commands of God become subject to His character.\textsuperscript{58} If believers hold to Scripture's authority, God's commands benefit His people and should influence every ethical decision.

The benefits of this model for the Church's response come in two parts. First, rather than relying on formulating an ethical response from human reasoning and philosophy, the Church can rely on the teaching of Scripture and the God who commands for the benefit of His people. This gives authority to the Church's response and gives the Church a unique perspective because of the unique character of God as compared to other religions. Second, this model provides practical norms for many situations. For example, the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 provide life principles that benefit people. The command against adultery protects the marital and family relationships. Similarly, God's commands regarding the value of human life and against unjust killing provide the Church with a foundation for speaking on the issues of abortion.

However, this model also contains flaws. If the Church should choose to formulate a response on this model alone, she must deal with the problem of conflicting commands and correctly interpreting the context of those commands. For example, Rae recounts the story of Corrie ten Boom who faced a decision to obey the command against lying and the command to protect the innocent.\textsuperscript{59} Additionally, one must consider the contextual difference between the world of Scripture and the world of today. The commands of the past may require a different application in the present. Unfortunately, the world does not see the Church as the sole interpreter of Scripture. Thus, those outside the Church appeal to Scripture and to God's commands just like the Church.

\textsuperscript{58} For the sake of brevity, this paper will not cover the issues of essentialism and voluntarism. Rae's summary of Plato's problem of Euthyphro provides an excellent understanding of the issue for the purpose of Christian ethics (Rae, 47-49).

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 49-50.
While this model presents the Church with the benefit of relying on Scripture, the commands contained in Scripture require contextual proof and lack authority to those outside the Church. Therefore, the Church cannot rely on this model alone for considering a response to the issues of abortion. This becomes even more troublesome in light of the lack of direct teaching on abortion in Scripture discussed below. However, the Church should not abandon this model. When combined with love as the motivating norm, the commands of God become the source for ethical decisions within the Church. Although one may consider the ability to make an ethical decision good, one must carry out the ethical decision and practice what he or she believes. Thus, the Church must also consider a model that allows for application of ethical decisions.

**Virtue Theory**

Virtue theories may provide beneficial components to the formulation of the Church's response. According to traditional virtue theory, the ethical person possesses certain traits or qualities that produce a good life. This definition alone seems ambiguous and unpractical. However, Rae further defines virtue theory: "... also called aretaic ethics (from the Greek term arete, "virtue"), holds that morality is more than simply doing the right thing. The foundational moral claims made by the virtue theorist concern the moral agent ... not the act that the agent performs." Traditional virtue theory from the teaching of Plato and Aristotle emphasize the goodness of the person rather than the goodness of the act, right, or consequence. According to Peter Kreeft, modern ethics and, more importantly, the Church's response need a return to the

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60 Ibid., 91.

emphasis of virtue.\textsuperscript{62}

This will assist the Church in formulating a response to the issues of abortion in several ways. First, a focus on virtue and on virtuous models for ethics allows the Church to focus on the virtuous model of Christ and His life on the earth. Because Christ serves as the prime example of God's character and what it means to live a fully human life according to God's character, Jesus' virtue provides the Church with everything she needs in this regard. Second, virtue theory targets the deeper issues of the person and emphasizes the contemporary ethical issues as secondary to character. This becomes important for the Church because of the presence of sin in the world. Since no human being, except Jesus, ever entered this world without sin, no human being has the ability to live a completely ethical life. However, since virtue theory focuses on the character and the motivation behind the action, the Church has the ability to respond on those terms rather than on the unavoidable and consequential sinful action. Third, this model allows for freedom from legalistic moral codes. In a society that emphasizes the letter of the law when it comes to issues of taxes, freedom from religious codes becomes a necessity.

