

The Fifth Commandment

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by Martin P. Janke

The 5th Commandment, the topic suggested for this paper, certainly covers a multitude of sins. Our Catechism reminds us that we are so to fear and love God that we neither "kill", that is, take our neighbor's life, nor even by word or deed "hurt or harm our neighbor in his body." Among the sins against the 5th Commandment, our Catechism specifically mentions suicide, mercy death and lynching. Had the committee responsible for our present Catechism done its work in 1973 instead of some 20 years earlier, they would almost certainly have added abortion to that list. We have taken the liberty of selecting abortion and euthanasia for closer scrutiny in this paper. Anyone at all aware of what is going on in the world will recognize these as two of the burning issues of the day.

The week of January 21, 1973, will long live in the annals of history. On Monday Lyndon Johnson died, on Tuesday came the long-awaited announcement of a cease fire in Vietnam. Also on Monday, but almost lost in the shuffle, came the Supreme Court's abortion decision. But history has a way of putting events into proper perspective, and this abortion decision by the Court may well have the most far-reaching consequences of all.

What did the Court hold? It held that in the first trimester of pregnancy, the abortion decision must be left to the prospective mother and her physician, a decision in which the State can have no input. During the second trimester the state may regulate the act of abortion for the purpose of protecting the health of the mother. Thus the state could establish requirements for where and by whom abortions could be performed, but it could not prohibit the practice. During the last trimester the state may prohibit abortions in order to protect the life of the fetus, although abortions still could be performed to preserve the life or health of the mother if the state so decided.

What was the Constitutional basis for this decision? Basically the decision was predicated on the right to privacy as protected from state interference by the 9th and 14th Amendments to the United States Constitution. The Court said: "This right of privacy is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy."

Reaction to the Court's decision was not long in coming. On Friday, January 26, the *Milwaukee Sentinel's* lead editorial had a two-word title: "Killing Legalized." Syndicated columnist Wm. F. Buckley, Jr., called the Court's decision an "outrageous decision."

Nor was reaction to the court's decision long in coming from the churches throughout our land. The position of the Roman Catholic Church has been well known for a long time. But others were not silent. Our *Northwestern Lutheran*, in its February 25, 1973, issue, asks, "Was this Ruling Supreme?" Our position is clearly stated in these words, "While it is true that no one can legislate morals, this ruling permits killing. Abortion is killing. Some may debate about what precisely is being killed, but whatever it is, it is clear that it is something living that is brought to its death. For the Christian there is no question as to what it is. It is a human person being prepared to live outside the womb. Although Psalm 51:5, 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me,' is most often cited to prove that man is a sinner already before birth, it also asserts that he is a human person before birth. The ruling of the Supreme

Court did not follow the will of the Supreme Judge of heaven and earth. He says, "Thou shalt not kill (murder)."

"To approve of abortion as an expression of the right of a woman to have control over her body is not Biblical. Neither man nor woman are masters of their own bodies. Both are responsible to God Himself for how they use them. If they use their bodies so that life is conceived, then they are responsible to obey God who forbids murder.

"Perhaps the court might not have arrived at this decision if so many churches had not favored abortion on demand. How such churchmen can harmonize their actions with God's Word is beyond grasp. They are silent partners in this decision, and cannot plead innocence.

"All in all, this decision is a sad commentary on our society. It is fervently hoped that no Christian woman will permit herself to be misled. Just because abortion may be legal, does not make it right."

"Christians on Their Own", an editorial in the March 11, 1973, issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* by Prof. Carleton Toppe, was another response to the Supreme Court's decision. He wrote: "Recent rulings by the Supreme Court have riddled the defenses of communities against indecency, whether printed, portrayed, or practiced; they have nearly disqualified the use of capital punishment as a penalty for crime, and have struck down state regulations against the practice of abortion, thereby undermining the foundations of morality, and failing a basic purpose of law itself. The court's latest 'moral' decision, for example, can only accelerate the shift in public opinion in favor of abortion.

"In its stand on morality the church has before this enjoyed the support of the laws of our land and the justice of our courts. When the state enforced laws against sexual perversion, fornication, and abortion, for example, the church found its own position easier to defend.

"Today, as the emphasis is shifting away from the sanctity of life to the quality of life, and our nation has developed a mania for freedom, convenience, and pleasure, the growing amorality and permissiveness of the Supreme Court makes one wonder whether the next step might even be in the direction of legalizing the removal of undesired and undesirable children or the elimination of the unwanted aged. If the mother now supposedly has the right to murder the child she bears in her body because it is inconvenient to bring it to birth, what is to prevent the court from giving a family the right to dispose of those of its helpless members who are distressful to its convenience and the pursuit of its pleasure?

"A paganism is beginning to darken even the highest court in our land. Its support of basic morality is weakening. It is retreating before the forces of evil.

"The Christian church may be returning to its first-century years, when it stood almost alone in a corrupt and degenerate society. We too will have to realize that if the defenses against immorality are to be held, it is the Christian people who will have to maintain them. We must be prepared to become lonely protesters in our society, speaking out for and standing up for principles that not only large numbers of our fellow-citizens, but even the powers that be, are in the process of destroying. If the state retreats in the battle for decency and morality, Christians will have to fight it alone."

But in many Protestant church bodies today the trumpet gives no such certain sound. The fact that many of these favor abortion on demand is an indication of how far they have drifted from the moorings of God's Word. Already in March, 1971, the Board of Homeland Ministries of the United Church of Christ "called for the repeal of all legal prohibitions of physician-performed abortions." The General Conference of the United Methodist Church on April 25, 1970, urged "states to remove the regulation of abortion from the criminal code, placing it

instead under regulations relating to other procedures of standard medical practice.” The Supreme Court’s decision is one greatly to be regretted, but perhaps more regrettable still is that many a church body had spoken the language of the Court long before its decision had been handed down. It is as Jeff Koepsell wrote in the DMLC Messenger last year: “Many people these days, even in churches, are in favor of abortion, on demand or otherwise; for people, anyway. I mean, nobody wants abortions for cows. After all, we can use cows. It’s the things that man has no use for that he eliminates. Like his fellowman.”

Let’s examine some of the arguments of the pro-abortionists. Advocates of the repeal of laws restricting abortion argue that the fetus carries the potential for, but is not a human being. The State of Connecticut has asked the Supreme Court to review its position that during the first few months of pregnancy the fetus is not a “person” in any constitutional sense and is not therefore entitled to the protection given to a person. Connecticut reminds the court that in 1966, the Supreme Court observed that “when constitutional rights turn on the resolution of a factual dispute, we are in duty bound to make an independent examination of the evidence in the record.” It is such an independent examination that the State of Connecticut has conducted and 14 states of the union have joined Connecticut. Connecticut has imposed on itself rigorous scientific responsibilities, to which end it begins its 55-page brief with testimony from scientists.

Dr. Albert Liley is a professor in perinatal physiology in the Postgraduate School of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Auckland. “In 1963,” says Dr. Liley, “I developed a technique for the transfusion of blood to the baby *in utero*. This work demonstrated conclusively that the unborn child, like any other person, could be ill and could have his disease diagnosed, his condition assessed, and his malady successfully treated.

“In a number of genetic and biochemical problems, definite diagnosis can be established as early as the 14th week, and in the Rh baby, therapy has been undertaken as early as the 18th week of intrauterine life.

“With advances in technique these limits will be moved back earlier in pregnancy. The unborn child is my patient, and I respect and protect his life as I would the life of any other patient.” Dr. Hymie Gordon is chairman of the Department of Medical Genetics at the Mayo Clinic. He introduces his testimony philosophically: “The modern biological concept of human individuality is remarkably in harmony with that of some of the oldest theological concepts. The Rabbis of the Talmudical period and the early Christian Fathers taught that life entered the fetus at the moment of conception. Modern biology teaches the same thing.

“True, environmental influences both during the intrauterine period and after birth modify the individual’s constitution and continue to do so right until his death, but it is at the moment of conception that the individual’s capacity to respond to these exogenous influences is established.

“It is an ignorant presumption to suggest that we are in a position to weigh its (the living cell’s) life against that of another.

“A clear distinction must be made between the unquestioned right of the mother to decide whether or not she is to become pregnant, and the unquestioned right of the unborn baby to life.”

Dr. Micheline Mathews-Roth of the Dept. of Microbiology and Molecular Genetics at Harvard deposes that “studies in embryology and genetics have conclusively proved that the embryo from conception to birth is a living human individual...”

Dr. Paul Rockwell, director of anesthesiology at Leonard Hospital in Troy, New York, writes that “in 1958 or thereabouts, while giving an anesthetic for a ruptured ectopic pregnancy at 8 weeks gestation, I observed what I believe was the smallest living human being ever seen. A

tiny human male, (approximately one centimeter) was swimming vigorously in the amniotic fluid from the end of the umbilical cord within the intact, transparent embryo sac.

“This tiny male was perfectly developed with fingers and hands, toes and feet...it is my opinion that if the lawmakers and people realize that very vigorous human life is present, even at this early stage of development, it is possible that abortion would be found much more objectionable than euthanasia.”

Commenting on the testimony of these experts, Wm. F. Buckley writes: “Critics of the Court’s decision have thus far mostly insisted that the decision was bad law and bad philosophy. Connecticut and 14 other states are now saying that it is bad science, that the factual basis of it was incorrect.”

If the fetus is not human life during the first trimester of pregnancy, we should like to ask what it is. It certainly isn’t animal, is it? Dr. and Mrs. J. C. Willke, in their “Handbook on Abortion” from which we shall quote rather freely throughout this paper, supply the following information: Heartbeat begins between the 18th to the 25th day. Electrocardiogram recordings can be taken at 9 or 10 weeks. Electrical brain waves have been recorded as early as 43 days. The brain itself is completely present by 8 weeks. In the 6th to 7th weeks, if the area of the lips is gently stroked, the child responds by bending the upper body to one side and making a quick backward motion with his arms. This is called a ‘total pattern response’, because it involves most of the body, rather than a local part. At 8 weeks, if the baby’s nose is tickled, he will flex his head backwards away from the stimulus. At 9 to 10 weeks he squints, swallows, moves his tongue, and if his palm is stroked he will make a tight fist. By 11 to 12 weeks he is breathing fluid steadily and continues to do so until birth. His stomach secretes gastric juice by 8 weeks. Fingernails are present by 11 to 12 weeks; eyelashes by 16 weeks. All body systems are present by 8 weeks, all are working by 11 weeks. All 20 milk teeth buds are present at 6½ weeks. At 18 weeks, equipped with a full set of vocal cords, it can go through the motions of crying but without air cannot make a sound. At 12 weeks it weighs one ounce, at 16 weeks, 6 ounces, and at 20 weeks, approximately one pound.

Consider the perverted thinking of which man’s sin-blinded reason is capable when you hear this, from the same authors who supplied the previous information. “The following two items came to your authors’ attention within the same week. The one, a confidential letter from the police department of a nearby city:

“Dear Doctor:

On Tuesday, November—, 1970, a new-born baby was found in a cardboard box behind a supermarket in our city. Apparently, the baby was born sometime that day, and had been dead eight hours or more when found at 9:30 p.m. The autopsy showed the child had been stabbed seven times, suffered a head concussion, and was strangled with a zipper. In the box was the placenta and the severed umbilical cord. Obviously the baby was born without medical assistance. This may or may not indicate that the mother has or will be seeking medical attention as a result thereof. The police request your assistance in locating this woman...”

The other, a newspaper article: November, 1970

“An attempted abortion resulted in the live birth of one of a set of twin babies. Dr. Fritz Fuchs, chief of Obstetrics and Gynecology, New York Cornell Medical Center, explained after being questioned that the saline injection had been successful in killing one fetus but that unexpectedly a second and live twin had been delivered. Despite all

efforts to save the baby, it died after 15 hours. Dr. Fuchs noted that in the case of twins it is sometimes impossible to inject the solution into both amniotic sacs.

“Why is it that the police are only looking for the woman? What of the doctor?”

“Didn’t the doctor clearly mean to kill both of the twins only one day prior to their birth? Since he succeeded in killing only one, and the other was expelled from his mother’s uterus alive, why did he not kill this baby also when he found it yet alive? What magic occurred in his thinking once he saw the baby in daylight compared to when the child still lived in the darkness of his mother’s uterus?”

“Why the total about-face from destruction of life to heroic intensive-care attempts at preservation of life?”

The devil leads men to manipulate words in order to save their consciences. It is much more impersonal to speak of a fetus rather than a baby, to speak of terminating a pregnancy rather than of murdering a child. We are reminded of the woman who came to her gynecologist one day with this request: “Doctor, I want you to terminate my pregnancy.” The doctor replied, “Lady, I’m not in the business of killing babies. If you want your child killed, wait until it’s born and kill it yourself.”

We ought to pause to consider briefly the grisly business of the abortion techniques themselves. There are four methods commonly used in performing an abortion. They are” 1) Dilatation and curettage (D & C), 2) Suction, 3) Hysterotomy, and 4) Saline poisoning. It may well be that you’ve seen some of the full-color pictures or the film showing the results of these procedures. They make one almost physically ill, but more than that, they make one sick at heart.

What is a “D & C”? To use this method the surgeon must first paralyze the cervical muscle ring (womb opening), then slowly stretch it open. This is difficult because it is hard or “green” and not ready to open. He then inserts an instrument, a curette, up into the uterus. With this he cuts the placenta and baby into pieces and scrapes them out into a basin. Bleeding is usually profuse. Of this procedure R.F.R. Gardner, in his book, “Abortion, The Personal Dilemma”, writes, “Although dilatation of the cervix, the neck of the womb, is an operation the gynecologist performs many times a week, on this occasion it will be different. He takes that first dilator and is tinglingly aware that he is about to seal the fate of a fetus, that he is about to alter history. In other operations the cervix will dilate up readily, but in this operation it will fight, grip the end of the dilator and force it back into his hand. And then at last he will win, and as he does so he will wonder who has lost.”

The *suction method* is similar to a “D & C” except that a hollow plastic tube is inserted into the uterus instead of a curette. This is attached to a powerful suction apparatus which tears the baby and placenta into small pieces. These are then sucked out of the uterus and into a bottle. Of this method Dr. Gardner writes: “The desire for a quick operation—for the sake of secrecy, to save the patient money, to avoid a scar and the risks of a larger operation, as well as the wish for a quick turnover—has tempted some to use the vacuum technique at an increasingly late stage in pregnancy. As one operator said to me: ‘I find it important to have a very heavy pair of forceps to crush the skull.’”

A *hysterotomy* is like a Caesarian section. The mother’s abdomen is surgically opened as is her uterus. The baby is then lifted out, and, with the placenta, discarded. This method is used after the fourteenth to fifteenth week of development. One hundred percent of all babies aborted by hysterotomy are born alive. They must then either be killed or left to die from lack of attention. Abortion by the *saline method* cannot be performed much before the 16th week but can be used any time thereafter. A large needle is inserted through the abdominal wall of the

mother and into the amniotic fluid. The baby breathes and swallows it, is poisoned, struggles, sometimes convulses, and in about one hour dies. About a day later the mother goes into labor and delivers a dead baby.

Some time ago there appeared in "Christian News" a few paragraphs written by Ruth Johnston, a registered nurse from New Orleans, Louisiana. She wrote: "There is one aspect of abortion which I have never seen mentioned, but it is an aspect which would certainly place a dampener on the current craze of killing the unborn.

"When I was in nurses' training, 20 years ago, I spent about 6 weeks working in a ward which was mostly composed of abortion cases. It was there I learned the horror of what it means to kill a vital, normal human being. At only 2 months the fetus is already recognizable as a human being; to hold one of these little humans in the palm of the hand and watch the strong, hopeless beat of the heart is something too sad to try to describe. Whenever the horror of abortion is mentioned I have that mental image of a heart trying desperately to live...so truly hopeless.

"The only reason I am able to write about it is because I baptized each little human, and through this wonderful Sacrament the aborted ones gained heaven from an earth which had rejected them. May God have mercy on us!"

Abortion is not mentioned in the Bible. But neither is blowing a man's head off with a sawed-off shotgun at close range. But who would argue that for this reason such an act does not come under the indictment of the 5th Commandment? How does the Bible view the fetus in womb? Jeremiah 1:5 and Isaiah 49:1 both speak of God addressing persons, human in the womb. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." "Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name." Both passages use the Hebrew word, *Yatsar*, which invariable means, "to form, to create by giving shape to." Before God gave shape to Jeremiah, he was known to God as a person. Before formation took place in the womb, according to Isaiah, this was God's servant.

In Psalm 51:5 David attributes human sin to himself at the time of both birth and conception. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." The only way for the pro-abortionist to try to get around these clear words is to claim that Psalm 51 has only one meaning (sin is bad) and then declare any other conclusion drawn from this Psalm to be irrelevant.

Scripture attributes human sin not only to adults and children, but also to life in the womb. Yet Scripture never attributes human sin to either the male sperm or the female unfertilized ovum. Human sin does not exist in a vacuum. Where human sin exists, a human being exists.

The inspired writers were not given precise, scientific knowledge of conception or maturation. In Ecclesiastes 11:5 Solomon writes: "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all." But Psalm 139:15-16 reveals a deep, spiritual awareness that whatever happens in conception and early prenatal growth, a human being is loved and protected by God. "My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

Prof. Siegbert W. Becker, in an article in the January 4, 1970, issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* writes: "It may be argued that the 5th commandment does not apply because an unborn child is not a human being, and that therefore abortion cannot be equated with the exposure of infants or the shooting of a grown person. The Bible does not fix the exact moment when a new human soul comes into existence. There may be in the minds of Christians, therefore, some doubt as to the exact moment when an unborn child should be called a true human being. Some Christian theologians have held that the soul comes into existence at the moment of conception. Others have been of the opinion that it takes place when the unborn child is quickened in the womb. A few have even said that the soul is drawn into the body with the first breath. Whatever the opinions of men may be, the Bible clearly speaks of unborn children as real persons. In Luke's account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth, we are told that when Elizabeth heard the voice of Mary, 'the babe leaped in her womb.' The evangelist then goes on to tell us that Elizabeth, speaking under the influence of the Holy Ghost, said, "As soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.' Elizabeth spoke these words several months prior to the birth of John; yet her words clearly speak of John as a real person, who rejoiced over the coming birth of the Son of God. We may not understand how such a thing as this can happen, but the words are not hard to understand.

"The account of the Visitation surely justifies us in saying that unborn children are human beings, that they are persons, and that therefore they come under the protection of the 5th Commandment. The "Bible, indeed, does not tell us when this unborn child becomes a person, and we can only conclude that there is at least a possibility that a human being, a real person, comes into existence at the moment of conception."

Pro-abortionists have raised the specter of *rape and incest* as reasons for liberalizing abortion laws. Dr. and Mrs. J. C. Willke in their book, "Handbook on Abortion" cite a hypothetical case. "Picture the poor helpless girl, possibly your daughter, assaulted by an unknown assailant, frightened, tearful, emotionally upset. Then a few weeks later, confirmation of her worst fears—she's pregnant. Who would be so heartless and so cruel as to refuse her an abortion? Why must this innocent girl be forced through the ordeal of pregnancy and childbirth? Talk is easy, as long as this is theoretical, but what if this were your daughter?"

Such a situation, charged as it is with emotionalism, pathos, and sympathy, has been sufficient to convince some state legislators to enact laws that permit abortion for rape or for incest. Yet the fact is that pregnancy from rape is extremely rare. A scientific study of 3,500 cases of rape treated in hospitals in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area over a 10-year period revealed zero cases of pregnancy. In Czechoslovakia, out of 86,000 consecutive induced abortions, only 22 were done for rape. This figures out to be one in 4,000. At a recent obstetric meeting at a major midwest hospital, a poll taken of those physicians present (who had delivered over 19,000 babies) revealed that not one had delivered a bona fide rape pregnancy. But what if pregnancy should occur as a result of rape or incest? Is abortion the answer, or will it only add another traumatic experience to the one that has already been suffered? Will the mother be able to live with the memory that she killed her developing baby? Would she in the future not be more at peace with herself if she could remember that, even though she was unwillingly pregnant, she nevertheless gave her child life and a good home, perhaps through adoption? And isn't it a twisted logic that would kill an unborn baby for the crime of his father?

Mental health of the mother is one of the most frequently cited reasons for abortion on demand. But again, what are the facts? Of a total of 62,672 hospital abortions performed during 1970 in California, 98.2% were for mental health. New York doesn't require the subterfuge of

“mental health.” It reports only 2% done for this reason. Dr. Theodore Litz, Yale University Psychiatrist, has said, “It is practically impossible to predict when an abortion will not be more detrimental to the mental health of the mother than carrying her child to birth.” Dr. R. Bruce Sloan of Temple University, writing in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, May 29, 1969, said: “There are no unequivocal psychiatric indications for abortion.” He stated further that if the pregnancy is not interrupted, “the risk of flare-up or precipitation of psychosis is small and unpredictable, and suicide is rare: In fact, the State of Ohio had only two maternal suicide deaths between the years 1955 and 1963. In a series of 344 women who were refused legal abortions in Sweden for a variety of reasons, 62 specifically stated that they would commit suicide. It was determined that none of them did. In a detailed report of the Minnesota experience from 1950-1965 entitled, “Criminal Abortion Deaths, Illegal Pregnancy Deaths and Suicides in Pregnancy,” the following facts were reported: There were only 14 maternal suicides in the State of Minnesota in 15 years, or one for every 93,000 live births. Four were first pregnancies. None were illegitimately pregnant. Ten of these women committed suicide after delivery, only four while pregnant, leading to the author’s comment, “The fetus *in utero* must be a protective mechanism. Perhaps women are reluctant to take another life with them when they do this.”

But there is evidence, and plenty of it, to show that many women who have abortions have mental health problems afterward. The World Health Organization, in an official statement in 1970, said: “Serious mental disorders arise more often in women with previous mental problems. Thus the very women for whom legal abortion is considered justified on psychiatric grounds are the ones who have the highest risk of post-abortion psychiatric disorders.” It has been said that it is easier to scrape the baby out of the mother’s womb than to scrape the thought of that baby out of her mind.

The old argument about “population explosion” is one that scares many. What are the facts? In the *Fond du Lac Reporter* of February 3, 1973, there was this: “State Birth Rate Attains Lowest Point. Wisconsin’s birth rate last year was the lowest ever recorded, 14.3 per 1,000 population,” the state Division of Health said Friday. “At that rate, zero population growth would be reached in 2048 or 75 years from now, but a replacement fertility rate could be reached this year,” said Henry Krebs, a statistician with the agency. “Replacement fertility means that people of childbearing age are just replacing themselves each generation.” “With such a rate, 13 per 1,000 population, the death rate eventually would catch up with the birth rate as the ‘baby boom’ generation ages,” “For zero population growth to occur immediately, Wisconsin’s birth rate would have to drop to 9 per 1,000 population, the same as its death rate.” Krebs said that the figures for Wisconsin closely match nationwide trends. An estimated 64,500 children were born to Wisconsin citizens in 1972, the lowest number since 1932. The natural increase in Wisconsin’s population was about 22,000 last year, only about a third of the peaks reached from 1959-1961.”

Fewer people were added to our population in the decade of the 60’s than in the decade of the 50’s. In the percentage of gain, it was the second lowest rate of increase of any decade in the history of the United States. Only the depression years of the 30’s were lower. In 1850, the average number of children per family in the United States was six. In 1970, the average number of children per family was 2.45. In the spring of 1972, the United States Census Bureau reported that the U.S. rate was 2.145. Zero growth rate is 2.11. Another way to calculate this is births per 1,000 people per year. In the first quarter of 1972 this was 15.8, the lowest in the history of the United States. Population trend studies are notoriously subject to both mistakes and abuse in predicting any distance into the future. In 1910, there were 30.1 children born in the U.S. for

every 1,000 people. In 1936 this had dropped to 18.4. If this trend had continued, births in the U.S. would have ceased altogether by 1975. In 1936 the birth rate was 18.4 per 1,000. In 1957 the birth rate had risen to 25.3 per 1,000. If this trend had continued, we would have had over 400 million people by the year 2000, almost a billion by 2050, and 2½ billion by 2100. In 1957 the birth rate was 25.3 per 1,000. By 1970 it had dropped to 17. If this trend continues, the last baby in the United States to ever utter its first cry after birth will be born in the year 1992, and further births will cease totally.

