

The Hardest of the “Hard Cases”: Rape and Saving the Life of the Mother

by Teresa Beem

The conference on abortion was the fifth on contemporary moral issues sponsored and organized by the Loma Linda University Ethics Center. At the very first session, David Larson, director of the ethics center and associate professor of Christian ethics in the school of religion, made it clear that the ethics center did not anticipate that the conference would adopt its own position statement on abortion. The center, Larson says, is not a lobby. Rather, it attempts to be “an intellectual Switzerland—a place to which people with all points of view can come to learn from each other.”

However, by the end of the conference members noted that some convergence had taken place in what Larson calls the “middle ground” on the subject. Larson and his colleagues at the center, Charles Teel, James Walters, and Gerald Winslow, were not surprised. The candid but courteous exchange of views throughout the conference suggests that on some controversial moral issues, such as abortion, the church might avoid dictating a stand to its members, and instead encourage an unofficial but real consensus to emerge gradually. Larson believes that such a consensus is both less divisive than official statements and much longer lasting.

The ethics center that Larson now heads was founded

only five years ago. In addition to organizing conferences on issues such as heart transplantation and nuclear arms, the center produces collections of essays. The four full-time Ph.D.'s in ethics at the center also offer a master's degree in religious ethics and an eight-week clinical intensive course in biomedical ethics. Their newsletter is distributed to 12,000 readers.

Including only the most trenchant presentations from the ethics center's latest conference still permitted us to include both men and women, as well as both pro-life and pro-choice advocates. We do not pretend that we have been able to publish an exact number of pages for each category, but we do believe that the most pointed essays have been included. To varying degrees all the essays presented here are, with the permission of the authors, shorter than the original presentations. Some, as noted at the beginning of the pieces, are excerpts that provide relevant information, not the author's own position on abortion. Those wanting the longer versions of these essays and the other presentations can write to the Ethics Center, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California 92354. A printed volume of essays from the abortion conference is now being edited.

— The Editors

I don't believe in bombing abortion mills, or terrorizing the people who run them or go to them. But I do believe we Adventists and American citizens should rein-

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state the unborn child's right to live. Yes, I am a pro-lifer and I believe that upon conception a unique individual, a gift of God, has entered the human family. I believe God created that life, and no one but God has the right to take that life. When we destroy one of our fellow humans we destroy a part of his creation.

Every 20 seconds in the United States a child's life is destroyed by an abortionist.¹ Almost 20 million since the Supreme Court decision in

1973. *Roe vs. Wade* and its twin case, *Doe vs. Balton*, legalized abortion for any reason at any time during a woman's nine months of pregnancy.² Of these, 97 to 99 percent are done for social or emotional reasons.³ Most Americans agree that these abortions are useless genocide and should be halted.⁴

What about the other three percent? Why are they performed? Are they "necessary" abortions? Specifically, I question the morality of approving abortions performed in those hardest of hard cases, abortion for reasons of rape or the endangerment of the life of the mother.⁵

Who Is the Neediest Rape Victim?

One cold January evening, 16-year-old Kay ran through an underpass on her way home. She was grabbed in the darkness and raped. She told no one. Soon she began experiencing horrible nightmares and paranoia. For four months she calmed herself by rationalizing that her missed periods and queasiness were due to the trauma of the rape. Soon it became physically evident, and her fears were confirmed: Kay was pregnant.⁶ This is an exceptional story. Becoming pregnant after a rape is extremely rare. The FBI estimates that a half a million rapes occur annually in the United States. Less than one percent end up in a pregnancy.⁷ Yet there are instances, like Kay's, that a woman does become pregnant. Should they be able to obtain an abortion, legal or morally, because the child was conceived after rape?

Kay did not have an abortion. Instead, she gave her child up for adoption.

