

HUMAN LIFE AND PERSONHOOD

IS THE FERTILIZED OVUM A POTENTIAL HUMAN BEING OR A HUMAN BEING WITH POTENTIAL?

HUMAN BEING WITH POTENTIAL

To prevent birth is anticipated murder ... The one who will be a man is already one.
(Tertullian, a Christian writer, end of 2nd century)

'from the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor of the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already.'

(*Declaration on Procured Abortion*, 12, 18 Nov. 1974)

There is 'a serious ambiguity about an argument from the premise that the embryo is 'potentially human', for the potentiality concerned is not that of becoming something else but of becoming what it essentially is.'

(Prof. T. F. Torrance, 1985, Church of Scotland)

It is a misunderstanding of botany to say an acorn is a potential oak tree. An acorn is a tiny living oak tree inside a shell ... All the genetic information which comprises an adult human being is in the fertilized ovum. All that is added to make an adult ... is water, air and food.

(Professor N. Geisler, Christian scholar)

POTENTIAL HUMAN BEING

(There) is at least a degree of difference between the embryo before and the embryo after it is implanted in the womb ... The step from one to the other appears to be the step from potency for life to actual life ...

(The Church in Wales)

.. the foetus has a moral significance insofar as it is potentially a human life and is likely to become a human person in the normal course of events ...

(*Abortion: An Ethical Discussion*, Church of England)

Until a foetus is viable outside the womb it can only be a potential human personality, but it nevertheless deserves respect on precisely that account ...

(Baptist Union of Gt. Britain and Ireland)

The foetus is undoubtedly part of the continuum of human existence ... There is never any moment from conception onwards when the foetus totally lacks human significance ...

(*Abortion reconsidered*, Methodist Church)

Can it (the fertilized egg) be said to be on its way to humanity until 10-15 days later when it implants in the womb - an entrance test for 'life' that more than *50% of fertilized eggs fail?

(*Economist*, 1984; * figure doubtful)

OTHER ARGUMENTS

(FORMED/UNFORMED, ENSOULED/UNENSOULED)

Augustine maintained that the soul was implanted at 46 days although he condemned the killing of both formed and unformed fetuses, whilst Thomas Aquinas maintained that the souls of girls were implanted at 90 days and the souls of boys at 40 days. (Puzzle of Ethics, p 157)

SCRIPTURE

If, when men come to blows, they hurt a woman who is pregnant and she suffers a miscarriage, though she does not die of it, the man responsible must pay the compensation demanded of him by the woman's master ... But should she die, you shall give life for a life ... (Exodus 21:22-23)

It was you who created my inmost self, and put me together in my mother's womb; for all these mysteries I thank you: for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works. (Psalm 139:13-14)

'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you ...' (Jeremiah 1:5)

Unborn babies are called 'children' - the same word used of infants and young children (Lk 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16).

The image of God includes 'male and female' (Gen 1:27), but it is a scientific fact that maleness or femaleness is determined from the moment of conception.

God became man in Mary's womb at the moment of conception (Mt. 1:20-21, Lk 1:26-27).

ANCIENT CHRISTIAN SOURCES (EXTRA-BIBLICAL)

You shall not kill by abortion the fruit of the womb and you shall not murder the infant already born.

Didache (earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament)