

Abortion in Canada: A Brief to the Legislative Committee on Bill C-43

February 1990

Introduction

In making this presentation to the Legislative Committee on Bill C-43, we are building on the long-standing position on abortion held by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). The EFC is a national association made up of some 27 Protestant denominations, hundreds of local congregations and agencies, and thousands of individuals.

Our thesis

The EFC deplores the government's failure to include full legal protection for the human right to life of the unborn. We advocate that appropriate amendments be adopted before the bill is passed. As well the EFC cannot accept the broad, vague definition of "health," which allows for abortion on virtually any ground. The EFC advocates that Parliament adopt a clear amendment, giving doctors clear guidance regarding "health." We endorse the proposals made by Nurses for Life, who advocate the adoption of essential conscience clauses which protect all health care workers in their right to refuse to participate in performing an abortion.

The Declaration on Human Life

We have expressed our views on abortion through several statements, most notably through The Declaration on Human Life passed by our General assembly in 1987.

Our Biblical View:

Recognizing that life is a gift from God, we affirm the inherent worth of human life from conception. Further, that all humans possess a dignity which must not be violated.

The biblical command to love God, and your neighbour as yourself, is the core of our concern for one another. Christian morality is grounded in this belief. Likewise Micah's call for justice and mercy stems from the belief that because all people bear the divine image, the dignity of the least advantaged must be respected.

Human life transcends any utilitarian or functional definition. Hence we affirm our responsibility to fight injustice, to alleviate human suffering, to uphold the right to life and to provide for the security of the unborn child, the severely handicapped and the disabled against all forms of technological and social dehumanization.

We are called to oppose the destruction of human life, to seek a biblically just social policy and to be servants in loving, Christian action. We are committed to comprehensive Christian ministry which speaks to all of life including exploitation, unemployment, the breakdown of the family, child abuse, pornography, racism and idolatrous materialism.

While firmly opposed to abortion, we recognize that those whose views are contrary to ours should be treated with respect and dignity and that God's forgiveness is offered to all. We call on the church to express the compassion of Christ in supporting mothers in their decision to carry a child to birth. We also urge continuing active support for those involved in parenting and in the adoption and fostering of children.

The church must renew its commitment to teaching a biblical view of sexuality, including marriage, wholesome relationships and the affirmation that sex is a physical endowment, a source of joy and a sacred trust. We call men to support the role of motherhood and to develop nurturing attitudes toward women and children.

Our presentation to your committee focuses on the social issues linked to abortion. As you struggle to formulate recommendations regarding Bill C-43, which the House of Commons can amend or pass as is, we ask that you keep the broader implications of the abortion issue in mind.

We offer you seven considerations

1. Failure of individualism

We cannot isolate the act of taking the life of the unborn from the rest of life. We are learning from the current ecological crisis that the ideals of individualism have failed us. The notion that people can do what they want is not compatible with social or planetary survival. For example, what may seem fitting for one person is not fitting if it destroys the ozone layer or pollutes our rivers. The environment - that precious and frail fabric which surrounds us - needs protection.

The very nature of life makes living people, be they born or unborn, interdependent. Our society is coming to recognize that relationship; our government can no longer proceed on the basis of worn-out assumptions of individualism, which blind us to the realities of our being interconnected. No stage or form of human life can be treated as disposable or outside the law in the interest of individual autonomy.

2. Demographic considerations

While many countries struggle with high birth rates, Canada has the opposite problem. The province of Quebec is even offering financial incentives to parents who have more than one child. At the same time, it receives federal health payments for hospitals to perform abortions.

The declining birth rate ought to be a concern for all of us, not just for those living in Quebec. Will there be sufficient young people in the coming decades to provide the social support needed to assist the elderly? A wider immigration and refugee policy will help somewhat. Immigration is not a long-term solution, however. One of the reasons for our low birth rates (and for abortions, of course) is that in the places where there are jobs, housing for families is becoming unaffordable. Both spouses find they must work full time to keep up the payments inflated by high interest rates. Immigrant couples face the same pressures as the native-born and will have the same needs when they are old.

The problem is great enough to give us pause to reflect on the fact that the nation is polarized on the abortion issue, yet consideration of abortion is never linked to the long-term building of our nation.

3. Foetal Farming

With the development of tissue transplantation technology, we can now design tissue for transplantation by intentionally producing and aborting a foetus. Our attitudes toward abortion are a strong indicator of how we will respond to this technical know-how.

If the taking of the life of the unborn is permitted by this society for reasons of social, psychological or emotional stress, this underlying “logic” will be used to support the production and abortion of a foetus. Such a normless notion of life will tend to legitimize the use of foetal tissue for utilitarian purposes. In effect, support of abortion for reasons other than saving the life of the mother opens the door to accepting the production and use of foetal tissue.

4. Sex choice

While the notion of aborting a fetus of the “wrong” gender (usually female) may seem remote in Canada, the problem is real in other countries. The “logic” for abortion on request - the perception that the unborn have no value in themselves - legitimates the aborting of fetuses of one sex until a fetus of the preferred sex has been conceived. If all reasons for abortion are acceptable, “gender” abortions cannot be ruled out.

5. Fertility technology

In vitro fertilization, the freezing of embryos, surrogate motherhood and other scientific advances are proceeding at great cost, amid great ethical and legal confusion. Is it not absurdly contradictory to be spending millions on fertility technology and on structuring legal frameworks to accommodate it, while at the same time we are losing the lives of some 60,000 unborn a year?

6. Royal Commission on Reproductive Technology.

The federal government recently announced the formation of the Royal Commission on Reproductive Technology. A statement by the House of Commons to the effect that the unborn fetus is seen as no more than an appendage of the pregnant woman would surely send a disturbing message to the members of the Commission and possibly prejudice its hearing and recommendations.

7. Social Considerations

The attitudes toward the unborn which become law will affect other areas of social policy. If we devalue the life of the unborn, we will be less motivated to do much for those who are marginalized by poverty or other disabilities. If we truly value human life, then we will be as concerned about enhancing the lives of those who are disadvantaged as we are about protecting the lives of the unborn. Abortion policy is not isolated from the policies on housing, child care, health and education.

Conclusion

Our society is shifting its emphasis toward conservation - both of our physical and our cultural environments. This conserving

impulse recognizes that we cannot escape the consequences of our actions simply by redefining them. Environmental disasters and the national debt concern us because we know our children and grandchildren will be burdened with them.

The same can be said about the abortion issue. If we continue to have low regard for the life of the unborn - who are literally our future, a most precious resource - generations to follow will wonder at our limited understanding of life, our destructive concept of the relations between women and men, our narrow view of personal concerns and our stunted expectations of what our society should be.

Finally, we extend to you the Committee our thanks for your efforts in attempting to find solutions to this watershed decision.

As you sort through the various requests, we remind you that generations to come will judge your view of life on the basis of your recommendations.

In our appearances before the legislative committee we will make further comments and suggestions as to why and how the human right to life of the unborn must be protected and the needs of their parents be met.

We wish to be known as a nation “that is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law.”

Further, we urge Parliament to implement the Charter section dealing with equality rights which states: “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”