“THEREFORE, CHOOSE LIFE:” CHRISTIANITY AND THE ANTI-ABORTION MOVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

As I sat in the sanctuary of my nondenominational Christian church in Louisiana one Sunday morning, I listened as the campus pastor excitedly said abortion is no longer legal in our state and watched the congregation clap and cheer in response. It was the summer of 2022 and the Christian Church was celebrating the Supreme Court’s ruling to overturn Roe v. Wade, a case which granted the right to safe and legal abortion procedures across the United States. As a devout Christian woman who identifies as pro-choice, I was saddened to hear the Church celebrating the decision while women across the country feared the consequences that the ruling would have on them.

In the United States, the Christian Church is commonly associated with the pro-life movement and is arguably one of the biggest supporters of the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Although Christian pastors across the country have had varying responses to the ruling, it seems as if the overwhelming majority see this as a win for the lives of the unborn ("Roe v. Wade Verdict: How the Church Reacted"). However, other religious groups, namely Jewish groups, have responded quite differently to the overturning of Roe v. Wade, stating that to deny access to abortion is a violation of Jewish law and tradition ("Jewish Groups Respond to the Supreme Court’s Ruling Overturning Roe v Wade")\(^1\).

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\(^1\) Both liberal and conservative Jewish groups agree that overturning Roe v. Wade intrudes on women’s rights, especially when pregnancy may result in physical or psychological harm to the mother.
I could not understand how Jewish and Christian responses to the ruling differed so drastically considering Christianity was born out of Judaism. The Christian Church emphasizes that our God is unchanging, remaining the same across all of time. Verses like Malachi 3:6, “For I, the LORD, do not change,” and Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,” tell us of the enduring and unfailing ways of God (New American Standard Bible). Jesus Christ, Christianity’s Messiah himself, was a Jewish prophet who taught the same principles already set forth by God. Therefore, if God never changes and Jesus himself was Jewish, then should not Christian thought align with Jewish thought on the topic of abortion? Why is it that Christianity is the one religion so deeply associated with the pro-life movement in the United States?

These questions led me to examine whether Christianity as a religion truly is anti-abortion. Although many inside and outside of the Church believe Christianity is anti-abortion, I question whether this is spiritual truth or if Christians have just blindly accepted this as truth. Is the Bible really a pro-life text? Is Christian tradition rooted in anti-abortion beliefs or would ancient texts and history prove otherwise? In this paper, I seek to understand whether Christianity is truly anti-abortion by examining the Bible, ancient religious texts and thought, and abortion history in the United States. In examining this question, I hope to critically understand Christianity’s position on abortion rather than blindly following the views of the modern Church.

I. Defining Pro-Life and Pro-Choice

To frame this discussion, it is important to understand the definitions of pro-life and pro-choice as well as the underpinnings of each side’s argument. To begin, those who are pro-life generally believe abortion is wrong and should be illegal. There are many
claims that those who are pro-life use to support this argument. The first claim is that the fetus is a living being. Because they believe a fetus is a living person, those who are pro-life characterize abortion as homicide (Halva-Neubauer and Zeigler). Additionally, many pro-life Christians see children as a precious gift from God, framing abortion a sin against God himself (Karrer 528). From a pro-life perspective, abortion is therefore never acceptable because it is classified as murder and murder is a sin.

Oppositely, those who are pro-choice generally believe that the option to have an abortion should be legal. The main claim amongst those who are pro-choice stems from a feminist perspective that women have the right to choose and the right to bodily autonomy. The next claim is that the fetus is not a living being. Therefore, those who are pro-choice often favor the pregnant person over the fetus because they do not consider the fetus to be living like the pregnant person. Other pro-choice believers think abortion is justifiable only in specific circumstances, such as pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. Ultimately, those who are pro-life are for the life of the fetus while those who are pro-choice are for the choice of the pregnant person².

It is important to recognize that pro-choice is not synonymous with pro-abortion. While pro-choice activists generally believe in giving a person a choice in whether to continue a pregnancy, pro-choice activists do not celebrate abortion nor desire to see a person choose abortion, as the term pro-abortion might suggest (Manninen 90). Studies have found that even those who characterize themselves as pro-choice feminists experience guilt and sadness when they themselves procure an abortion (Siegel). As the

² For discussions on modern times, I have chosen to use the gender-neutral term “pregnant person.” However, when discussing abortion in antiquity, I will use the term “pregnant woman” to align with ancient understandings of gender and pregnancy.
name suggests, being pro-choice simply implies that a person has the right to choose and that choice should not be restricted by legislature.

II. Limitation

While I do come to a definitive conclusion at the end of my research, I do want to note some limitations that I have encountered throughout my process. To begin, it was difficult to assess ancient texts and history through a pro-life and pro-choice lens because these binaries did not exist in biblical times. The authors and people in the Bible did not view abortion in such a black and white manner. Therefore, in examining the Bible for pro-life and pro-choice arguments, we are applying modern interpretations to ancient thought, which does not neatly fit into the categories of pro-life and pro-choice.

Because ancient peoples did not define themselves as either pro-life or pro-choice, I had to examine other questions to inform my understanding of whether Christianity is anti-abortion. These questions include: When does life begin? What is considered murder? What are ancient beliefs on fetal development? What were abortion practices like in ancient societies? When did the binaries of pro-life and pro-choice form? All of these questions are addressed in my search to find the answer to my research question.
CHAPTER ONE: THE BIBLE – PRO-LIFE OR PRO-CHOICE?

To understand whether Christianity is anti-abortion, we must begin by examining the Bible, the authoritative sacred text of Christianity. Today, supporters of both the pro-life and pro-choice movements utilize Bible verses to promote their viewpoints. Therefore, I will be analyzing Bible verses from both pro-life and pro-choice perspectives to understand how proponents on each side use the Bible to advance their beliefs. I will also critically examine each verse to find potential limitations for their usage in the pro-life/pro-choice debate. The Bible verses I have chosen to analyze are those that I often hear pro-life and pro-choice supporters use and that frequently appeared in online searches pertaining to the topic of abortion in the Bible.

Before analyzing these verses, it is important to understand how each argument is constructed biblically. On the anti-abortion side, pro-lifers believe the Bible makes three main claims: 1) Life begins at conception, 2) The fetus needs protecting, and 3) Life is sacred. The main argument on the pro-life side is that if life begins at conception and life is sacred, then the fetus must be protected from lethal harm. Oppositely, on the abortion rights side, those who are pro-choice argue that the Bible provides proof contrary to these pro-life claims. Those who are pro-choice use the Bible to make the following claims: 1) Life does not begin at conception, 2) God allows killing in certain circumstances, and 3) God grants people the right to choose. From this perspective, because life does not begin
at conception and God grants us free will, then abortion is considered acceptable. I will review each of these claims in depth to assess whether the Bible is an anti-abortion text.

I. The Pro-Life Side

**LIFE IN THE WOMB.** The first, and potentially most important, claim of those who are pro-life is that the Bible proves life begins in the womb. The most used verse to support this claim is Psalm 139:13 which states, “For You created my innermost parts; /You wove me in my mother’s womb.” In this psalm, King David describes the omniscient power of God as the One who knows us completely inside and out. In verse 13, the design-related diction of “created” and “wove” demonstrate God’s role as the creator or designer of humankind. From a pro-life perspective, the use of this design-related diction combined with the word “womb” is evidence that fetuses are fully formed humans before being birthed.

However, the Psalm continues to say,

My frame was not hidden from You
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully formed in the depths of the earth;
Your eyes have seen my formless substance;
And in Your book were written
All the days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them. (Psalm 139:15-16)

According to biblical notes, the word “frame” is a metaphor for bones, the frame of the body. David states that God knew the design of his bones when he was “formed in the depths of the earth.” In contrast to verse 13 which states that formation occurs in the womb, verse 16 points to formation occurring in the depths of the earth. This concept of being formed from the earth harks back to the creation story in which Adam, the first
man, was formed from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). The idea of being formed from the earth, rather than the womb, departs from the pro-life narrative, implying that David is speaking about his formation in a metaphorical sense, rather than a literal sense, to emphasize God’s cosmic creation power. The earth here is the ultimate “mother in which the seed has been sown” (Stol 145).

One could argue that verse 16 furthers the pro-life perspective as it explains that David’s days were written out before he experienced a single one of them. Those on the pro-life side would see this as affirmation that David existed before he was born. However, this does not mean that David was alive before he was born, as that would be physically impossible. Again, it is more likely that David wrote this verse as a metaphorical testament to the authority God granted him as king before he lived his first day.

Anti-abortionists make a similar argument for life in the womb using Jeremiah 1:5 which states, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you./And before you were born I consecrated you;/I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” At the start of his prophetic book, Jeremiah says these are the first words he heard from God. Like Psalm 139:13, the first line of Jeremiah 1:5 implies Jeremiah existed before he was in his mother’s womb. However, time is an important consideration in understanding the meaning of this verse. God states that He knew Jeremiah before he was formed. If we read this verse literally, then it would mean Jeremiah was living even before conception before there were ever ties to a physical body (Jones and Molinari 35). Therefore, this verse would be illogical if readers interpreted it literally to signify the beginning of life.
A more logical interpretation of Jeremiah 1:5 takes into consideration the second and third lines of the verse which explain God’s ordaining of Jeremiah as a prophet. In these lines, the sacred diction of “consecrated” and “prophet” define Jeremiah’s authority as an intermediary between God and His people. Further, by appointing Jeremiah prophet “to the nations,” God emphasizes the breadth of Jeremiah’s authority as it spans across a wide area. Therefore, like Psalm 139:13, Jeremiah 1:5 acts as a metaphorical way of ordaining Jeremiah’s anointing and emphasizing his divine authority as a prophet. Rather than acting as proof that life begins in the womb, this verse is used to introduce readers to Jeremiah and relay his authority as prophet to illustrate why readers should believe his book.

**THE FETUS IN NEED OF PROTECTING.** In addition to claiming life begins in the womb, anti-abortionists also claim that fetuses fall within a category of beings that God calls us to protect. Proverbs 31:8 states, “Open your mouth for the people who cannot speak,/For the rights of all the unfortunate.” The Bible defines the “unfortunate” many times as a group of people who we are to protect and speak up for. Isaiah 1:17 states,

> Learn to do good;  
> Seek justice,  
> Rebuke the oppressor,  
> Obtain justice for the orphan,  
> Plead for the widow’s case.