I can live with the fact that I have been raped, but I could not live in peace if I had killed my child. I do not agree with those who advocate abortion for rape or incest. One violent, cruel act doesn't justify another. Our laws do not condemn the rapist to death, so it is insane that we would issue a death sentence for an innocent baby. Robin [the child conceived by rape] is no different and no less valuable than any other human being. In fact, I have often imagined Robin and my other daughter (born through marriage) standing together

before a gathering of all the pro-abortion people. I would ask the crowd to decide which one should live: Does one deserve to die because of the way she was conceived, because of the sin of her father?⁸

Kay chose life for her child. This is not unusual. Of women who become pregnant by rape, about half of them carry their child full term. Only one of 25,000 abortions are performed annually on women pregnant from rape.⁹ Less than 100 abortions occur each year in the United States because of rape or incest.¹⁰

In 1973, the United States Supreme Court heard the story of a Dallas woman who said she'd been gang-raped and became pregnant. The high court ruled on this case, opening up the possibility for a woman to kill her child for any reason.¹¹ Fortunately, the ruling was too late for the baby of the Dallas woman. The mother had already given birth and given her up for adoption into a loving family.

Since the 1973 ruling of the Supreme Court, there *have* been women, although few, who obtained abortions for reasons of rape. Jackie was one of them. She was sexually assaulted at knife-point in Hollywood. She also became pregnant. She was told by her family and friends that abortion was the only answer. "They offered no solutions." Jackie recalls:

I believed them when they said my nightmare would be over and I could get on with my life after the abortion as if nothing had ever happened. I felt an emptiness that nothing could fill, and quickly discovered that the aftermath of abortion continued a long time after the memory of the rape had dimmed. For the next three years I experienced horrible depression and nightmares. I would dream of giving birth, but they would take my baby away from me. I would hear crying and I would search, but I could not find her anywhere. I would just hear her cries echoing in the distance.¹²

When a woman has an abortion, she most likely will experience postabortion syndrome or psychological trauma. If we combine this with the rape experience, it may be doubly devastating.

One experienced counselor declares that, "abortion does not un-rape a woman."¹³ The director of Suiciders Anonymous of Cincinnati reported, "Interestingly, the pregnant rape victim's chief complaint is not that she is unwillingly pregnant, as bad as the experience is. . . . We

found this experience [the rape] is forgotten by remembering the abortion, because it is what *they* did.”¹⁴

Should a woman have a legal right to abortion—especially a rape victim? So far, I have used women who, because of personal experience, say No. Can we use their testimony to decide for other women? You might be able to find many more testimonies of women who chose abortion because of rape and felt they did the right thing.

As Adventists, we must look at the question in a much broader sense. We obey laws, yes, but we answer to a much higher power when we make our choices. We make decisions not only from personal and other people’s experiences, or what we feel at the time, but by what God’s Word says. We should base our actions by the laws in the Bible. There we find God’s commandment not to kill (Deuteronomy 5:17, Exodus 20:13). We learn that we are not put on this earth to find our own happiness, nor to manipulate people to solve our own problems. We are here to follow Jesus’ example and show love and compassion to our fellow humans. We are all given trials, just as Job in the Bible endured trials. We are held up by Satan to the entire universe and our works and reactions to those trials either glorify God or mock him. We show our commitment to God by humble, unselfish submission to his commands. Then he turns our sorrow into joy; he takes what seems like tragedy and turns it into triumph.

What God requires of us is one thing. What our government requires is another. With our ever present paranoia of church and state separation, we must find different grounds than loyalty to God if we want to make rape/abortion illegal.

Making abortion illegal, except in cases of rape or incest, invalidates the whole argument of illegal abortion. Let me explain. The reason we should not kill preborn people is because they *are* people and have the right to live protected under the 14th amendment of the Constitution. Biologists, geneticists, fetologists, to name a few of the professional fields, all have proved that a human life begins at conception.¹⁵ We have allowed the killing of that unborn child because society feels sorry for the young woman. We give her the fairly new concept of “right-to-control-her-own-body”

because we can see she is emotionally unready to be a mother, or so she convinces us. If we allow the rape victim access to abortion for emotional reasons, we must allow all women the same. Either *all* unborn children have the same rights or they do not. You cannot pick and choose those who are really human by the way in which they are conceived.