However, not everything about virtue theory suits the needs of the Church. First, although virtue theory allows the Church to focus on Christ's example of virtuous living, the interpretation of the records of that life become subject to the individual. This creates problems when virtue theory becomes a solution in and of itself. Second, although the deeper issues of humanity, namely sin, become a vital part of the Church's response, the presenting issues of the world focus on the symptom rather than the disease. Third, while Christians have freedom from the legalism, the Law serves to bring us to the point of salvation.\textsuperscript{63} These caveats make this model problematic for the Church's response to the issues of abortion and should be weighed carefully.

\textsuperscript{62}Kreeft, 56.

\textsuperscript{63}Cf. Galatians 3:24-25.
With the results of the possible solutions available for application to the issues of abortion in mind, it seems the Christian and the Church have no error-free model for dealing with the issue of abortion. Perhaps this demonstrates the problem at its most basic level: The Church cannot respond to the issues of abortion based on a religion-less ethic and on the above facts, considerations, and models without harmful results. This may seem grim and contradictory to the mandates of Scripture for the Church to exist as salt and light in the world.\textsuperscript{64} If this proves true, what hope remains for the Church to fulfill Christ's commands in regard to abortion?

\textsuperscript{64}Cf. Matthew 5:13-14.
CHAPTER 5
FORMULATING A RESPONSE TO ABORTION FOR THE CHURCH

At this point, the author must admit that the considerations above have lacked biblical support. However, because both pro-choice and pro-life proponents use Scriptures extensively to support their arguments, this becomes irrelevant for their arguments as long as the interpretations remain valid. Mathematically speaking, the two negate each other. If this proves true, the Church may not have the ability to use Scripture to speak directly against abortion. However, this demonstrates a powerful point concerning Christ's teaching. In fact, Jesus never directly discusses or teaches against abortion, nor does the rest of the Bible. Rather than basing a conclusion on issues of abortion from the silence of Scripture, basing an argument on what the Bible says positively forms a better foundation.

What the Bible Does and Does Not Say about Abortion

Geisler's discussion of abortion provides a good summary of the Scripture used to support both the pro-life and pro-choice positions.\(^65\) Traditionally, because they rely on the personhood of the fetus, pro-life proponents use Scriptures that speak of the person before birth and the value of life before birth. For Geisler, nine arguments from Scripture speak to the personhood of the fetus: 1) The unborn are called children.\(^66\) 2) The unborn are formed by God.\(^67\) 3) The death of the unborn receives the same punishment as the death of an adult.\(^68\) 4) Christ was human from

\(^{65}\) Cf. Geisler, 132-3; 143-44, 148-9.


\(^{67}\) Cf. Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Psalm 139:13.

conception.  
 6) The unborn have personal characteristics.  
 7) Scripture references the unborn with personal pronouns.  
 8) God intimately and personally knows the unborn.  
 9) God calls the unborn before birth.  

While these arguments affirm the value of human life and the personhood of the unborn, none of their surrounding contexts speak of the unborn except for Exodus 21:22-24 and Luke 1:41-44, the two strongest arguments from Scripture in the author's opinion.

On the other side, pro-choice proponents use Scripture as well. Geisler summarizes these arguments as follows: 1) The death of the unborn does not require the same punishment as the death of an adult.  
 2) The unborn child has not actually sinned.  
 3) The unborn child is unformed.  
 4) Breath constitutes a living being.  
 5) The unborn bear no more importance than

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71 Cf. Psalm 51:5.  
73 Cf. Psalm 139:15-16; Jeremiah 1:5.  
75 As Geisler notes in summary, "Taken as a whole, these Scripture texts leave no doubt that unborn children are just as much persons in God's image as little children or adults are." Geisler, 149.  
77 Cf. Psalm 51:5. In this argument, the unborn only constitutes a potential human because he or she has the potential to sin after birth.  
78 Cf. Psalm 139:13, 15-16. In this argument, the unborn again has human potential not actualized until birth. Along with these Scriptures, Geisler notes Romans 5:12 and Hebrews 7:9-10 in which the unborn remain potentially within their ancestors (Geisler, 144).  
the dead.\textsuperscript{80} 6) Value begins at birth.\textsuperscript{81} In all of these appeals to Scripture, both sides appeal to the interpretation of similar if not the same passages. However, these appeals have produced no progress in the debate. Also, as noted above, these passages usually contain a single verse in a different context. Thus it would seem the larger message of Scripture does not specifically address what has become a large issue in the political and religious worlds.