Other verses in both the Old and New Testaments emphasize similar messages of defending the fatherless and oppressed (Psalm 82:3) and looking after orphans and widows (James 1:27). Additional verses, like Leviticus 19:33-34 and Zechariah 7:10, also
call us to protect foreigners who reside among us. The sheer number of times the Bible repeats this message indicates clearly that God’s will is for us to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Many anti-abortionists use these verses to classify the unborn within the category of unfortunates to make the argument that we must speak up for them because they cannot speak up for themselves while in the womb. However, the Bible does not directly specify “the unborn” as a group in need of protecting, while it is very clear that these commands apply to orphans, widows, and foreigners.

Oppositely, anti-abortionists use other verses to characterize the unborn as sacred to justify their need for protection. Luke 1 tells the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth who become pregnant by praying to God, despite their old age and infertility. The angel Gabriel visits Zechariah and tells him that the child is to be named John. This John would later become known as John the Baptist, Jesus’ predecessor. A few months after Elizabeth conceives, Mary, also known as Mother Mary or the Virgin Mary, becomes pregnant with Jesus. The angel Gabriel visits Mary and tells her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; for that reason also the holy Child will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Mary then learns of her cousin Elizabeth’s pregnancy and pays her a visit. Upon Mary’s arrival to Elizabeth’s house, the scripture says, “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41).

It is this verse that anti-abortionists use to prove the sacredness of the fetus inside of Elizabeth’s womb. The words “leaped” and “filled” imply joy and abundancy associated with the baby in her womb. Additionally, the “baby” is the subject of the sentence, implying that the fetus has agency and thus life. The verse further emphasizes
the sacredness of the baby by associating its movement with the Holy Spirit. Here, the baby acts as a conduit through which Elizabeth is able to receive the Holy Spirit, implying the baby has agency and life.

When reading the verse in the context of the entire chapter of Luke 1, the above interpretation of the baby as sacred falls apart. Although it appears Elizabeth and John the Baptist are the main players of this story, the introduction of Mary and Jesus overshadows their story just as Jesus eventually overshadows John the Baptist as the Son of God. Luke 1:42 states, “And she [Elizabeth] cried out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you [Mary] among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” Elizabeth continues to call Mary the “mother of my Lord” and Mary responds saying that future generations will “call me blessed” (Luke 1:43-48).

When connecting Luke 1:41 to the verses that follow, it seems as though the text is emphasizing the sacredness of Mary (and by extension Jesus), not the sacredness of the baby in Elizabeth’s womb. Elizabeth tells Mary that not only is she blessed, but so is the “fruit of her womb,” being Jesus. Mary has already been filled with the Holy Spirit by the angel Gabriel. However, when Gabriel visited Zechariah to fulfill his prayer of Elizabeth becoming pregnant, Gabriel did not fill Elizabeth with the Holy Spirit. It is only when Elizabeth encounters Mary, the mother of Jesus, that she is filled with the Holy Spirit. In this context, the reference to the baby leaping and Elizabeth being filled with the Holy Spirit is an argument for the sacredness and holiness of the Virgin Mary and a testament to Jesus being the Son of God. Additionally, although baby John is the one who has agency in the verse, it is ultimately Elizabeth who interprets the baby’s actions (Aitken and Playoust 171). The emphasis is less on the nature of John as an unborn being, and...
more on the sensation of joy associated with the coming of Jesus which serves to emphasize Jesus’ divine authority as the Son of God.

It is important to note that the New Testament itself is a collection of stories about Jesus’ life and in these stories there is little concern with unborn Jesus (Aitken and Playoust 157). According to Aitken and Playoust, sensations during pregnancy were often used rhetorically in the Bible, not to symbolize the coming of a child, but to create continuity between generations or to represent the coming of a new generation. Much of Matthew and Luke’s gospels attempt to connect Jesus’ lineage to past generations of Jews and Gentiles to demonstrate his authority as king over both (164). This was partially out of necessity because many believed John the Baptist was actually the one who was to fulfill the prophesies of the Old Testament. Therefore, Luke’s aim in most of his gospel, including this opening tale, is to reconcile the relationship between John and Jesus while still asserting Jesus’ dominance over John as the Messiah. Therefore, this story of John and Jesus’ interaction as fetuses acts as a rhetorical device, allowing Luke to form the foundation of John and Jesus’ relationship and, furthermore, their hierarchy.

**SANCTITY OF LIFE.** Finally, those on the pro-life side argue that the Bible teaches that life is holy and, therefore, should be chosen above all else. One of the most popular verses anti-abortionists use in this pro-life claim is Exodus 20:13 which states, “You shall not murder.” As one of the Ten Commandments, this verse is widely popular. Arguably the most well-known translation of this verse is the King James Version which reads, “Thou shalt not kill.” Because those who are pro-life believe a fetus is a living being, they consider abortion as a form of killing which God commands against.
In the King James Version, as in other versions, translators have translated the Hebrew word *retzach* as “kill.” However, some debate whether a more accurate translation of the word is “murder.” According to the Bible, murder and killing are not synonymous. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus defines murder as outlined in Exodus stating,

“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not murder,’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be answerable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be answerable to the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be answerable to the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”

Here, Jesus explains that even the feelings that lead to murder can make a person guilty.

In the process of this explanation, Jesus mentions anger as the root of murder. This definition of murder remains closely aligned with society’s definition of murder today.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines murder as “the crime of unlawfully killing a person especially with malice aforethought” (“Murder”). Additionally, the United States Department of Justice defines murder as, “the unlawful killing of a human being with malice” (United States Department of Justice). Both sources found in and outside of the Bible define murder as having ill intent. However, killing is not the same as murder.

God Himself allows killing in specific circumstances throughout the Bible. Exodus 21:12-13 states, “He who strikes someone so that he dies shall certainly be put to death. Yet if he did not lie in wait for him, but God caused him to fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.” This verse juxtaposes murder and killing, defining murder as having mal intent on the part of the human and killing as lacking this mal intent. Additionally, this verse compares the consequences of murder and killing, with God putting to death anyone who commits murder yet protecting anyone who kills someone that God caused to fall into their hand. Other instances in which God
allows killing include war – as seen in Joshua 10:29-30 in which it says the Lord handed over the city of Libnah to Israel and left no survivors – and self-defense – as seen in Exodus 22:1-2 which uses the example of a thief breaking into someone’s home.

These verses demonstrate that God is not against all killing as the King James Version, and many anti-abortionists, might suggest. Rather, God is against murder, which is unlawful, malicious, and fueled by anger. Therefore, abortion could be classified as killing instead of murder since it lacks mal intent and can be used in certain circumstances like self-defense of the pregnant woman.

II. The Pro-Choice Side

**DEFINING THE FETUS.** Moving on to the pro-choice side of the debate, it is first important to assess how those who are pro-choice define the fetus based on the Bible. As we have seen, those who are pro-life believe the fetus is a living human. Yet those who are pro-choice would argue the Bible states otherwise. One of the most popular pro-choice arguments in the Bible comes from Exodus 21:22-25 which states,

> “Now if people struggle with each other and strike a pregnant woman so that she gives birth prematurely, but there is no injury, the guilty person shall certainly be fined as the woman’s husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”

Here, God is explaining to Moses the laws He wants him to share with the Israelites. The phrase “gives birth prematurely” refers to a miscarriage or loss of the fetus. God states that if a miscarriage occurs, but there is no injury to the pregnant woman, then the consequence is a monetary fine. Oppositely, if there is further injury to the pregnant
woman, then the consequence is a life for a life, or death. Because there is a different consequence between the loss of a fetus and loss of the pregnant woman, we can infer that the fetus and woman are classified differently. The loss of the pregnant woman’s life accounts for the loss of another life in exchange because she is a living human whereas the loss of the fetus accounts for a monetary fine because a fetus is property. Note also that God never refers to the woman as a mother, but instead only refers to her as a pregnant woman, emphasizing the woman’s own identity unrelated to the fetus.

As a counterargument, one could say that because the death of the fetus was accidental, that is why it is only a monetary fine rather than being considered intentional murder. However, the loss of the pregnant woman was also accidental and is still treated as a life for a life. Other verses throughout Exodus 21 and 22 discuss cases in which financial restitution is required including Exodus 21:33–34 – which calls for monetary restitution in the case of harming someone’s animal – and Exodus 22:6 – which calls for restitution in the case of someone’s field being consumed by a fire. Both of these cases are examples of property damage that require financial restitution to right the damage. The fact that the loss of a fetus results in the same consequence as property damage signifies that the fetus is property, not a living being.

Anti-abortionists present an additional counterargument that the verse is not referring to the loss of the mother, but rather the loss of the fetus. One interpretation asserts the verse to mean if the fetus comes out but does not die, then the penalty is financial restitution whereas, if the damage results in the death of the fetus, then the penalty is a life for a life (Irshai 117). However, throughout other works rabbis have asserted that this second interpretation is not possible because the Bible states, “He who
strikes a man so that he dies will surely be put to death” (Exodus 21:12). Therefore, the damage mentioned in Exodus 21:22-25 cannot be applied to the fetus if it is not considered a living man (Irshai 118).

**THE BEGINNING OF LIFE.** While those who are pro-life believe life starts in the womb, those who are pro-choice have found different biblical interpretations for the start of life. The first story of human life in the Bible is Adam. Genesis 2:7 recounts God creating Adam when it says, “Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living person.” The name Adam, which translated from Hebrew means “man,” is derived from the Hebrew word Adamah meaning “ground.” This linguistic connection is lost in English translations, but the original Hebrew emphasizes mankind’s origin from the dust of the earth, or as a derivative of the ground. According to Genesis 2:7, Adam was first formed and after formation was given the breath of life that allowed him to be a living being. Prior to God giving him breath, Adam was not yet living but was just formed dirt. Therefore, this verse marks the beginning of life as first breath. Thus, those who are pro-choice believe that, like Adam, a fetus, although formed in the womb, is not fully living until it exits the womb and breathes.