An editorial in the January 28, 1973, issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran* by Pastor Immanuel Frey, entitled, "God Still Reigns", speaks clearly to this subject. "Man has a peculiar penchant for nominating himself to the position of God. When it appears in man's limited wisdom and restricted vision that God is bungling the job, man takes over, and God is demoted. Man is at it again. In fact, he never stops. It just becomes more obvious at times. Currently, as many see it, one of the problems which God has permitted to get out of hand is world population. Man can arrogate himself the responsibility for setting the limits of human population, but one searches the divine Word in vain for any indication that this falls under his jurisdiction. As a matter of fact, Scripture indicates that God reserves control of this complicated matter to Himself. In conveying the Word of the Lord to the intellectuals in Athens, the Apostle Paul declared, "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation." Almost 150 years ago Thomas Malthus, a British clergyman, gloomily predicted that the world would soon outgrow its food supply. He "proved" it by means of statistics. But his dire forecast has not fulfilled. In more recent years Neo-Malthusians have resurrected their predecessor's specter of people stacked like cordwood, dying of starvation; and they have proposed drastic solutions to forestall such an eventuality. Their urgent proposals include sterilization, abortion and universal education in contraception. In this kind of atmosphere it is not unusual for pregnant wives today to be subjected to dirty looks in the supermarkets as contributors to the world's doom. We Christians need not panic. The Lord Himself has promised, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (food, drink, etc.) shall be added unto you." His predictions have never been known to fail, unlike those of men like Malthus. God still reigns. And when the future looks frightening, there is a course open to men other than to take over the throne of God. That is to stand at the foot of it and repent."

The Unwanted Child We agree that every child should be wanted. A world with only wanted children would be an idyllic place in which to live. Wouldn't it also be a wonderful world if there were no wives unwanted by their husbands, no husbands unwanted by their wives, no aging parents unwanted by their children, or ever again a person who at one time or another finds himself unwanted or persecuted? But while men continue to live in this world of sin the unwanted will always be with us. But to use being wanted by someone as a measure of whether a human life is going to be permitted to continue is a frightening concept, and the even more frightening conclusion logically awaits us—that the unwanted can be eliminated.

There is something else to bear in mind. Physicians who deliver babies will agree that a significant percentage of all pregnancies are not planned, and, at the time these women are first seen in the doctor's office, they definitely have "unwanted pregnancies." Overwhelmingly, however, a mother adjusts to the initial surprise and shock, accepts the baby growing within her, and comes to anticipate the birth of her child. If we permit abortion for an unwanted pregnancy, we will be destroying vast numbers of children who by the time of their birth and through their childhood would have been very dearly wanted and deeply loved children indeed. Most

unwanted pregnancies become wanted babies. It is also true that some wanted children become unwanted ones. Dr. Edward Lenoski of the University of Southern California has conclusively shown that 90% of battered children were planned pregnancies. Unloved babies sometimes become dearly loved and vice versa. To make the assumption that because a woman is unwillingly pregnant, the child in every case, in most cases, or even in many cases will be unwanted and therefore neglected and abused is totally inaccurate and wildly unrealistic.

Prof. Carleton Toppe addressed himself to this matter of unwanted children in an editorial in the May 23, 1971, issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran*. He wrote: "One of the arguments in favor of legalizing abortion is that abortion on demand will diminish the number of today's unwanted children, lest they become tomorrow's alienated, violent, mentally disabled or criminal. First of all, the assertion that unwanted children are likely to become alienated, violent, or criminal is an airy assumption. Unfortunately, too many of our alienated, violent, or criminal young people today come from suburban homes where family planning supposedly prevented the birth of unwanted children."

"But what of the argument that unborn children should be killed—poisoned in the womb or ripped out of it—if they are unwanted by their mothers? Does the fact that an unborn child is not wanted justify destroying it?"

"The argument sends chills up and down one's spine. If such a principle is allowed to gain acceptance, the life of born children will not be safe either. Many a child is unwanted after birth—because it is another mouth to feed, or it is malformed or retarded, or it is a burden and a trial to the mother and to the family. Will not the devil in hell soon pervert some doctor or some sociologist to suggest that we gently exterminate all undesirable, all unwanted children? After all, cannot born children cause a mother grief and heartache?"

"Where will many Americans find the moral sureness and strength today to abhor even that suggestion? That's why one trembles to hear the arguments for legalizing abortion voiced among godless men and women, who repudiate what God has declared human life to be."

You may have heard or read of the 13-year-old girl here in Milwaukee who gave birth to her first child in May and now has been pregnant with the second for about 4 months. She threatened to abort herself if she were not permitted a legal abortion. The County Welfare Dept. stepped in to gain permission to secure an abortion for her, saying in effect, "She may commit murder. We can't let that happen. We must do it for her." Judge Michael T. Sullivan's decision, carried in Saturday's *Milwaukee Sentinel*, came as a breath of fresh air. "Anglo-Saxon law for almost a millennium has afforded protection to the fetus," the judge said. "In current society anti-abortion sentiments are reflected by a large segment, perhaps a majority, of Americans in every walk of life." Sullivan said that the experts who testified in favor of an abortion for the girl did not advise her "as to feasible alternatives, thereby inducing her erroneous belief that abortion was the only way out of the predicament." They should have told her that she could have the baby and give it up for adoption," he said. He said her attitude that the pregnancy would ruin her life and her chance for an education was in error and "framed by the experts themselves." A doctor and two psychiatrists had testified that an abortion was in the best interests of the 13-year-old. "The experts' opinions of the pregnancy's dire effect on the girl's health and schooling are flimsy and unsubstantial," Sullivan said. The judge also noted that the 13-year-old testified that the fetus she carried was not a baby. "The court holds that the physicians, in advising her, had a duty to inform her fully about the fetus," the judge said, adding: "They should have told her in language she could understand facts such as that upon the moment of conception the sex of her unborn was fixed; that when she was 5 weeks pregnant, although her unborn was still an embryo

only ¼ of an inch long, it already had a two-lobed brain, a spinal cord and a heartbeat. They should have advised her that by the end of the 8th week it had a head with the beginnings of facial features and that fingers, toes, ears and eyes had begun to form.”

Another argument that sounds plausible in our liberated world, writes Pastor Harold Wicke in an article entitled, “Abortion Vocabulary” in the May 23, 1971, issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran*, “is the one that *a woman ought to have the right to decide what is to happen to her own body*. I submit that she made this decision previously, when the child was conceived. It involves not only one right, but two rights. Abortion is a great deal more than just the emptying of the uterus. It involves the soul and body of another human being.”

Have we ever thought of it in this way? What of the soul of that unborn infant? These are unborn human beings, who, were they to be born, would be given a time of grace here on earth, a time to repent of their sins, a time to hear the glad tidings of salvation and be brought to faith in Christ as their Savior so they might spend eternity in the mansions of glory. On Judgment Day we would not want to be in the shoes of those who are in the grisly business of destroying these tiny human beings.

Will making abortion legal *reduce illegal abortion*? Ann Landers, who needs no further introduction, already in December of 1969 wrote: “Women should not be subjected to back room kitchen-table butchery. Thousands of married women as well as single girls die every year because the law has driven them to attic hideouts and motel room surgery.” No one in his right mind would try to make a case for the crude abortions done by unqualified people in unsterile surroundings. But this argument is a very powerful one and has been used with telling effect on legislators throughout the United States. But the real question is: Does legalizing abortion reduce the number of illegal abortions? What has been the experience in other countries? Sweden is generally considered to have one of the more “enlightened and progressive laws.” The prestigious British Medical Journal “Lancet” stated, “Sweden’s law, in its present form, has not sufficed to subdue criminal abortion.” Dr. Christopher Tietze, one of the world’s outstanding biostatisticians has written: “One of the major goals of the liberalization of abortion laws in Scandanavia was to reduce the incidence of illegal abortion...it is doubtful whether this objective has been achieved in any of the countries concerned. Of the 50 million unborn children that have been killed by abortions in the last 22 years in Japan, and where abortions are very inexpensive, perhaps half of the procedures continue to be, done illegally. What about Germany, Switzerland, and other countries? Drs. Hilgers and Shearin from the Mayo Clinic assembled 21 scientific reports from 10 different countries. The passing of permissive abortion laws had “no effect” on the criminal abortion rate in 8 of them. In 2 countries it actually increased with the liberal abortion law.

Why is the number of illegal abortions not reduced when legal abortions are made easily available? Among the reasons are fear of disclosure, of someone finding out, or of ignorance. Consider a few hypothetical cases:

1. Here is the wife of a man who wants another child. The wife does not. She becomes pregnant. If she goes through official procedures in a hospital the husband may find out. She doesn’t want him to know but is determined to get rid of this baby, so she has an illegal abortion.
2. Here is a married woman, pregnant by a man who is not her husband. The husband has been overseas in service, and would know this could not be his child. He must never know that his wife has become pregnant in his absence, so she has the abortion performed illegally.

3. Here is a prominent citizen whose teenage daughter becomes pregnant. Scandal must be avoided at all costs. Hospital procedures are available to her, but the risk of disclosure would be too great. The abortion is performed in the privacy of an illegal situation.
4. Here is a woman who is poor. Perhaps her husband has left her. There is a long waiting list at the hospital, and much red tape she doesn't understand. She is frantic to "get rid of it." A friend tells her of someone who will take care of it for her. She goes there.

The British Medical Journal, May 1970, stated: "The fact that legalization of abortion has not so far materially reduced the numbers of spontaneous abortions or of deaths from abortions of all kinds is not surprising. It confirms the experience of most countries and was forecast by the 1966 statement of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynecology. But even if legalized abortion would cut down on the number of illegal abortions, is killing under antiseptic conditions by an experienced physician any less sinful than killing in filth and squalor by an amateur?"

But some will say, isn't it true that restrictive abortion laws are *unfair to the poor*? It is probably true that it is safer for a rich person to break almost any law, than for a poor person to do so. Perhaps the poor cannot afford all the heroin they want. Rich people probably can. Does that mean we should make heroin available to everyone? Not everything that money can buy is necessarily good.

What about a *child that is likely to be born deformed*? Aborting such a child is sometimes called pre-natal euthanasia. All the reasons discussed so far that have been put forward as justification for abortion have related directly to the mother, her life, her health, her social or economic well-being, her convenience. Here we are thinking primarily of the child. The justification for allowing him to live and to be born is whether or not he will prove independent enough, intelligent enough, and useful enough to society to allow him to live. This is a frightening concept, one that only three decades ago was put into practice by the German State.

Few are aware of the fact that the first gas chambers in Germany were erected in the state mental hospitals. At first only the most defective and burdensome were killed, but then the price tag on human life continued to be marked down. After the mental hospitals were empty they turned to the institutions for defective children, then to the incorrigibles in prison, to the nursing homes and the homes for the aged and finally to what they considered to be a defective race, the Jews. Before the Jews, about 300,000 pure blood Germans had been killed because they were "useless eaters." For an entire decade prior to that, however, permissive abortion-on-demand had apparently established well the fact that a human life was only worth so much pain or inconvenience to those around him. The anti-life mentality was there. Hitler only perfected the techniques.

But isn't it cruel to allow a handicapped child to be born to a miserable life? The assumption that handicapped people enjoy life less than "normal" ones has been shown to be false. A well-documented investigation has shown that there is no difference between malformed and normal persons in their degree of life satisfaction, outlook of what lies immediately ahead and vulnerability to frustration. The conclusions of a study on Happiness of Life Satisfaction of the Malformed, published in the proceedings of the American Psychologic Association stated, "Though it may be both common and fashionable to believe that the malformed enjoys life less than normal, this appears to lack both emperical and theoretical support." Parents of retarded children have also been heard from on this matter. Mrs. Rosalie Craig testified before the Ohio Legislature in 1971: "There has not been a single organization of parents of mentally retarded

children that has ever endorsed abortion. We, who are parents of these children and have borne the burden, ask that before you, the legislators, propose to speak for us, by possibly authorizing abortion for fetal abnormality, please ask our opinion first.”

In the *Northwestern Lutheran* article referred to earlier Prof. S. Becker writes: “But certainly the possibility or even the probability of the birth of a defective child cannot be called an unusual circumstance which would justify an abortion. If it is a crime against God to kill such children after they are born, it is surely a sin to kill them before birth. If we would describe abortion as what it is, the killing of unborn children, we would have a quick and effective way of determining whether the practice is in harmony with the will of God in most cases. A civilization which approves the killing of unborn children for no other reason than that they might prove deficient in some way will not find it difficult to justify the killing of a whole class of people on the grounds that they are an inferior race. The state legislator who was crippled from birth and who, from a wheelchair, seconded the motion to kill a bill that would have allowed abortion where the birth of a possibly deformed child is indicated will help us to see this whole matter in clearer perspective.”