Another problem with allowing rape victims abortions is that there are several types of rape.

Statutory rape involves a girl, 15 years old or

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younger, who willingly has intercourse with a man of legal age.

Date rape is when a woman on a date is forced into sex.

Marital rape occurs when a man forces his wife into sex.

Assault rape is the most commonly thought of when we speak of rape. This is when an unknown, possibly armed, man surprises a woman and sexually assaults her. It is often accompanied by beatings and threats on the woman’s life.

Although all are degrading and with the exception of statutory are forced, all could be used to gain legal abortions. Marital and date rape would be almost impossible to prove. If the law only considered assault rape, women would begin staging rapes to get abortions and possibly innocent men would be put in jail. The only way rape can be proved is if the woman immediately reports it to the police and gets medical attention. If she does this, she can receive hormonal therapy to prevent pregnancy, therefore, that renders the rape/pregnancy reason invalid.

An anonymous caller to a radio talk show told her story:

I am the product of rape. An intruder forced his way into my parent’s house, tied up my father, and, with him watching, raped my mother. I was conceived that night. Everyone advised an abortion My father, however,

said, "Even though not mine, that is a child and I will not allow it to be killed." I do not know how many times that, as I lay secure in the loving arms of my husband, I have thanked God for my wonderful Christian father.¹⁶

Kathy, at 16, was raped when the man she had accepted a date from drove her to the lake, instead of taking her home as she had requested. She screamed and screamed. Somehow she knew she would become pregnant. She did. Kathy's story occurred many years ago, before the legalization of abortion, so she tried to kill her child herself. She drank ant poison, jumped off tall haystacks, and punched her stomach. Kathy recalls:

"I hated the baby, I hated the guy and most of all, I

hated myself." After the baby was born, Kathy said, everything changed. She decided to keep her baby and named him Patrick. Two-and-a-half years later she married, but the rape experience continued to haunt her. "I hated men. I got even deeper into drugs and drinking, and what was left of my life quickly crumbled. Finally after my third or fourth overdose, God got through to me. I knew I needed to give my life to the Lord, and I cried out to God."¹⁷

Kathy writes about her new life in Christ and her son:

Patrick is now 22, and I thank God abortion was illegal when he was conceived. If it had been available, I do not know for certain what I would have chosen, but I am glad I did not have the option. I pray for the day

A Modest Proposal

by Madelyn Jones-Haldeman

RN. Wennberg insists that a woman has the right to determine what happens in and to her body, but "it does not follow that she also has the right to the death of the fetus" (*Life in the Balance*, p. 168). He suggests that modern science develop artificial wombs in which fetuses can be placed. However, until modern medical science can come up with such technology, Wennberg declares that the right of the fetus to live supercedes the right of the woman to control her body. Please note that Wennberg is a male, and that his solution, of course, has to do with the female. Permit me to direct your minds to some solutions which have to do with gentlemen. These suggestions are not only Christian solutions, they can be promoted by Christians helping society to confront and solve a moral dilemma.

Solution One: Every couple applying for a marriage license must sign a contract as part of their marriage agreement that they will have only so many children. Upon reaching that goal, the husband is to be sterilized.

Solution Two: With sperm banks and insemination present-day realities, all men who are getting married, or who decide to cohabit without a marriage license, should be required by law to deposit enough sperm in sperm banks to create at least 50 children. Having deposited his sperm, the

male is sterilized. Insemination of the woman with the sperm of her husband or partner will guarantee that begetting of new life is no accident, but truly planned.

Solution Three: Young boys who reach the age of puberty should be treated as men who are intending to marry. Each should deposit sperm in sperm banks and then be sterilized. Boys and men who are guilty of incest should be emasculated.

If these simple remedies appear barbaric, remember no one thinks so when a woman is so desperate that she has a tubal ligation. Furthermore, if these solutions were adopted, there would be no need to legislate on abortion, even for those women who were raped or who were victims of incest.

These solutions put the responsibility of sexual activity squarely on men's shoulders. It proposes to make men stewards of the life within them. When male theologians seek to solve the problem concerning abortion by always prescribing and proscribing what women should do, they need to know that they are indeed themselves acting irresponsibly. Why not, after the manner of the paradigm in Ephesians 5, let men (husbands) give their life for the wife? Why are we so afraid to suggest: "Christian gentlemen, it is your turn to take some of this awesome responsibility of begetting life"?

Therefore, Christian theologians, pastors, teachers, and men should do everything in their power to introduce into the legislative halls the concept that the male, particularly now that science has made new options easily and safely available, is far more responsible than the female for maintaining the integrity of creating new life. Christians should urge the three solutions suggested so we can solve our ethical dilemmas at the beginning and not the end. I call on all Christian men, including Adventist males, to be brave and lead a great movement urging society to adopt these solutions.

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when it will again be outlawed. I guess both Patrick and I are classic examples of God's mercy and grace and what He can do in the case of rape. . . . Every life is of immeasurable value and importance, no matter what the circumstance of their conception. God gives each person something unique to contribute, and when even one life is lost, we all lose something. If Patrick wasn't here, there are many people whose lives would have suffered, including mine. [I find this last statement of Kathy's very interesting.] It was Patrick who challenged and helped me to truly forgive his father.¹⁸

What about the women who choose abortion? Surely we cannot say they made a mistake, can we? I would never presume to judge anyone's decision in a case such as this, but I will say that she will never know what that child could have meant to her, or an adoptive family or society.

Even if conceived outside the sacred marital bed, there is no such thing as "wrongful life." For if a child conceived of rape is "wrongful life," is God no longer Master of the universe, the Giver of life? If he remains so, then surely none of his creation is expendable.

Often forgotten in the discussion is the fact that the child is still a part of the mother. The baby may be half the rapist's, but it is still the mother's flesh and blood. Can we justify killing all of the child to rid it of its "ugly" half? Maybe we should take the Bible literally when it says he will not give us more than we can bear.

I do not mean to sound legalistic or less than compassionate toward a woman who has gone through something as horrible as rape. I, being a woman, have lived in dread of being raped. I, along with probably every woman in America, check the backseat of my car before I get in. I also feel somewhat panicky when I must enter a dark, empty house alone at night. Yet I question the kind of compassion used by society when it automatically encourages an abortion if a woman becomes pregnant following a rape. No matter how well meaning our judgment seems, abortion probably isn't the best answer for the woman, and it never is for the child.

Kathy's son, Patrick, a happily married, handsome young man tells us,

"As a child of rape, I have a unique outlook on abortion. If abortions had been legal when I was conceived, I would not be alive. I would have never had the

chance to love and give of myself to others. I have had wonderful opportunities to share my testimony, too. Whenever someone says, 'What about rape?' I have the perfect answer!"¹⁹

Should the Mother Automatically Save Her Own Life?

In 1985, Dr. Joseph MacDougall told the story of one of his patients, a 23-year-old mother with a one-year-old child. She was hospitalized, suffering from tuberculosis and was near death. This story begins in December of 1947, when medical science had no drugs to cure cases like hers. The doctor chose to name the woman Eleanor, to protect her real identity, and he said she was a devout and courageous woman.

One day Eleanor asked, if she were still alive, couldn't she please go home for Christmas? The doctor promised her that she could only because he knew she would not make it till then. It seemed so little to do to make her happy. Yet, Christmas

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Eve she still hung on to life, so true to his promise the doctor allowed her to go home. When she returned her condition was worse and soon she was down to 80 pounds. New complications developed; she became nauseous and vomited continually. As ridiculous as it seemed, the doctor gave her a pregnancy test, and to everyone's astonishment it was positive. The doctor said, "On the very outer frontier of life itself, she now bore a second life within her. When I told her she smiled and blushed."

Legally, medically, they strongly advised an abortion, yet Eleanor and her husband said No. The doctors didn't push because they knew her body would reject the baby anyway. They began

to feed her intravenously and although they kept insisting she was dying, Eleanor refused to die, and kept her child. "Then an incredible thing began to happen," said her doctor. "In late June of 1948, we noted some improvement . . . She began to eat and to gain weight. An X-ray showed that the growth of the TB cavity had stopped. The diaphragm was pushing up against the diseased

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lung to make room for the child she bore. Nature was doing exactly what we had failed to do: it was pressing the sides of that deadly hole together." Eleanor gave birth to a normal, healthy baby. In a few months Eleanor was so much better they allowed her to go home. The baby whom everyone said would hasten her death actually saved her life.²⁰

We can never predict when God will intervene with a miracle. When doctors have done everything possible and when a woman's life is endangered by a pregnancy, the doctor must advise what he thinks is best. Then it must rest with the mother; only she can decide to have an abortion.

She can also go to the Bible for some principles to guide her. There we find the story of a little lost lamb (Luke 15:3-6). The shepherd had a flock of sheep that he tended, which he was responsible for. But when the smallest, frailest, most vulnerable was in trouble, the shepherd left his others to rescue him. He was even willing to put his life in danger to save the lost one (John 10:11). A mother is like a shepherd. She knows when one of her children is in need of her. She sometimes puts her other children on temporary "hold" to tend to the one who is most in need. We might be able to apply this parable to the woman who is facing a therapeutic abortion.

I have based my entire paper on the valid assumption that the unborn *is* a child—snuggled

warmly inside the protective womb where no one can see it develop. Although an unborn child may not be so easily recognized as a baby, an unborn child *is* a living human being. Even though a mother has not held the baby in her arms or wiped its runny nose, or heard its first cry, to kill the unborn would be to kill one of her children.

Under rare, sad circumstances I can understand a woman choosing abortion. I have two small children myself and I cannot imagine not being there for them, giving up being their mother to give life to another child; leaving them to the responsibility of their father. Yet, I would find it close to impossible, in order to save my own life, to kill any of my children, including an unborn child.

The Bible says, there is no greater love than that a man should lay down his life for his friends (1 John 3:16-18 [NASB], John 15:13). Of course, the Bible does not coerce or demand this of anyone. And I am in no way suggesting that we should convince a woman to carry her child to term if it means her life, or pass legislation making therapeutic abortion illegal. Therapeutic abortion should remain legal; and when I say *therapeutic*, I mean in the strictest sense: Abortion to save the life of the mother.²¹ Such exceptions should include the mother who has cancer and for whom pregnancy would interfere with life-saving treatment, as well as the mother who has Eisenmenger or Marfan's disease. But let us remember the woman with tuberculosis. If we automatically choose abortion when faced with a life or death decision, we rule out God's possible intervention with a miracle.

Of all abortion topics, disapproving an abortion even when the life of the mother is in danger, is the very hardest. We cannot legislate a woman to die because she is pregnant, but abortion is not the automatic answer for the Christian. If I am ever faced with this decision, I hope that I have the faith and relationship with Christ that I will be open to the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

Pro-lifers are often described as being uncompassionate, unrealistic fetus lovers, who are against the woman in a personal crisis. Instead of lots of cold statistics, I have let the people who have endured and overcome rare tragic circum-

stances speak to you about their views on abortion and why they feel it is wrong. In addition I have shared the opinions of a few experts, as well as my own. I have focused on the hard cases, those cases in which you might disagree with my conclusions. I only hope that your mind and heart have been opened to new ideas for even the apparently open-and-shut cases. I hope that you and I together can join in the effort to uplift the human of God's creation. I pray that our society may see the wonders of God's hand even in the tiniest of human beings. For, since the beginning of man's existence, when God breathed into Adam's nostrils and ignited the spark of mankind, the gift of human life, the image of God has been passed

down; first, through Adam's bone to Eve, and then to the first child at conception. Thus the chain of life has continued till now and will continue into the future. We are all a part of that chain and have a kinship with our fellow humans. Ultimately we must protect and preserve the life and dignity of each human because we are Christians. And because we are Christians we must preserve life with love and compassion.

Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Surely we did not know this," Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?" (Proverbs 24:11, 12, NKJV).

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