A similar example of life beginning at first breath occurs in Ezekiel 37:8-10 with the vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. In this passage, God gives Ezekiel a vision in which he sees a valley filled with bones. Then, Ezekiel says,

And I looked, and behold, tendons were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘The Lord God says this: ‘Come from the four winds, breath, and breathe on these slain, so that they come
to life.’’ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath entered them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

From the bones Ezekiel saw, God created living beings that became an army. Like Adam, the bones are not living until God gives them breath. They are fully formed as seen in the biological diction of “tendons,” “flesh,” and “skin,” yet the one qualifier that keeps them from being alive is that they have no breath. It is only once God instructs Ezekiel to breathe into them that they come to life and can stand. Their ability to come to life is a direct consequence of breath entering them. According to this passage, the process of creation begins with formation, then breath, then life, and finally development. If life does not begin until first breath, then pro-life verses, like Psalm 139:13, which reference creation in the womb, only refer to the first step of creation: formation. However, although formed in the womb, the fetus would not be alive until it breathes its first breath.

To counter, those on the pro-life side could argue that these verses do not apply to fetuses as Adam and the bones were conceived in an unnatural manner. Additionally, one could argue that the context of these verses alters their meanings. For example, because Adam was created in the Garden of Eden, one could argue that the natural order of creation and birth did not yet apply. Therefore, it is possible that the process of creation and birth did not begin until after the fall of humankind as spurred by Adam and Eve eating the fruit from the Tree of Life. This argument makes some sense when you consider that Eve’s punishment for eating the fruit is pain during childbirth (Gen. 3:16). Similarly, one could argue the because the passage from Ezekiel occurred in a vision, rather than in a real state, that it does not equate to that natural process of conception and
birth. Ultimately, pro-choice believers use these verses to counter the pro-life narrative, arguing that life begins at first breath rather than at formation.

**QUESTIONING THE SANCTITY OF LIFE.** Unlike pro-lifers, those who are pro-choice question the biblical idea of the sanctity of life, believing if God thinks life is sacred, then He would not kill anyone. There are many instances where God brings down curses in the form of death. In Numbers 5, God explains to Moses a test that will reveal whether a wife has been unfaithful to her husband. God explains that a priest will give the wife a water of bitterness that will have no impact on her if she has been faithful but will bring a curse on her if she has been unfaithful. In Numbers 5:20-22, God says,

‘...if, however, you have gone astray, though under the authority of your husband, and if you have defiled yourself and a man other than your husband has had sexual intercourse with you’ (then the priest shall have the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman), ‘may the Lord make you a curse and an oath among your people by the Lord’s making your thigh shriveled and your belly swollen; and this water that brings a curse shall go into your stomach, to make your belly swell up and your thigh shrivel.’ And the woman shall say, ‘Amen, Amen.’

Here, “belly” is thought to refer to the womb and “shrivel” has been associated with the word collapse. This language implies that the punishment for unfaithfulness is a miscarriage. Abortion here is used by God as an act of justice, rectifying the unfaithfulness of the woman to her husband.

There are other cases in which God kills children as a punishment for someone else’s wrongdoings. In 2 Samuel 12, the Lord rebukes David for having Uriah the Hittite murdered to take his wife, Bathsheba, as his own. In response, God spares David’s life but decides to take the life of David and Bathsheba’s child. 2 Samuel 12:15-18 recounts how the child became sick and, despite David’s fasting and praying to the Lord, died after seven days. Many people on the pro-choice side argue that this defeats the sanctity
of life argument. Again, if God cared about human life, especially children and the unborn as anti-abortionists argue, then why would He kill innocent children even if it is to punish someone? Some may argue this is an act of justice, so it is therefore justified. However, those on the pro-choice side use these examples to question whether God actually finds life to be as sacred as some may say.

**THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE.** Finally, and most importantly, those on the pro-choice side must look to the Bible to further their claim that humans have the authority and right to choose. In Deuteronomy 30:19-20, Moses is reciting the words of the covenant from God to the Israelites when he says,

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have placed before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding close to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, so that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

Many people on the pro-choice side use these verses to claim that God gives humans the right to choose. This is based on the singular word “choose” in verse 19. The logic here is that God gives humans the free will to make choices on their own so, therefore, humans have a right to choose abortion.

However, the argument surrounding this verse is flimsy and hinges on a single word that is taken out of context. Contextually, these verses directly follow Moses’s command to love God and keep His commandments “so that you may live and become numerous, and that the Lord your God may bless you” (Ezek. 30:16). Life here does not refer to physical life, but to spiritual life which leads to blessings and a promise to reside in the chosen land. This implication toward spiritual rather than physical life is furthered
in verses 19 and 20 through the juxtaposition between life and death. Rather than meaning physical life and death, life is metaphorically associated with the blessing and death with the curse. Therefore, the verses cannot be taken literally as they are less about choosing physical life and more about encouraging the Israelites to pursue a spiritual life in God. Further, even if the verses were to be understood literally as choosing physical life, Moses encourages the Israelites to choose life if given the option. Through positive diction like “blessing,” “loving,” and “holding close,” Moses characterizes life as the better option over death. Therefore, even though God gives humankind the option to choose, He highly emphasizes that life is the better choice over death.

III. Conclusion

While we can interpret claims form different verses in the Bible, ultimately the Bible never mentions the word abortion. The Bible is very clear about many laws and commandments and makes sure to outline details on how to carry out those laws. It seems odd then, that a document which is so detailed, would exclude information on abortion if it were against the law. However, the Bible does not conclusively tell us what God’s position is on abortion. Additionally, the verses used to further the pro-life and pro-choice sides both have flaws. Therefore, we cannot conclusively determine from the Bible alone whether Christianity is anti-abortion. We must look to cultural and historical context to inform how the ancient Israelites interpreted the text we find in the Bible.
CHAPTER TWO: LOOKING OUTSIDE OF THE BIBLE

Because the Bible does not provide a clear stance on abortion, we must look to outside sources to understand how the ancient Israelites interpreted abortion in the Bible and how abortion has been understood by scholars and religious leaders throughout the years. Historically, although abortion has been practiced for centuries, little is known about abortion in pre-modern times. However, we do know the pre-modern peoples practiced abortion and the Bible does refer to the practice of abortion. Ancient peoples practiced early abortions using herbs and other plants to induce miscarriage. One of the earliest records of abortion is in the Ebers papyrus from around 1550 BC in Egypt. According to the Ebers papyrus, ancient Egyptians practiced abortion by creating a remedy of honey and crushed dates to be introduced vaginally (Drife 432). Ancient Greek physicians, like Hippocrates, prescribed tough physical exercise to induce abortion or at times physical harm to the uterus by massaging it or wearing a tight belt. In Rome, plants like silphium, which was harvested to extinction, and hellebore, which has poisonous properties, were prescribed orally to abort a fetus. There is little that would indicate abortions were done surgically during this time.

Overall, little literature on abortion exists from pre-modern times, likely because unauthorized abortions were rare in ancient societies (Schiff 56). There is no exact statistic on miscarriage rates in the Ancient Near East, but scholars estimate that miscarriages could have occurred about 20 percent of the time with about a third of
babies dying during childbirth (Gonzalez and Marti). Because of such high miscarriage and infant mortality rates, the ancient peoples viewed pregnancy as a blessing (Schiff 56). Therefore, since pregnancy was held in such high regard in ancient Near East culture, it is likely that the main purpose of abortion during this era was to save the life of the mother.

In understanding infanticide in biblical times, we can begin to understand how opinions surrounding abortion and abortion practices were formed by religious figures. Because the Bible does not make a definitive stance on abortion, people have differing theories on how abortion should be viewed. While some see the lack of discussion of abortion in the Bible as a sign that it was so obviously illegal it was not worth stating, others see it as a sign that abortion was not illegal and therefore, did not have to be made a law. With no definitive statement on abortion and mixed interpretations, religious figures and philosophical thinkers attempted to understand the truth behind abortion and whether it is acceptable. In this chapter, I will review both Judaic and Christian interpretations of abortion in the Bible to understand how Christian thought on abortion developed, and eventually departed, from Judaic thought.

**II. Judaic Thought on Abortion**

Widely held Judaic thought on abortion can be summed up in three main points: 1) The pre-born are not considered to be a life until they are born; 2) Abortion is allowable when the mother’s life is in danger; and 3) Murder of the mother is a much more serious offense than feticide (Khorfan and Padela). Ancient Judaic texts, specifically the Torah, place high emphasis on the value of life. However, the life of the mother is placed at much higher importance than that of the fetus. In response to the rise of Christianity in the first century CE, Jewish leaders attempted to preserve fundamental
characteristics of Judaism discussed in the Torah and were namely concerned with divine and moral interests rather than societal interests. As Christianity began to form its own opinions on the status of a fetus and feticide, Judaism held true to the beliefs posed in Exodus that the life of the mother was valued at a higher standard than the life of the fetus (Schiff 25-26).

THE MISHNAH. Sources outside of the Torah and Masoretic text provide insight into Jewish interpretations on abortion. Rabbinic literature outside of Masoretic text includes religious law, known as Halakha, and legends or stories, known as Aggadah (Lepicard 24). Here, we will mainly be looking at Halakhic rabbinic literature. The Mishnah, which was compiled around 200 CE, “quickly gained recognition as the sole authoritative code of law” and sought to reconstruct Jewish life around religious law (25-26). Again, although there are few passages which reference abortion, there are some that give clues as to what the ancient rabbis believed about abortion and the status of the fetus.