But what if it is established that a *pregnancy will almost certainly result in the death of a mother, or in the death of both mother and child*? First it ought to be said that such cases are very, very rare. We ought to remember too that the doctors making such a judgment are not God, that their judgments are not always correct, that God can save that mother or that mother and child if it is His will. We would prefer to leave that life and death decision in God’s hands, asking Him to resolve the matter according to His good and gracious will.

Pastor Harold Wicke, in a previously cited article in the *Northwestern Lutheran*, has this to say in summary: “All of the reasons usually given for justifying an abortion have one grievous error in common. They leave God out of the picture. That’s why these reasons are wrong reasons. After all, there is something like trust in God. In fact, it is of the very essence of our Christian faith. Even as it is of the greatest importance for us all to know and believe that if we have fallen, the Lord will meet every penitent with His forgiveness. Let us not be misled by the insidious way in which those are quoted who have undergone an abortion, but seek to justify their action. They would do it again! They were glad when it was over! It’s certainly more moral than having an unwanted child! One shudders at such a misuse of the word ‘moral’. Loving God, let us seek to live our lives to His glory. Let us ask Him to strengthen us to accept His holy will as our standard and guide. Let us not be misled by specious arguments. Above all, let us not add sin to sin!”

In conclusion we should like to quote from Pastor Walter Moll’s pastoral letter to his Bethlehem congregation in Oshkosh: “How can we show disgust at King Herod’s slaughter of the innocent children in his frantic search for the Christchild, and yet show no emotion at the murder of the unborn? How can we speak in terms of utter horror at Hitler’s mass murders and yet not say a word about the murder of the unborn? Is abortion any less horrible, any less disgusting, than Herod’s or Hitler’s murders?”

“In our so-called enlightened and educated age of history, when people are at the height of concern for their environment, it is incredible that so many people can show more compassion for air and water and wildlife than for the lives of unborn human beings. It seems incredible that so many will strongly oppose war and capital punishment and crime in the streets, but will not raise their voices to protest and condemn the murder of the unborn. According to one recent estimate, more human lives were lost in one year by abortion than the entire toll of all the wars in America’s history!”

(Is it any wonder that things have come to such a sorry pass in our country? Be not deceived, God is not mocked.)

“The attitudes which find expression in abortion and mercy-killing can be traced to evolutionistic thinking. The evolutionist insists that man is just a step along the ladder of change from the simple to the complex, from non-life to life, from amoeba to man. If man is just another evolutionary state of development, and man’s worth no greater than the monkey or the sheep or even the lowly cockroach, then man would not be the crown of creation or the dignified individual that God declares him to be. And if that is true, and the evolutionist claims it is, then society has the right and the duty to weed out the useless from the useful, the unwanted from those who pay their way. Then human life, in or out of the womb, presents no more of a problem than the ant that walks into the kitchen at the wrong time and is stepped on.”

“For the Christian, the matter of life and death needs to be left in the hands of God, not placed into the hands of man. If we remember that God counts every new life as human, as a sinner, and redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, then we shall treat that life accordingly, God helping us.”

EUTHANASIA From the Greek eu = well and thanatos = death

The Euthanasia Society of America’s membership has jumped from hundreds to tens of thousands in the last four years, and its director says interest continues to swell. Over \$100,000 in donations has been received so far this year; as much as was received during all of 1972. Donations totaled about \$33,000 in 1970. Membership has jumped from 600 in 1969 to 50,000 this year. The society advocates passive rather than active euthanasia. That is, it would favor halting prolonged medical attention to someone who might require it but not an injection of poison into a terminally ill patient. Euthanasia or mercy death is surely an issue we need to reckon with, and the answers are not as easy as they once might have been.

The *Fond du Lac Reporter* of June 5, 1973, carried an article pointing out that “the governing body of the American Medical Association is being asked by its Connecticut delegation to approve a statement by which a person can ask for “the right to die in dignity.” This is especially true when a patient is irreversibly ill,” said the delegation. “The decision to cease employment of artificial means or heroic measures to prolong life of the body belongs to the patient and or the immediate family with the approval of the family physician.”

The discussion of death was included in a resolution presented by the group to the AMA’s House of Delegates at organized medicine’s 122nd annual convention. Under the resolution, this statement would be made available to any patient: “To my family, my physician, my clergyman, my lawyer: “If the time comes when I can no longer actively take part in decisions for my own future, I wish this statement to stand as the testament of my wishes.”

“If there is no reasonable expectation of my recovery from physical or mental and spiritual (?) disability, I request that I be allowed to die and not be kept alive by artificial means or heroic measures. I ask also that drugs be mercifully administered to me for terminal suffering even if in relieving pain they may hasten the moment of death. I value life and the dignity of life, so that I am not asking that my life be directly taken but that my dying not be unreasonably prolonged nor the dignity of life be destroyed.

“This request is made, after careful reflection, while I am in good health and spirits. Although this document is not legally binding, you who care for me will, I hope, feel morally

bound to take it into account. I recognize that it places a heavy burden of responsibility upon you, and it is with the intention of sharing this responsibility that this statement is made.”

Consider two items in the news within the last year. As George Zygmanski, 26, lay in a hospital bed in Neptune, N.J., paralyzed from the neck down because of a motorcycle accident, he felt that life was no longer worth living. He begged his brother Lester, 23, to kill him. According to police, Lester complied—using a sawed-off shotgun at close range. Lester, who had enjoyed an unusually close relationship with his brother, has been charged with first-degree murder.

Eugene Bauer, 59, was admitted to Nassau County Medical Center on Long Island with cancer of the throat. Five days later he was in a coma and given only two days to live. Then, charges the district attorney, Dr. Vincent A. Montemarano, 33, injected an overdose of potassium chloride into Bauer’s veins. Bauer died within five minutes. Montemarano listed the cause of death as cancer, but prosecutors now say that it was a “mercy killing” and have accused the doctor of murder.

Writes Gilbert Cant in a “Time” essay in the July 16, 1973, issue: “These two cases underscore the growing emotional controversy over euthanasia and the so-called right to die—that is, the right to slip from life with a minimum of pain for both the patient and his family. No one seriously advocates the impulsive taking of life, as in the Zygmanski shooting. A person suddenly crippled, no matter how severely, may yet show unpredictable improvement or regain at least a will to live. Whether or not to speed the passage of a fatally ill patient is a far subtler question. The headlong advances of medical science make the issue constantly more complex for patients and their families, for doctors and hospitals, for theologians and lawyers.