However, this does not mean, as Geisler believes, that Scripture has no value for approaching the issues of abortion. In formulating a response, the Church must emphasize the emphasis of Scripture as a whole. When appeals come from single verses with varying interpretations, history will repeat itself and the Church's reputation may suffer.\textsuperscript{82} Instead, the larger teaching of Scripture may provide the Church's response with a better foundation.

In the Old Testament, God called the Israelites to demonstrate His relationship with humanity to the surrounding nations. In regard to human life, the Israelites received laws distinct from those of the surrounding nations. For example, according to Andrew Sloane:

The sixth commandment is broadly applicable because it draws no distinctions between persons. It does not say as [Ancient Near East] codes (and many modern legal systems) implicitly do, "Don't kill important people, but if you're high enough up the social ladder, you can act with impunity toward the insignificant people at the bottom." It says boldly, with no qualifications, "Don't murder."\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80}Cf. Ecclesiastes 6:3-5.

\textsuperscript{81}Cf. Matthew 26:24.

\textsuperscript{82}J. W. Rogerson rightly notes, "Unfortunately, [the complex nature of Scripture] does not prevent people from plucking texts out of their context, and applying them to contemporary social issues without regard to what these texts meant in their original setting, and whether they can be legitimately applied to the modern world. Fortunately, in the case of the debate about abortion, there are no texts that can be simply applied to the matter. The Bible does not directly mention abortion anywhere. However, this does not prevent the misuse of passages that are thought to indicate a pro-life stance in the Bible, and there is a danger that over-zealous advocates of the pro-life viewpoint may damage their cause by using the Bible in ways likely to be repugnant to people who are not hard-line fundamentalists." J. W. Rogerson, \textit{Theory and Practice in Old Testament Ethics} (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 88.

This demonstrates what Jesus would later interpret as the intent of the Law. Not only should the Israelites demonstrate the value of human life, but they should also demonstrate it on a global scale. Sloane later notes, "The primary function of this command is to shape a moral vision in which, in response to God's liberating grace, the people of God show the same even-handed concern for human life that Yahweh shows." However, the object of this concern in context is not the unborn child specifically. It is one's neighbor. In this way, Fletcher's situation ethic with the absolute command to love drives the ethical character the people of God should demonstrate in the Old Testament. The character and action of the people of God come in response to the character and action of God toward His people. This forms the key to the mandate of God's people in the Old Testament. Likewise, the New Testament affirms the same ethical mandate for God's people.

Just like the Old Testament, the New Testament contains no specific teachings on or against abortion. Because of this, the Church's response from the New Testament should focus on the New Testament message to the people of God as a whole. According to Richard Hays, "The first task of normative reflection about New Testament ethics is to form the thought and practice of the Christian community. Regardless of what others may do or think, regardless of what the law allows, how shall we as people who belong to Jesus Christ live faithfully under the gospel with regard to our treatment of the issues of pregnancy, abortion, and childbearing?"

The text of the New Testament must speak to the message of the New Testament for the Church, and the Church must conform to the larger message rather than relying on a few select

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84 Ibid., 182.

85 This also applies to the way in which the Israelites manage slaves and servants. Cf. Deuteronomy 15:12-18 in which God commands the Israelites to treat their slaves well for they were once slaves themselves.

verses. For Hays, this comes in four themes: 1) People are God's creation. "We neither create ourselves nor belong to ourselves." 87 2) The Church should demonstrate love, just like the Good Samaritan. 88 3) The Church as community should assume responsibility for the care of the needy. 89 4) The Church should imitate Christ and self-sacrificially care for orphans, widows, and the innocent. 90 In light of these themes, the New Testament speaks to the call on the Church to be the Church in response to abortion rather than argue against abortion by appealing to the same authority as those engaged in the abortion debate.

If the response of the Church comes from the Bible, it must focus on the whole teaching of Scripture rather than a few single verses in a different context. The Church must also not take the lack of direct teaching as a position either for or against abortion. 91 To avoid the stalemates of the past, the Church should focus on the emphasis of the biblical material rather than selective hermeneutics. Because the emphasis of the biblical material speaks affirmatively of the Church's character and action in response to God's character and action and defines her in this way, the response of the Church should be on these terms. In other words, the Church should respond on the Church's terms, not the terms of the world.


91 According to Pierce, "Throughout the Bible there is no suggestion that abortion is an option for women who are pregnant; indeed, abortion is so foreign to the biblical perspective that it is not even mentioned." Pierce, 147. This view fails for two reasons. 1) It assumes the silence of the Bible as a message against abortion. One can make the opposing argument just as valid from a biblical perspective. 2) It makes the issue of abortion an issue of human rights. History shows when the rights of the fetus oppose the rights of the woman, no progress results. The reason lies in producing the absolute proof of the moment human life begins. When the Church attempts to take on the issue of abortion in the field of the secular state and on the terms of the secular state, it will lose.
Responding on the Church's Terms

What does it mean to respond on the Church's terms? Traditionally, this has meant appealing to Scripture as described above. However, according to Hauerwas,

Christian opposition to abortion on demand has failed because, by attempting to meet the moral challenge within the limits of public polity, we have failed to exhibit our deepest convictions that make our rejection of abortion intelligible. We have failed then in our first political task because we accepted uncritically an account of "the moral question of abortion" determined by a politics foreign to the polity appropriate to Christian convictions.92

In other words, the Church should focus on being the Church and imitating Christ. In this way, responding becomes a matter of being rather than doing. Kreeft's model for virtue ethics works well in this area. The character of Christ motivated by love serves as the model for the Church's response. Rather than appealing to the scientific facts or philosophical considerations in the abortion debate, the Church should appeal to the character of Christ and respond with a character congruent with that model. The Church possesses a unique perspective founded on the biblical model for the faith community. This is her strength and she should approach the issues of abortion on the terms of the definition of the Church, to model God's relationship with His people before the world.

First, this means avoiding issues of human rights and the right to life.93 While humans do have certain rights and the Church should seek to protect those rights, engaging the abortion debate on this front leads to a stalemate and forgets the larger teaching of Scripture. Instead, the Church should focus on demonstrating the self-sacrifice of human rights for the sake of the innocent. Rather than forcing government to enforce self-sacrifice, the Church should speak

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93According to Hays, "In Scripture, there is no "right to life." Life is a gift from God, a sign of grace. No one has a presumptive claim on it. Nor, on the other hand, do any of us—male or female—have a "right" to control our own bodies autonomously." Hays, 454.
through demonstration of what it means to live self-sacrificially. A self-sacrificing human assumes his or her proper place within God's creation and submits to the sovereignty of God.

In addition to avoiding the issues of human rights, the Church should focus on the larger emphasis of Scripture. This entails making a major issue of the models drawn from the Old and New Testaments above. Rather than basing arguments against abortion on single verses taken out of context, the Church should focus on carrying out the mandate to be a light to the nations and to demonstrate the reality of community in relationship with God.

Finally, the Church should use Scripture appropriately in accordance with this mandate. Context is everything when interpreting the biblical text. Using Jeremiah 1:5 as a proof text for the personhood of the fetus ignores the larger context of "God's loving omniscience and foreknowledge." 94 Perhaps the reason so many outside the Church appeal to Scripture out of context comes from the Church's own appeals to Scripture in the same manner. If this proves true, the Church's own hermeneutic could be to blame for the stalemate in the abortion debate.

Understanding the position and positive teaching of Scripture rather than the vague yet perhaps applicable principles should refocus the Church's response to abortion. Because the aforementioned arguments, considerations, and models approach this issue of abortion directly and seem to lack beneficial results for the Church, something must change. Rather than addressing the issue of abortion directly, perhaps an approach targeted at the root issue may prove more effective. In reality, Christ demonstrates this exact model. The following section moves forward from proposing a response for the Church to applying this response in a practical and meaningful way.