The Niddah, meaning “impurity” or “menstruous,” responds to Leviticus 15:19-32 which describes laws concerning a woman’s purity during menstruation. Niddah 3.3 discusses purity laws concerning the fetus stating,

1. 1. If a woman suffered a miscarriage and there was blood with it, she becomes unclean; but if there was not, she remains clean. R. Judah says: In either case she is unclean.
2. 2. If the abortion was like of rind, or hair, or dust, or red flies, let her cast them into water: if they dissolve she is unclean, but if they do not, she is clean. If the abortion was the like of fishes, locusts, insects, or creeping things, and there was blood with them she us unclean; but if there was not, she is clean. If the abortion was like to a beast, a wild animal, or a bird, be they clean or unclean, and it was a male, she must continue [unclean the number of days prescribed] for a male; and if it was a female she must continue [unclean the number of days prescribed] for a female; if the sex is not known she must continue [unclean the number of days prescribed]
prescribed] both for a male and for a female. So R. Meir. But the Sages say: What is not of the form of man is not accounted [human] young.
3. If the abortion was a foetus filled with water or filled with blood or filled with variegated matter, she need not take thought for it as for [human] young; but if its [human] parts were fashioned, she must continue [unclean the number of days prescribed] both for a male and for a female.
4. If the abortion was like to a sandal or an afterbirth, she must continue [unclean the number of days prescribed] both for a male and for a female. If there was an afterbirth in a house, the house becomes unclean; it is not because the afterbirth counts as [human] young, but because there can be no afterbirth without young. R. Simeon says: the young may have melted away before it came forth.
5. If the abortion was of doubtful sex or of double sex she must continue [unclean the number of days prescribed] both for a male and for a female. [If she bore] a thing of doubtful sex and a male, or a thing of double sex and a male, she must continue [unclean the number of days prescribed] both for a male and for a female; but if it was a thing of doubtful sex and a female, or a thing of double sex and a female, she need continue [unclean the number of days prescribed] for a female only. If it came forth in pieces or with feet foremost, it is deemed born after the greater part is come forth. If it came forth in its ordinary way [it is not deemed born] until the greater part of its head has come forth. And what is deemed the greater part of its head? When its forehead has come forth.
6. If she suffered a miscarriage and it is not known what it was, [whether male or female], she must continue [unclean the number of days prescribed] both for a male and for a female. If it is not known whether it was [human] young or not, she must continue [unclean the number of days prescribed] both for a male and for a female, and also for a menstruant.
7. If she suffered a miscarriage on the fortieth day, she need not take thought for it as for [human] young; if on the forty-first day, she must continue [unclean the days prescribed] both for a male and for a female, and also for a menstruant. R. Ishmael says: If [she suffered a miscarriage] on the forty-first day, she must continue [unclean the days prescribed] for a male and for a menstruant; but if on the eighty-first day, she must continue [unclean the days prescribed] both for a male and for a female, and for a menstruant, since a male is fully fashioned after forty-one days, but a female only after eighty-one days. But the Sages say: The creation of a male and the creation of a female are alike: each [is fully fashioned] after forty-one days.

The chapter explains multiple different scenarios which would influence a woman’s cleanliness during pregnancy. Here, the concern is for the purity of the pregnant woman, rather than the life of the fetus (Lepicard 27). Specific statements provide information on how early rabbis viewed abortion and fetuses.
To begin, the rabbis answer questions regarding the status of a fetus as a human being. The Sages on spontaneous abortion or miscarriage state, “What is not of the form of man is not accounted [human] young” (Niddah 3.2). Additionally, the Sages state if the miscarried fetus did not yet have “[human] parts [that] were fashioned,” then the mother “need not take thought for it as for [human] young” (Niddah 3.3). From these two mishnayot, we know the rabbis believed that, in order to be considered a human being, there had to be at least some sort of human physical form. In comparison, miscarried fetuses that appeared to be like dust or creeping things (animals) did not constitute human beings because they had not yet taken human form. Other portions of the Niddah provide insight as to when this transition from fetus to human occurs. Niddah 3.5 asserts that if a baby is exiting the womb in the typical manner of head-first, it is not be considered born until most of its head (the forehead) has emerged. This assertion aligns closely with previously mentioned Bible verses which indicate life begins at first breath.

Although the Sages did not view the fetus as a full life, there are some indications that they did not consider the fetus to be totally devoid of life either (Irshai 119). Niddah 3.7 gives us a look at the Sages’ beliefs concerning gestation periods during pregnancy. According to the Sages, a fetus became fully fashioned at day 41 of pregnancy. Therefore, if a woman miscarried up through the fortieth day, then the fetus would not be considered a human. However, if she experienced a miscarriage on the forty first day, then the woman would be considered unclean because the fetus had become fully fashioned. Although they question if male and female fetuses become fully formed at different times, the Sages conclude that in general each is fully fashioned at day 41. As we will see later on, this idea of full formation on day 41 harkens to Aristotle’s theories
on gestation (Lepicard 28). However, beyond Halakhic sources, the rabbis did not emphasize the importance of the forty first day and they never went as far as to declare a fetus a nefesh, or soul, at day 41 either (Schiff 35). While this discussion of formation in the Mishnah did not have effect on Judaic abortion laws, it did indicate that the rabbis may have believed the loss of a fetus before day 41 was of much less concern than fetus loss at later stages of pregnancy.

Other sources in the Mishnah which do directly discuss abortion justify the practice in specific circumstances. The Arakhin, meaning “values,” states, “If a woman was condemned to be put to death they may not wait until she has given birth, but if she had already sat on the birth-stool they wait until she has given birth” (1.4). This principle relates to Niddah 3.5, indicating that the fetus holds a different status when it has begun exiting the mother’s womb. The law that execution should be delayed until once a pregnant woman’s birth has set on demonstrates that the rabbis saw birth as the point when a baby obtained a status separate from that of the mother’s (Irshai 121). Again, it is clear the Sages designated different significance between the unborn and the born as they deemed it acceptable to execute a woman with a fetus in her womb but unacceptable to execute a woman mid birth. This indicates that, although feticide may not have been widely practiced, it was not considered murder and was even acceptable in some circumstances.

An additional source in the Ohaloth, or “tents,” focuses on purity laws related to corpses, but includes a mishnah on abortion. Ohaloth 7.6 states, “If a woman was in hard travail, the child must be cut up while it is in the womb and brought out member by member, since the life of the mother has priority over the life of the child; but if the
greater part of it was already born, it may not be touched, since the claim of one life cannot override the claim of another life”. Once again, the Sages make a distinction between an unborn and born child wherein the unborn child is considered lesser than the born child. As we see in the law, the life of the unborn child is hierarchically below the life of the mother. However, once the child is mostly born, this hierarchy shifts, and the life of the child is considered equal to the life of the mother. This is because once the child is mostly out of the womb, as the *Niddah* states, then it is considered a full life. The Sages very clearly state that “the life of the mother has priority over the life of the child” while the fetus is still in the womb. They even go so far as to use the word “must” to command that when the mother’s life is at stake, the fetus absolutely has to be removed to save her. Therefore, when the life of the mother is in jeopardy, abortion is not just allowable, but necessary.

Later, some rabbis, such as Israel Meir Mizrachi and Mordecai Winkler, would expand this category of risk to the mother’s life beyond just the physical to include mental health as well, arguing that severe mental health concerns were also worthy of abortion as they could result in physical health concerns, like suicide, self-harm, and injury to others (Schiff 118). Again, the rabbis place the concern for life on the mother rather than the fetus, which is not yet considered its own life. Overall, the *Halakhic* teachings in the Mishnah emphasize fetal dependence on the mother and assert that the fetus is not a separate living being until it is being born (Urbach 243).

**THE TALMUD.** While Judaic texts outside of the Bible originally sought to respond to Christian interpretations that were dominating culture during the time, eventually additional Judaic texts arose as a response to political and cultural hegemonies
in eastern culture (Lepicard 31). The Talmud, which consists of both the Palestinian (early 5th century CE) and Babylonian (early 6th century CE) texts, is a commentary on portions of the Mishnah. While the Talmud does not respond to every section of the Mishnah, it does respond to some of the passages I referenced earlier. By evaluating the Talmud, we can understand how beliefs on abortion evolved from the time of the Mishnah.

One of the mishnah the Talmud responds to is the Arakhin 1.4 which allows a pregnant woman to be executed. The Talmud responds to the Mishnah when it says,

MISHNAH: In the case of a pregnant woman who is taken by the court to be executed, the court does not wait to execute her until she gives birth. Rather, she is killed immediately. But with regard to a woman taken to be executed who sat on the travailing char in the throes of labor, the court waits to execute her until she gives birth…

GEMARA. Isn’t it obvious that the court executes the pregnant woman rather than waiting? After all, it is part of her body. The Gemara answers: It was necessary for the Mishna to teach this, as it might enter your mind to say that since it is written: “And if men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her offspring depart…he shall be fined, as the woman’s husband shall place upon him” (Exodus 21:22), the fetus is considered to be the property of the husband. If so, the court should wait until she gives birth before executing her, and not cause him to lose the fetus. Consequently, the mishna teaches us that the court does not take this factor into account…

The mishna teaches: With regard to a woman taken to be executed who sat on the travailing chair in the throes of labor, the court waits to execute her until she gives birth. The Gemara asks: What is the reason for delaying the execution in this case? The Gemara answers: Once the fetus uproots from its place and begins to leave the woman’s body, it is considered an independent body and may not be killed together with the mother.

Rav Yehuda says that Shmuel says: In the case of a pregnant woman who is taken by the court to be executed, one strikes her opposite the womb, i.e., on the abdomen, so that the fetus dies first and so that she not suffer disgrace as a result of publicly bleeding from labor. The Gemara asks: What is this to say that according to Shmuel if a pregnant woman dies, she dies first, before the fetus?…Were the fetus to perish first, before the woman, there would be no need for this. But this is difficult, as we maintain that the fetus dies first…

The Gemara asks: Is it true that the fetus always dies first when the mother dies naturally? But there was an incident where the mother died naturally and the fetus
made three spasmodic motions afterward. The Gemara answers: That is just as it is with the tail of the lizard, which jerks after being severed from the lizard; it is just a spasmodic motion, which does not indicate that it is still alive (Arakhin 7a).

Here, the gemara reinforce the law outlined in the Mishnah and further explain its reasoning. The gemara agree firmly that one should not wait to execute a woman if she is pregnant as evidenced by the exclamatory tone of, “Isn’t it obvious that the court executes the pregnant woman rather than waiting? After all, it is part of her body.” It seems almost obvious to the author then that this should be the case.