“There is no doubt that a panoply of new techniques and equipment can be and often are used to keep alive people who are both hopelessly ill and cruelly debilitated. Artificial respirators, blood-matching and transfusion systems, a variety of fluids that can safely be given intravenously to medicate, nourish and maintain electrolyte balance—these and many more lifesavers give doctors astonishing powers. Should the patient’s heart or lung function be artificially sustained for weeks or months? Should he be kept technically alive by psysiochemical legerdemain, even if he has become a mere collection of organs and tissues rather than a whole man? If a decision is made not to attempt extraordinary measures, or if, at some point, the life-preserving machinery is shut off, then an act is being committed which has been called passive euthanasia. The patient is allowed to die instead of being maintained as a laboratory specimen.”

The case of Harry Truman was an example of prolonging life artificially after no rational hope for recovery remained. The vast majority of patients admitted to many ordinary American hospitals at Truman’s age and in his condition would have been dead within a few days. The measures taken to keep the ex-President alive for 22 days were numerous and elaborate, as spelled out in no fewer than 80 medical bulletins.

“Time’s” January 8 issue said the following in its “Medicine section” “Though it was natural for the medical team to fight hard against death, there was still a temptation for laymen—and even some doctors—to wonder why he (Truman) should not have been allowed to go in peace.

“The fact is that doctors are graduated from medical school with a built-in dilemma. Their Hippocratic oath requires them not only to preserve life but also to relieve suffering. With the span of life being lengthened and with medical wizardry increasing its skills, there will be more and more cases in which one Hippocratic obligation is in direct conflict with the other.”

“Technical wizardry,” says “Time”, has, in fact, necessitated a new definition of death. For thousands of years it had been accepted that death occurred when heart action and breathing ceased. This was essentially true, because the brain died minutes after the heart stopped. But with machines, it is now possible to keep the brain ‘alive’ almost indefinitely. With the machines unplugged, it would soon die. In cases where the brain ceases to function first, heart and lung activity can be artificially maintained. The question then, in the words of Harvard Neurologist Robert Schwab, in “Who decides to pull the plug, and when?”

What is the position of the Roman Catholic Church on this matter? “Time” points out that Pope Pius XII declared that life need not be prolonged by extraordinary means. But Pius insisted, as have most other moralists, that life must be maintained if it is possible to do so by ordinary means—that is, feeding, usual drug treatment, care and shelter. This attitude is supported by history. It would have been tragic, in 1922, to hasten the end of diabetics, for the medical use of insulin had just been discovered. Similar advances have lifted the death sentence for victims of hydrocephalus and acute childhood leukemia.”

But are there not instances of what some might call passive euthanasia which would definitely come under the indictment of the 5th Commandment? Consider the Baltimore couple who let their mongoloid baby die of starvation by refusing permission for an operation to open his digestive tract. The operation might have been considered an ordinary means of treatment, if the child had not been a mongoloid. In a case such as this the quality of life became the determining factor, and once again we are not far removed from the mentality of Nazi Germany.

“Time” goes on: “For cases where the line is unclear between ordinary and extraordinary means, Roman Catholic theology offers an escape clause: the principle of double effect. If the physician’s intention is to relieve pain, he may administer increasing doses of morphine, knowing full well that he will eventually reach a lethal dosage. There are unavoidable uncertainties even in what is called passive euthanasia. Doctors may disagree over a prognosis. A patient may be so depressed by pain that one day he wants out, while the next day he has a renewed will to live. There may even be the problem of heirs who may be thinking more of the estate than of the patient when the time to pull the plug is discussed. There will undoubtedly be gray areas with us always.”

Prof. Armin Schuetze addressed himself to this difficult matter in the column “A Lantern to Our Footsteps” in the January 18, 1970, issue of the *Northwestern Lutheran*. Seeking to answer the question, “Must All Medical Skill Always Be Used?” Prof. Schuetze makes the following points: The 5th Commandment prohibits us from causing anyone’s death. We are not to be the cause of shortening anyone’s time of grace. The Lord gives life; the Lord will end life. The 5th Commandment, however, is not only transgressed through what we do, but also by what we fail to do. There are sins of omission as well as of commission. In the parable of the Good Samaritan the failure of the priest and Levite to administer help was sin.

Prof. Schuetze also points out that medical skill is a gift of God to be used. We surely are not to ignore the medical skills the Lord has made available to us in our day. Nor to use them is sinful neglect. The Jehovah’s Witness parents who refuse the life-saving blood transfusion their child needs are basing this on a false understanding of Scripture. They are guilty of sinful neglect.

The problem arises when it is not a question of restoring someone to health, of prolonging his time of grace in the true sense. Must every effort be made to prolong the life of the person who is evidently going to die in another few hours, in another day? Must the

operation be performed, must an expensive medical program be pursued that can at best delay death, that can at best add a few hours of “life?”

As Prof. Schuetze points out, there are other considerations for a Christian to keep in mind. Scripture does not speak of death as the one great evil that must be avoided at all costs. The Apostle Paul looked forward to the time of his death. He saw it as a time of deliverance from the evils of this life. He wrote: “I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23). This raises the question: Isn’t there such a thing as letting death, letting deliverance through death, come normally?

Prof. Schuetze also raises the question of good stewardship, particularly when the cost of such specialized medical care which may involve the use of every possible means to prolong life is becoming ever greater. Should the financial resources that might be needed by a widow to provide for herself and her dependents be used merely to prolong life for a brief time, knowing that death is inevitably very near? May there not be times when following certain medical procedures may become unjustifiable “devouring of widow’s houses” because of the costs involved? Must a family place itself into a ruinous financial situation merely to prolong an unconscious, dying person’s life a few hours or days? Arthur Hugh Clough may have said it well in his couplet: “Thou shalt not kill; but needst not strive officiously to keep alive.”

Some of these questions have arisen because of the great advances in medical skill since Bible times. There are no final, decisive, pat answers to all of them. On the one hand, we should seek to prolong our time of grace on earth through the means God has made available to us. On the other hand, artificially to force a Christian who is longing for his eternal home to linger on at great expense to his family seems to go beyond what the Scripture calls for.

These are not simple decisions, not for doctors, nor for loved ones. They will not be made lightly, but in the fear of God, asking His guidance and direction.