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94 Ibid., 448.
CHAPTER 6

APPLYING A CHRIST-BASED MODEL

As noted above, the Church cannot be the Church without a demonstration, without action, before the world. Thus, the response outline above becomes meaningless if not enacted through models represented in Scripture, especially in the New Testament. This section will examine these models in various genres of New Testament teaching and attempt to apply the response of the Church to modern society through the model supplied by Jesus in His interaction with the society of His day.

**Being and Doing**

According to James, faith or the community of believers, cannot exist without action.\(^95\) He uses the example of favoritism in the context of the assembled believers.

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?\(^96\)

Here, the example given violates the New Testament mandate to demonstrate love and care for the needy. James argues this kind of action contradicts the definition of the Church and becomes self-defeating. In the same way, the Church today should behave as the Church in the context of the abortion issues and demonstrate, not through legislation or coercion, love in every situation so as to bring more people into the kingdom of God. Once inside the body of Christ, the Church may hold believers accountable to demonstrate this love to the unborn. However, the Church

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\(^{95}\)James 2:14-26.

\(^{96}\)James 2:2-4, ESV.
cannot expect unbelievers to hold to this same standard.\textsuperscript{97}

Likewise, according to Paul, the Church should seek to imitate Christ and be His example to the world through acting like He acted. In Romans 15:1-7, Paul tells the Roman believers to imitate Christ's self-sacrifice and seek to please others rather than one's own self. In this way, the model of Christ's character becomes a matter of action as each believer forsakes his own good for the good of others. Again, the Church should not expect those outside the Church to act in a similar manner. If those outside the Church behaved in this way, the Church would serve no purpose. Instead, the teachings of Paul throughout his epistles demonstrate the need for the Church to be the Church before the world and to demonstrate the character of Christ.

As the prime example of character for the Church, Jesus' teaching provides an authoritative statement on being and doing. He demonstrates this in the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout Matthew 5-7, the recurring theme of Jesus' teaching points to the issues of being an ethical person. He teaches that motive and character form a vital part of being in a community of faith before the world. Again, one should note, the Sermon on the Mount served as a teaching for the Jews, the community of faith in Jesus' day. While the principles do apply directly to the community of faith today, the Church cannot expect those outside the Church to hold to the same standards of being.

In addition, Jesus demonstrated his character through his interactions with the poor and the outcasts. The Pharisees often found him eating and spending time with sinners and tax collectors, as in the story of Jesus' visit to Levi's house.\textsuperscript{98} To imitate Christ, the Church must also spend time with the outcasts and the downtrodden of society. In this way, the Church fulfills the

\textsuperscript{97}If the Church insists on expecting unbelievers to hold to this standard, the Church becomes a political power broker. Trull and Carter, 143.

\textsuperscript{98}Cf. Mark 2:13-17.
fourfold mandate as outlined by Hays above.

Throughout the New Testament, the message to the Church continues to be one of character and action working together as the Church carries out her mandate to be light and salt in the world. The model for the application of this message may come from Jesus' life.

Avoiding Participation on Political Terms

In order to be like Christ in His demonstration, the Church must interact with the political world in a similar manner and with the same focus. Looking back at the story of Jesus in the home of Levi the tax collector, it becomes clear that Jesus and the religious politicians of His day did not cooperate. Although many called Jesus their rabbi, or teacher, He did not associate closely with the other teachers of His day. According to Jesus, the politicians and religious leaders of the day failed to understand the important issues related to the Kingdom of God.99 Thus, for Jesus, the best response to the issues of His day came from dissociation because of the political state present in His society.