Additionally, the gemara reinforce the Mishnah’s claim that the fetus is dependent on its mother and is not a separate being until, as they say, “it uproots from its place and begins to leave the woman’s body,” at which point it becomes another body. The gemara also explain that a one day old child and an embryo are no equal in status, claiming that the child which is separate from its mother’s body is a fully-fledged human but the embryo, which is still dependent on its mother is not. In comparison to the Mishnah, we do see the emphasis shift from being solely focused on the mother, to now including the fetus as a part of the discussion. However, the main emphasis remains on the purity of the mother as the gemara discuss aborting the fetus before executing the mother so as not to disgrace her before or after death. Rather than the main concern being on whether aborting the fetus is wrong, the main concern is really on the mother and maintaining her purity.

Finally, the gemara give more examples to further their argument that the fetus is not a living being. One gemara brings up a scenario in which, after a mother’s execution, the fetus continued to move three times. In response, another gemara compares the spastic movement of the fetus to the movement of a lizard’s tail which continues to move
even after it has been cut off. This analogy makes it even clearer how little significance the gemara give to the fetus as they compare it to a piece of an animal, something that is of a much lower status than a human being. Ultimately, the gemara reiterate that because the fetus is not an independent life, abortion is acceptable in specific circumstances. The question of personhood only becomes more significant once the child has begun to move from the mother’s body (Irshai 122-123).

Beyond abortion in cases of execution, the Talmud also responds to abortion in the cases where the mother is in harm’s way. A portion of the Sanhedrin responds to Exodus 21:12-13 which states, “He who strikes someone so that he dies shall certainly be put to death. Yet if he did not lie in wait for him, but God caused him to fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.” In response to these verses, the rabbis bring up the concept of a rodef, a “pursuer” who intentionally tries to bring harm or death to another. Here, the consequence for a rodef is death. The rabbis then question whether minors, and by extension fetuses, can be considered rodefs when they say,

Rav Huna says: If a minor was pursuing another person in order to kill him, the pursued party may be saved with the pursuer’s life…The Gemara explains: Rav Huna maintains that a pursuer, in general, does not require forewarning, and there is no difference with regard to this matter between an adult and a minor…Rav Hisda raised an objection to Rav Huna from a baraita: If a woman was giving birth and her life was being endangered by the fetus, the life of the fetus may be sacrificed in order to save the mother. But once his head has emerged during the birthing process, he may not be harmed in order to save the mother, because one life may not be pushed aside to save another life. If one is permitted to save the pursued party by killing the minor who is pursuing him, why is this so? The fetus is a pursuer who is endangering his mother’s life. The Gemara answers: This is not difficult, as it is different there, with regard to the woman giving birth, since she is being pursued by heaven (Sanhedrin 72b).
Rabbi Huna concludes that a minor can be considered a *rodef*, and therefore can be put to death to save whoever is being pursued. However, Rabbi Hisda asks whether a child being birthed who is causing harm to the mother can be classified as a *rodef* since, as the Mishnah says, it is now a separate being from its mother. The conclusion Rabbi Huna comes to is that the fetus is not considered a *rodef*, but rather the mother is being “pursued by heaven” or, in other words, experiencing an act of God.

Here, the rabbis emphasize the importance of saving the one being pursued and valuing their life above the life of a *rodef*. However, while the rabbis reference a child being born, concluding it is not a *rodef*, they do not explicitly mention the fetus within this passage. This is likely because the rabbis already agreed that the fetus was not considered a life because, as they reiterate, it only becomes a life “once his head has emerged.” Once the forehead of the child has emerged, the baby is considered a separate entity from its mother, but it does not have intent to murder its mother so, therefore, it is not a *rodef*. The rabbis’ beliefs here reinforce the Mishnah, “saying that the fetus may be killed as long as it is still in its mother’s womb not because it is considered a *rodef* but because it is not considered a ‘life,’ for if it were a *rodef*, it could be killed even after emerging” (Irshai 126). Therefore, even though an emerging child cannot be considered a *rodef* because it is not willfully causing harm to the mother, this passage implies that the status of a fetus as a *rodef* does not matter because the fetus itself is not a life (126).

The Talmud also discusses the development of the fetus throughout different passages. In the *Yevamoth*, the rabbis are responding to a case in which a priest’s daughter is having relations with an Israelite. The rabbis are questioning whether she may
continue to eat terumah if she becomes pregnant with the Israelite’s child when they state,

R. Hisda said: She immerses and partakes of teruma only until forty days after her husband’s death, when there is still no reason for concern as if she is not pregnant, then she is not pregnant. And if she is pregnant, until forty days from conception the fetus is merely water. It is not yet considered a living being, and therefore it does not disqualify its mother from partaking of teruma. Abaye said to him: If so, say the latter clause of the baraita: Once her fetus in her womb is noticeable, she is ruined retroactively…Rav Hisda responded: What is the period in which she is retroactively ruined? It is from the moment the fetus is noticeable and back in time until forty days from the beginning of her pregnancy. During the first forty days of the pregnancy, she is not retroactively ruined, as the fetus is not yet considered a living being (Yevamoth 69b).

Ultimately, the rabbis conclude that, even if the woman is pregnant, she has only committed an offense if she ate terumah after the fortieth day of her pregnancy since, prior to the fortieth day, the fetus is considered to be “only a mere fluid.” From this declaration, we can understand that to the rabbis, embryos in the very early stages of pregnancy hold “relatively little legal value” and are “apparently of insufficient consequence to merit recognitions for purposes of considering her [the mother] truly to be ‘with child’” (Schiff 34).

Other passages from the Talmud, like Niddah 31a give further indication of the rabbis’ beliefs on development in the womb. Niddah 31a says,

The Sages taught in a baraita: During the first three months of pregnancy, the fetus resides in the lower compartment of the womb; in the middle three months, the fetus resides in the middle compartment; and during the last three months of pregnancy the fetus resides in the upper compartment. And once its time to emerge arrives, it turns upside down and emerges; and this is what causes labor pains… And Rabbi Elazar says: What is the verse from which it is derived that a fetus initially resides in the lower part of the womb? “When I was made in secret, and I was woven together in the lowest parts of the earth” (Psalms 139:15). Since it is not stated: I resided in the lowest parts of the earth, but rather: “I was woven
together in the lowest parts of the earth,” this teaches that during the initial stage of a fetus’s development, when it is woven together, its location is in the lower compartment of the womb…

The Sages taught in a baraita: During the first three months of pregnancy, sexual intercourse is difficult and harmful for the woman and is also difficult for the offspring. During the middle three months, intercourse is difficult for the woman but is beneficial for the offspring. During the last three months, sexual intercourse is beneficial for the woman and beneficial for the offspring; as a result of it the offspring is found to be strong and fair skinned.

The Sages taught in a baraita: With regard to one who engages in intercourse with his wife on the ninetieth day of her pregnancy, it is as though he spills her blood. The Gemara asks: How does one know that it is the ninetieth day of her pregnancy? Rather, Abaye says: One should go ahead and engage in intercourse with his wife even if it might be the ninetieth day, and rely on God to prevent any ensuing harm, as the verse states: “The Lord preserves the simple” (Psalms 116:6) (Niddah 31a).

Here, Rabbi Elazar explains that from Psalms 139:15, we can understand that at the start of fetal development, the fetus occupies the lowest compartment of the womb. Further, we see from the Sages teachings that they believed development happened in trimesters as the fetus moves from the lowest compartment, to the middle compartment, and finally to the upper compartment. The continued discussion of the effects of intercourse on the mother and offspring in each trimester further demonstrate the rabbis separation of three distinct phases in fetal development. However, the final portion of this chapter again emphasizes the significance of the mother over the fetus, as the Sages and rabbis are more concerned with the safety of the mother during intercourse, rather than the safety of the fetus. Overall, the Talmud confirms and expands upon the beliefs set out in the Mishnah.

III. Christian Thought on Abortion

Although Judaism and Christianity share the same authoritative text (the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament), cultural influences ultimately lent to a split in thought between the
two that has lasted to today. While Judaism focused on protecting the life of the mother and believes that the pre-born are not yet living beings, Christian thought is based on three main premises: 1) The right to life is above all else, 2) The fetus is equal to the mother, and 3) Two natural deaths are better than one murder (Khorfan and Padela 102). However, Christian thought was not always rooted in such definitive beliefs.

Much of Christian thought on abortion is derived from Greek philosophers, rather than Hebrew prophets or teachings, which is interesting to note considering Jesus himself was Hebrew, not Greek. While Hebrew thought viewed God as changing throughout history, Greek thought saw change or a participation in history as imperfection and therefore, “tended to favor the status quo” (Castuera 124). Ultimately, Christianity adopted multiple Hellenistic ideas including “eternal life, the immortal soul, and any depiction of God as a purely transcendent, unchanging being” (Castuera 124). In ancient Greece, abortion was highly frowned upon because the state wanted to ensure military manpower. However, the Greeks were not against leaving sick, weak, or deformed babies to die since they were a burden to society rather than an asset (Gilbert et al. 32). It is interesting then to think that Christian thought on abortion derived from a society that was more concerned with military power rather than human life.

Christianity became a permitted religion in 313 CE and became recognized as the state religion of the Roman Empire in 380 CE (Lepicard 31). With Christianity gaining prominence in Rome, national leaders sought to influence Christian thought so that it aligned with Roman political and social goals (Schiff). There is differing research on the severity of the consequences of abortion in ancient Rome, but in general, although abortion was practiced, it was highly disapproved of (Schiff, Gilbert et al.).
following sections seek to understand where Christian thought on abortion originated and how it developed over time.

**PLATO AND ARISTOTLE.** Throughout its rise, Christianity took inspiration from Greek thinkers and this included their thoughts on fetal development and abortion. Plato (428-348 BCE), and later his pupil Aristotle (384-322 BCE), were two Greek philosophers whose ideas had a large impact on Christianity. When it came to abortion, Christians adopted Plato’s idea of the “psyche” which he defined as an “unchanging, immaterial ‘soul,’ possessed by each person” (Castuera 124). Plato believed that the soul was its own entity separate from the body and existed in a cyclical, immortal nature by which it would leave a body after death and re-enter a new body at birth. Romans accepted this notion of ensoulment at birth and even wrote it into the laws of the republic at the time (Gilbert et al. 33). However, at some point Christians retained Plato’s idea of the immortal soul but left behind his idea of ensoulment occurring at birth (Castuera 124, 125).

While Plato was concerned with ensoulment, Aristotle was concerned with gestation. Aristotle called this ensoulment “animation” and believed that it occurs when the fetus begins to move of its own will, rather than at birth. At animation, Aristotle believed the fetus developed a rational soul whereas prior to obtaining a rational soul, fetuses would first have nutritive souls, like a plant, and then sensitive souls, like an animal. Aristotle also thought females were intellectually and physically inferior to males and thus believed that they developed at a slower rate in the womb. According to Aristotle, male fetuses became animated at 40 days after conception and female fetuses 90 days after conception (Gilbert et al. 33; Castuera 125). This belief on fetal
development was widely held until the 19th century and remains alive today in rural Egypt (Castuera 126; Stol 146). We even see influences of Aristotelian thinking in the Mishnah as rabbis cited day 41 as the time when the fetus becomes fully formed and equates an undeveloped fetus to an animal. Ultimately, Christian thought on abortion began very similarly to Judaic thought on abortion, supporting philosophers’ ideas on ensoulment occurring at birth and fetal development in the womb.

**THE SEPTUAGINT, PHILO, AND THE DIDACHE.** Despite originally sharing beliefs on ensoulment and fetal development, Christianity eventually began to depart from Judaism when it came to beliefs on abortion. One of the earliest sources in which we see a separation between Jewish and Christian thought is the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Bible written around the 3rd to 1st century BCE. As the Jewish community grew in Alexandria, they began working on a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible to be used for public study. However, at many points the writers of the Septuagint, to make the text more accessible to Greek readers, took liberties with the translation, using terms widely understood by Hellenistic Greeks and even adding Hellenistic concepts into the text. Although the Septuagint was originally used by Jews, eventually Christians adopted the Septuagint and the text came to be more associated with Christianity than Judaism. As Christians accepted the Septuagint as their Old Testament, Jews turned away from the Septuagint as a reliable source for their religious beliefs (Schiff 12, 24). While the Septuagint was meant to expand on Judaic thought, it is much more likely that its authors relied more heavily upon Egyptian-Greek influence (Aptowitzer 88).
Although the Septuagint is no longer accepted as an authoritative text of Christianity, it did influence Christian beliefs on abortion in the early stages of the religion. One area in which the Septuagint presents a fundamental difference than the Masoretic texts is in its translation of Exodus 21:22-23 which states, “And if two men strive and smite a woman with child, and her child be born imperfectly formed, he shall be forced to pay a penalty: as the woman’s husband may lay upon him, he shall pay with a valuation. But if it be perfectly formed, he shall give life for life…” (The Septuagint 98). According to this translation, if a pregnant woman is struck and the fetus is “born imperfectly formed,” or miscarried but not fully developed, then the penalty is a monetary fine. However, if the fetus is harmed when it is fully formed, then the penalty is a life for a life.

Here, the Hebrew word ason, which means “accidental injury” or “harm,” has been translated to “form” instead. This misinterpretation removes any harm from being done to the pregnant woman as it is emphasized in the Masoretic text, and instead makes it seem as though the severity of penalties is based on the formation of the fetus (Schiff 13). The Judaic emphasis on holding the life of the mother in greater regard than that of the fetus is replaced with the Aristotelian view that a developed fetus is a living being of equal status to another. Although this may seem like a small departure from the original text, ultimately it was inconsistencies like this that caused Christianity to bare a closer resemblance to Greek thought than Hebrew tradition.

Philo (~15 BCE-50 CE), a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria during Rome’s reign, promoted the idea held in the Septuagint that killing a fetus is murder. Although the Jewish belief that feticide was not murder dated back to the
time of Hammurabi (1810-1850 BCE), this tradition was replaced in Alexandria by Egyptian-Greek precepts on abortion (Aptowitzer 102). One major departure from Jewish thought was the belief held in Egyptian, Greek and Roman societies that pregnant women should not be executed (99). Philo asserts this belief in *De virtute*, exclusively using the Septuagint to support his claim that a pregnant woman is not allowed to be executed because, “it is the most impious of all customs to slay both offspring and mother at one time and on one day” (18). This assertion directly contradicted Jewish tradition which held that the mother’s life and purity take precedence.

Aptowitzer argues that this split between the Hebrews and Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, was less of a spiritual split and more so a political and ethical split. Aptowitzer states,

To politics the condemned mother is a part of a machine rendered useless, but her expected child is a freshly wrought screw; the former is cast to the heap of old iron, the latter is guarded carefully. To ethics, however, the condemned mother is still a woman having claim to forbearance. Hence the politically motivated law of the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, refused to admit the execution of a pregnant woman; while the ethically motivated law of the Jews prescribes it (99).

To summarize, Aptowitzer argues that to the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, the unborn child was a political resource while the condemned mother was of no concern because she was no longer a productive tool of society. Therefore, the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans had little ethical concern for the purity of the mother and were more concerned about keeping her alive long enough to bear another political asset.

Oppositely, the Jews were less concerned about political gain and more concerned for the condemned mother in an ethical manner. To the Jews, it would be inhumane to force a condemned woman to continue living a torturous existence know she will die, just
to carry a fetus to term with no guarantee of viability. While it may seem the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans had an ethical concern for the well-being of the fetus, other practices, such as the pre-mediated killing of children who were not fit for military duty, suggest these societies were not as much concerned with protecting life as they were with protecting political resources (Aptowitzer 99). Although the Western focus on abortion today may include a moral approach, we must recognize that the origins of abortion restrictions grew from political agendas (Schiff 16).

Other texts such as the Didache followed the Septuagint’s assertions that killing a fetus is considered murder. In the first half of the second century, an anonymous group of Christians wrote the Didache as a set of rules for pagan converts (Castuera 129; Schiff 24). While its true place of origin is unknown, most believe that the Didache originated in Egypt (Metzger 49). Although the Didache was advertised as an authoritative set of rules based on the Bible, some laws have no connection to Biblical passages. One law in the Didache states, “You shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill a child at birth,” yet is unable to reference any verse from the Bible that reinforces this viewpoint (5). Although the full title of the document is, “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles to the Nations,” Metzger speculates that this title was likely added to the document much later on as it never refers to the apostles, but instead refers to “itinerant evangelists” (50). Ultimately, the question of whether to consider the Didache as part of the biblical canon was denied, likely because of questions about the true authorship, place, and date of origin (Metzger 49-50). However, the lack of authority of the Didache did not stop later Christian and Greek thinkers from being influenced by its teachings.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT IN THE COMMON ERA. To note are two additional Christian thinkers from the first century CE who used the Septuagint to promote the belief that killing a formed fetus was murder (Schiff 24). In the 3rd century CE, Tertullian argued abortion was illegal because “the embryo becomes a human in the womb from the moment that its form is completed” (Treatise on the Soul 37). Scholars disagree on whether Tertullian was referring here to ensoulment or the moment of conception (Castuera 131). Whatever Tertullian’s intent, Christians at the time adopted the belief that ensoulment occurs at the moment of conception (Schiff 40).

Although other Christian thinkers affirmed this viewpoint, St. Augustine (354-430 CE) would reject the Tertullian mindset for one more closely aligned with the Septuagint, arguing abortion could only be considered murder once the fetus is fully formed. Although he did not consider it murder, Augustine did consider abortion at any time after conception to be condemnable (Schiff 40). While he did not often address abortion and contraception, when Augustine did, he typically did so out of concern for the spiritual well-being of the mother and father rather than the protection of the fetus (Castuera 139).

In De Nuptiis et Concupiscientia, St. Augustine says,

'It is, however, one thing for married persons to have intercourse only for the wish to beget children, which is not sinful: it is another thing for them to desire carnal pleasure in cohabitation, but with the spouse only, which involves venial sin. For although propagation of offspring is not the motive of the intercourse, there is still no attempt to prevent such propagation, either by wrong desire or evil appliance. They who resort to these, although called by the name of spouses, are really not such; they retain no vestige of true matrimony, but pretend the honourable designation as a cloak for criminal conduct. Having also proceeded so far, they are betrayed into exposing their children, which are born against their will. They hate to nourish and retain those whom they were afraid they would beget. This infliction of cruelty on their offspring so reluctantly begotten, unmasks the sin which they had practised in darkness, and drags it clearly into the light of day. The open cruelty reproves the concealed sin. Sometimes, indeed, this lustful
cruelty, or, if you please, cruel lust, resorts to such extravagant methods as to use poisonous drugs to secure barrenness; or else, if unsuccessful in this, to destroy the conceived seed by some means previous to birth, preferring that its offspring should rather perish than receive vitality; or if it was advancing to life within the womb, should be slain before it was born. Well, if both parties alike are so flagitious, they are not husband and wife; and if such were their character from the beginning, they have not come together by wedlock but by debauchery. But if the two are not alike in such sin, I boldly declare either that the woman is, so to say, the husband’s harlot; or the man the wife’s adulterer (I. 17).

St. Augustine argues that, although sex is not solely for the purpose of bearing a child, a married couple should never prevent pregnancy from happening or it would be a sin. Augustine goes so far as to argue that a married couple which attempts to use some form of contraception is not truly married but uses marriage to hide criminal conduct. Beyond contraception, Augustine also addresses infanticide, stating that couples who indulge in these actions kill their offspring that they never wished to have in the first place. He argues that this want to rid themselves of their offspring sometimes turns into using “poisonous drugs to secure barrenness” or attempts to “destroy the conceived seed by some means previous to birth.”

Here, we get a look into Augustine’s beliefs on abortion as an act that defiles a marriage and the act of procreation. Although he asserts that contraception and abortion are condemnable at any time, Augustine also points to key beliefs on formation when he says,

Sometimes, indeed, this lustful cruelty…resorts to such extravagant methods as to…destroy the conceived seed by some means previous to birth, preferring that its offspring should rather perish than receive vitality; or if it was advancing to life within the womb, should be slain before it was born.
Augustine distinguishes that there is a time in fetal development by which the fetus has received vitality and is certainly “advancing to life” where it was not prior. However, in other works like the Enchiridion, Augustine admits he does not know when existence begins for a fetus in the womb (2.85-86).