Although Christians in the United States have the privilege of participating in politics, the Church should consider the consequences of engaging issues on this front. In light of the previous conclusions concerning the abortion debate, does the Church benefit from approaching abortion in the political realm? The answer from history points to legalism and negative consequences. Peter Kreeft notes, "Ethics without religion means sin without salvation. Though modernists avoid talking about sin, their concentration on ethics really fosters the very thing modernism accuses its enemy, fundamentalism, of fostering: guilt."100 As noted above, the traditional response of the Church emphasizes ethics without religion. This should give the

99 Jesus speaks out against the Pharisees and political leaders extensively in Matthew 23.
100 Ibid., 33.
Church reason to reconsider engaging the issues of abortion in the political arena. When this occurs, the Church begins to move into a debate on the terms of the world rather than on the terms of the Church. For Jesus, being and doing in accordance with His character worked best outside the political system where He could avoid the conflicts of the religious leaders.

**Transforming People from the Root**

Once outside the political system, Jesus did not establish a system that engaged the issues on the grassroots level. Instead, he targeted the issues at their root. For example, in the story of the woman caught in adultery, Jesus did not sit down next to her and begin to politely discuss the moral wrong involved in sexual activity outside the marriage relationship. Nor did he bomb the houses of adulterers and adulteresses. Instead, he modeled the mandate for love and care toward others, focused on the sin issue present because of the woman's humanity, and brought her into the community of faith.\(^\text{101}\) The Church should seek to model this targeting of the root issues.

In the context of the abortion issues, what may seem to be a presenting issue may only be a symptom of a larger issue. In this case, it indicates a failure of humanity to be like the people of God by demonstrating love and self-sacrifice. Again, the Church cannot expect unbelievers to overcome this failure. Instead, the Church, in responding to abortion, should demonstrate love and self-sacrifice as modeled by Christ with the woman caught in adultery. Christ showed his love for the woman by refusing to condemn her and sacrificed his public reputation by affiliating with a sinner. Today, the Church should similarly refuse to engage the issues of abortion on the surface level. Addressing the larger issues of sin and right standing with God should be the focus.

In the end, the issues of abortion become non-issues or, at the least, minor issues when

\(^\text{101}\)Cf. John 8:2-11.
viewed through the lenses of biblical teaching and the model of Jesus. God has given every human being a free will and the ability to determine his or her own path in life. While some paths may prove more virtuous or beneficial than others, each human being has the ability, the right, to make choices. Unfortunately, these choices lead to ethical dilemmas and clashes between absolutes. The Church possesses a unique response to the issues of abortion. However, the ethical framework for the Church on the issue of abortion must arise from a utilitarian ethic alone, which proves harmful for the purpose of the Church. Rather than targeting the symptom, the Church must begin to target the root issue: a failure of humanity to demonstrate self-sacrifice and selfless love, as Christ did, even in the case of unwanted pregnancies and rape. Although this means a tragic loss of life in the case of every abortion, the Church cannot fight for the lives of the innocent on foreign soil. The Church must be the Church on the Church's own terms.
CONCLUSION

After examining the facts of abortion and the current status of the conflicts, it seemed no common ground exists between the two traditional camps. If, as Thomson hypothetically admits, the fetus constitutes a full human life, the two camps clash over human rights.102 If the pro-life camp admits the inhumanity of the fetus, the Church will lose the battle for protecting the innocent unborn. As stated above, this seems to leave the Church no beneficial option. However, after proving the existence of a need for a solution and evaluating possible models for that solution, only one allowed the Church to fulfill her biblical mandate while campaigning for the rights of the innocent. In this way, the Church embodies a Christ-based virtue ethic motivated by the action of Christ himself.

While this model allows ambiguity and human error at times, it seeks to avoid the problems of a teleological ethic and those of a strict virtue ethic. However, this demonstrates the problem with ethics in a sinful world. The Church's approach to abortion must take this into account and seek to transform the world from the root upwards rather than from the branch downwards. In this case, abortion becomes a minor issue in relation to the whole. Considering all of this, the Church should consider rethinking her strategy on opposing abortion, focus on the major issues of Scripture and the teachings of Jesus, and become like the Christ she so eagerly professes to embody.

102 Cf. Thomson, 737.
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