Still further, in other works such as On Exodus, Augustine reinforces the Jewish viewpoint that a fetus cannot be considered a living being until it has sensation later on in fetal development, meaning abortion prior to sensation is not murder (Castuera 140). Yet, despite Augustine’s alignment with Jewish thought, the Catholic Church for the next 700 to 800 years would use Augustine’s writings on abortion as a means to “transform abortion… and other private acts into violations of public norms” (Castuera 145).

III. Conclusion

Although this is not a full compilation of the entire history of Judaic and Christian thought on abortion, this chapter provides a brief overview of how ancient Jews and Christians formed their opinions on abortion. With no clear answer from the Bible on whether abortion is acceptable, religious leaders and philosophers had to interpret their own meaning behind the scriptures. While Judaic thought derived from the rabbis who wrote the Mishnah and Talmud, which are still authoritative Jewish texts today, much of Christian thought derived from Greek philosophers and texts that were heavily influenced by Egyptian, Greek, and Roman sources. While Judaism allowed abortion in specific cases, Christianity condemned abortion. Even when Christian thinkers, like St. Augustine, aligned more closely with Jewish viewpoints on fetal development, interpretations of their works were heavily influenced by the social and cultural climate of the time.
It is interesting to see such drastic differences between Judaic and Christian thought on abortion considering that Christianity is derived from Judaism and shares some of its authoritative texts. It is also curious that Christianity would place such a high emphasis on Greek philosophical thought but turn away from Hebrew thought considering Jesus himself was Hebrew. However, the Hellenistic world adopted a strong stance against abortion and eventually would associate the practice with things like witchcraft, murder, and theft (Schiff 15). These extremely strong stances on abortion still exist today.

However, the binaries by which we think of abortion today did not exist in ancient times. Ancient peoples did not think of themselves as being either pro-life or pro-choice, but instead viewed abortion in a more nuanced and less dualistic manner. But if ancient Jews and Christians did not see themselves as either pro-life or pro-choice, then how did Christianity come to be so associated with the pro-life movement in the United States? In the next chapter, I will examine the history of abortion and the abortion rights movement in the United States to understand how Christianity became known as a pro-life religion and how strict viewpoints on abortion have prevailed in the United States today.
CHAPTER THREE: ABORTION HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES

From the first few centuries of the Common Era through the 18th century, beliefs and laws concerning abortion continued to change with society. In the 1200s, one of the most prominent Christian thinkers in history, Thomas Aquinas, promoted a similar viewpoint as Aristotle that animation occurs at a later stage in development (Castuera 164). Later in the Middle Ages, prominent figures like Pope Gregory XIV upheld the longstanding tradition from the Septuagint that there is a difference between an unanimated and animated fetus. Although beliefs on abortion were continuously changing, before the 1860s the Christian Church upheld the tradition that abortion was tolerable if done in the early stages of pregnancy (174-175).

In the early 1800s, it was common law in the United States that abortion was allowable if performed before fetal movement and abortion as a practice was popular throughout the remainder of the 19th century into the early 20th century (Farr 169; Castuera 176). If abortion then, was accepted as the tradition of Christianity and was common law in the United States, what led to the Christian Church denouncing the practice and declaring abortion as murder from the moment of conception? To understand why the Christian Church in the United States today has such strict regulations on abortion, we must understand the history of abortion practices in this country. In this chapter, I will begin by reviewing the early history of the United States and follow that history through modern day to understand societal and political shifts concerning
abortion. I will also include a discussion on how the terms pro-life and pro-choice and the binaries in which we view abortion today arose. Within these discussions, I will also seek to understand how the Christian Church was involved US abortion history and the emergence of the pro-life and pro-choice movements to assess whether Christianity in this country was always so anti-abortion. In reviewing this history, I hope to find clarity on why the Church departed so harshly from its earlier tradition.

I. From the 1800s Onward in the United States

In the early 1800s, US laws concerning abortion recognized the Jewish and Christian traditions of fetal development which distinguished early and late term fetuses. In the US, destroying a fetus that had already begun to move without due cause was a crime, but it was treated much less harshly than killing an already birthed human (Mohr 3-4). Oppositely, abortion was not considered illegal if the fetus had not yet moved in the womb. When it became commercialized in the 1840s, abortion as a practice gained popularity.

1860 proved to be a turning point as both religious and secular views on abortion began to shift. Although up to this point the Christian Church had been tolerant of abortion, its view quickly changed (Castuera 176). With the Enlightenment in the mid-1800s, science began to trump religion and modernization replaced traditionalism. As a result, people began to question sacred texts and turn to reason rather than faith. With this threat to its authority, the Christian Church, and more specifically the Catholic Sect, turned sharply away from liberalism. Because the identity of the Church relied upon being “the sole intermediary between humans and God, so it risked complete loss of authority and dissolution if it ever gave in to modern thought” (Castuera 180).
Another turning point in Catholic thought was Pope Pius IX’s doctrine of immaculate conception in 1854. In this doctrine, Pope Pius IX purported that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was free of original sin “from the moment of conception.” This usage of the word conception implied that Mary was ensouled from the moment she was conceived, a concept that was contrary to prior Christian thought (Castuera 180). In 1869, Pope Pius IX’s bull Apostolicae Sedis Moderationi overturned Pope Gregory XIV’s previous ruling that early term abortions were acceptable. Instead, abortion was no longer a mortal sin, but a crime at all stages of pregnancy, meaning anyone who procured a successful abortion at any time after conception faced excommunication. Abortion still remains a violation in Catholicism today and is the only violation that still leads to excommunication which does not consist of an act of treason against the church. Ultimately, in an attempt to reassert the Church’s spiritual control in a time when the authority of the Church was declining, church leaders denied earlier Christian tradition and turned toward much more conservative viewpoints that asserted the gravity of abortion (Castuera 181-182).

At the same time the Church was declaring abortion a crime, leading doctors of the American Medical Association also sought to criminalize abortion. However, this declaration was less out of concern for the unborn fetus, and more out of concern for maintaining the racial and social purity of the US (Castuera 190). According to Stormer, to physicians’ alarm, it became evident that native-born, white Protestants in New England were not multiplying as before. For instance, the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, forerunner of the New England Journal of Medicine, began publishing worried notices about declining white fertility rates compared with those of blacks; about threats to the ‘preservation of the species’ if white, New England women were less fecund; and about the higher ratio of births to ‘foreign parents, principally in the lower walks of life’ (70).
Therefore, the American Medical Association’s disapproval of abortion was not based in ethical concerns for the fetus, but political concerns as they wanted to preserve white America from being “overrun” by racial minorities and those of lower socioeconomic status.

In addition to these fears, leading doctors of the AMA were also worried about women stepping out of their “traditional” roles in the household and taking over men’s roles outside of the house. To keep women from infiltrating men’s spaces, the all-male physicians of the AMA pushed for bans on abortion to keep women “in their ‘places’ bearing and raising children” (Mohr 168). The vision of the AMA was for white, upper class women to bear children while men dominated professional spaces outside of the home (Castuera 194). In the end, the result of fears concerning growing populations of racial minorities and lower-class citizens as well as women leaving their “rightful place” in the home and infiltrating male-dominated spaces, led to a repression of all women’s reproductive rights. As a result of the AMA’s pushback to American law, by 1880 all states, except Kentucky, had criminalized abortion (Farr 169).

II. The Emergence of the Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Movements

Although abortion was criminalized in all states by 1900, abortion continued to be a common practice until the 1920s and attitudes on abortion began changing. In the early 1900s, physicians began to shift their stance on abortion from what the American Medical Association had previously promoted since physicians were no longer threatened by “irregular” competitors when it came to abortion procedures. However, through the 30s and 40s people who were open to abortion were cautious to make radical claims
about reforming abortion laws (Staggenborg 14). The 1950s saw greater changes in abortion reform, as many states were becoming less stringent on abortion. In 1959, the American Law Institute proposed changes for penal codes on abortion, granting support for abortion in cases of rape, incest, and fetal deformity and proposing abortion be permitted in cases where the mother’s physical or mental health is impaired (Karrer 529). These shifting attitudes would spur anti-abortionists into action, in what was the fledgling of the pro-life movement.

While shifting attitudes on abortion law pressured anti-abortionists to organize, two major events which garnered nation-wide media attention in the early 1960s would lead to the formation of the pro-choice movement. In 1962, a pregnant woman named Sherri Finkbine took prescription medication which contained thalidomide, a drug commonly known to cause fetal deformities. Finkbine attempted to get an abortion but could not procure one in the States. The second major event was the 1960s rubella measles epidemic, an illness that can cause fetal deformities when contracted by a pregnant woman (Staggenborg 14). These two events caused doctors and the public to reconsider the legality of abortion as a practice, opening the door for further public discussion of pro-abortion sentiments.

Other events demonstrated how attitudes were shifting in government as well. In 1965, the US Supreme Court case *Griswold v. Connecticut* addressed an 1879 Connecticut law which banned the use of any drug or tactic that prevented conception. When two Planned Parenthood physicians in Connecticut were arrested and fined by the state for offering illegal contraceptive advice to a married couple, they issued an appeal to the Supreme Court (Farr 170). The Supreme Court overturned the 1879 Connecticut
law, ruling that the law violated a married couple’s right to privacy. This right to privacy was later extended beyond married couples to anyone seeking contraceptives in the 1972 case of *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (McBride). Although not litigation on abortion, these cases provided the foundation which protected a woman’s right to privacy.

While both the pro-life and pro-choice movements were developing throughout the early 1960s, official organizations did not appear until later in the decade. In 1967, bishops of the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) and National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) founded the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), naming James McHugh, ordained bishop and director of USCC’s Family Life Bureau, administrator over abortion reform. The first newsletter of the NRLC in 1968, outlined the political goals of the organization to provide information on the efforts of states to change their laws on abortion and the strategies used by those attempting to change laws. By 1968, five states had already enacted changes to their abortion laws based on the suggestions of the American Law Institute.

While McHugh attempted to frame the NRLC as ecumenical, many on the abortion rights side saw the pro-life campaign as a tool of Catholicism and US bishops. Although the NRLC was founded by bishops of the NCCB, it is important to note that the beginnings of the pro-life movement grew out of small grassroot organizations and committees who joined together in response to changing US laws. Ordinary people spearheaded the pro-life movement outside of the hierarchy of the Church before it became associated with Catholicism. After its formation, the NRLC “would strive to enlarge its number of state groups, expand its network of anti-abortion doctors and lawyers, and increase its activity in the political process” (Karrer 537-540, 545).
Therefore, although created over a common ethical cause, the NRLC would quickly become politicized as it became more concerned with political victories than actively protecting life.

In 1969, not long after the formation of the NRLC, abortion researcher Lawrence Lader; executive director of the Association for the Study of Abortion, Ruth Proskauer Smith; and Doctor Lonny Myers founded the National Association for Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL). Heavily influenced by the women’s rights movement of the 1960s and 70s, which placed an emphasis on a woman’s right to choose, the NARAL framed the abortion rights movement as a women’s rights issue. This was a more liberal stance than prior abortion rights frameworks which typically argued for conservative views like population control. From NARAL, many grassroot and state-specific organizations formed. In Illinois, Doctor Lonny Meyers, lawyer Ralph Brown, and Episcopal priest Don Shaw founded Illinois Citizens for the Medical Control of Abortion (ICMCA). In Texas, the Dallas abortion rights movement drew on supporters from Planned Parenthood, the Unitarian Church, the Council of Jewish Women, and other local organizations. Ultimately, it was family-planning supports, like Planned Parenthood staff and volunteers, and church activists who were prominent figures in building and founding pro-choice organizations (Staggenborg 16-17, 25).

One of the tactics of the early pro-choice movement in gaining traction was referral work. In providing abortion referrals to women, pro-choice activists could stir controversy and bring abortion facts to the public. Religious support for abortion law reform progressed during the civil rights movements and spurred social activism in the churches. Supporters from Judaism, United Methodist, and Protestantism formed a
nationwide referral network that was run by clergy themselves. The involvement of these churches was also a reaction to Catholicism’s stringency on abortion. According to Staggenborg, “By 1969, there were local reform and repeal groups, Clergy Consultation Services, women’s movement groups, population movement organizations, and pockets of individuals in various parts of the country working for change in the abortion laws” (24). The alliances the NARAL made with these organizations would turn out to be part of the success of Roe v. Wade, as smaller organizations were vital in lower court cases and amicus briefs which educated the Supreme Court on the issue of abortion (Staggenborg 22-24, 37). As Staggenborg summarizes,

> Before 1973, the story is one of a movement that patched together different types of resources from different sources: the enthusiasm of young constituents, particularly feminists, willing to demonstrate for abortion rights in the streets; the skills of seasoned family-planning activists and volunteers who knew how to raise money and lobby their legislators; the moral concern and counseling skills of clergy members who organized abortion referral services; and the ingenuity of civil liberties and women’s movement lawyers anxious to test the abortion laws (4).

1973 was a turning point in the pro-life pro-choice debate with the US Supreme Court Case Roe v. Wade. The case, a class action suit by Jane Roe (pseudonym) against Dallas County, Texas, District Attorney Henry Wade, fought for the rights of pregnant women, couples attempting to prevent pregnancy, and physicians and healthcare workers who were affected by the criminalization of abortion. The US Supreme Court ruled that the Texas statute which banned abortions except in cases to save the mother’s life, violated a woman’s right to privacy. Thus, the US Supreme Court ruled that a woman had a right to procure an abortion before fetus viability at 24 weeks (Farr 171).
The outcome of *Roe v. Wade* surprised anti-abortionists after they had seen victories in specific states. However, the abortion rights victory spurred a re-mobilization of the pro-life movement as many states attempted to block the ruling (Staggenborg; Karrer). As a response to *Roe*, the NRLC disconnected itself from the Catholic Church in the hopes that they would be able to recruit a larger following of people from other religious backgrounds and conservative organizations (Karrer 549). At the same time, the NARAL changed its name to the National Abortion Rights Action League to respond to the ongoing battle over abortion rights. The ruling on *Roe* also allowed single-issue movement organizations to receive aid from more established organizations as it was no longer as risky to openly discuss abortion. Therefore, 1973 saw the support of two more established organizations to the pro-choice side: Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) (Staggenborg 59).

After the decision on *Roe v. Wade*, evangelical Christians had relatively little to say on the ruling, and some even supported the decision as a move toward religious liberty, equality, and justice (Balmer 12). For example, as a response to the legalization of abortion Protestant and Jewish denominations, along with other religious groups, formed the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights (RCAR). These religious groups felt they had a responsibility to “speak out on abortion and to prevent the public perception that the Catholic Church had a moral monopoly on the issue” (Staggenborg 60). Even some Catholic abortion rights groups arose like Catholics for Abortion Repeal and Catholics for a Free Choice (60). However, through other issues unrelated to abortion, conservative politicians eventually rallied religious groups which led to the politicizing of social rights issues like abortion and homosexuality. Castuera argues the Religious Right
did not arise spontaneously or of its own accord but was ultimately spurred on by political intervention (211). This shift toward the right only further continued when, in 1978, the Southern Baptist Convention appointed a conservative president, ultimately leading more Protestants to get involved in the pro-life movement (Karrer 557).

Other important cases continued to impact abortion rights in the US, causing the pendulum to swing back and forth between pro-choice and pro-life victories. In 1976, Congress passed the Hyde Amendment which banned Medicaid funding of abortions, causing abortion rights activists to expand efforts (Staggenborg 4). Later in 1989, support from the Reagan and Bush administrations opened a way to overturn Roe v. Wade with Webster v. Reproductive Health Services. In this case, although the Supreme Court did not overturn Roe, it did decide that the state of Missouri was not infringing upon any rights set forth in Roe. This meant that the state of Missouri was allowed to uphold laws that inhibited the use of public facilities and employees in abortion procedures, prohibited counseling on abortion, and required physicians to perform viability tests on women past their 20th week of pregnancy (Oyez). Similarly, the Supreme Court ruling on Planned Parenthood v. Casey (1992) would create a precedent for “undue burden,” giving states the ability to put restrictions on abortion so long as they did not place substantial obstacles in the way of someone seeking an abortion for a non-viable fetus (Farr 173). Although Planned Parenthood v. Casey upheld the precedent set in Roe v. Wade that women have the right to abortion, it gave states the ability to pass restricting laws on abortion that potentially interfered with Roe’s definition of viability based on trimesters. For decades after Roe, these cases balanced pro-life and pro-choice beliefs, giving states
the ability to set regulations on abortion proceedings while still upholding a woman’s right to abortion.

The history of the United States itself reflects the back and forth of thought on abortion as society and politics impacted public thought on abortion. However, the concepts of pro-life and pro-choice are relatively new within this history. It is important to note religious groups have been on both sides of the abortion debate, with Catholicism playing a key role in organizing the pro-life movement and Protestant, Evangelical, and Jewish groups becoming involved in the pro-choice movement. Other Christian sects did not begin to associate themselves with the pro-life movement until later when politicians spurred religious groups to become involved in conservative political issues. Therefore, even up until 30 to 40 years ago, Christianity as an entire religion was not associated with the American pro-life movement.


The precedents on abortion rights existed until June 24, 2022 when the United States Supreme Court issued its verdict on Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, a verdict which would overturn both Roe and Casey. In 2018, the state of Mississippi issued the Gestational Age Act, which prohibited abortion after 15 weeks of gestation except in cases of medical emergency or severe fetal deformation (Mississippi State Legislature). This act directly contradicted the 24-week abortion period set forth in Roe v. Wade. In March of that year, the Center for Reproductive Rights filed the Dobbs case on behalf of Jackson Women’s Health Organization, the only licensed abortion facility left in the state of Mississippi. Despite both the district court and US Court of
Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruling against the new Mississippi law based on the precedent set in *Roe*, the conservative-held US Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of Mississippi, eliminating the right for women to have an abortion (American Civil Liberties Union).

As of today, October 13, 2022, 13 US states have issued a total ban on abortion and one has issued a six-week ban on abortion³. While abortion may be legal everywhere else, numerous other states have attempted to place bans on abortion that are currently blocked⁴. Of the remaining states, only 15 have upheld the law set by *Roe v. Wade*, keeping abortion legal until viability⁵. In the remaining states, while still legal, abortion is restricted, typically through issuing stricter gestational limits or inhibiting the use of state funds for the procedure (The New York Times). Although abortion remains legal in most of the states, very few are actively protecting abortion and it is likely more states will issue total or near-total bans once they are no longer blocked.

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* has major implications for the people of the United States. Prior to this ruling, the Supreme Court balanced both pro-life and pro-choice wants, issuing middle ground rulings to appease both sides. Cases like *Casey* protected the pro-choice side by reaffirming the right to an abortion but also compromised with the pro-life side by giving states the ability to grant

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³ States with total bans are as follows: Idaho, South Dakota, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Georgia currently has a six-week ban in place, which practically eliminates abortion considering many women do not know they are pregnant until after six weeks.
⁴ States with a blocked ban are as follows: Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, Iowa, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, and South Carolina.
⁵ States in which abortion is legal and protected are as follows: Maryland, California, Alaska, New York, Washington, Vermont, Oregon, New Mexico, New Jersey, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Maine, Illinois, Hawaii, and Connecticut.
certain protections for fetuses in the first and second trimester (Sarvasy 2). Sarvasy argues that, “Perhaps because Casey strengthened the antichoicers in their pursuit of state regulations to convince the pregnant woman/person to shun abortion, the national narrative changed, so that everyone now feels pressure to take a stand on whether or not abortion is murder” (3). What today’s Supreme Court has failed to see is that the United States rests on a variety of moralities and religions that have different viewpoints on abortion. Therefore, there is not a single approach or viewpoint that can correctly address the multitude of religious and moral beliefs present in our democracy.

**POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES.** To begin, the decision to overturn Roe does not reflect the majority opinion in the United States and is therefore an extremist view. As of the summer of 2022, 62 percent of Americans believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases while only 36 percent believe abortion should be illegal in all or most circumstances. Despite the strong association of the Christian Church with the pro-life movement, many religiously affiliated adults believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Six out of ten Catholics believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases as do the majority of Black Protestants at 71 percent and White non-evangelical Protestants at 61 percent. Oppositely, 73 percent of White evangelicals believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. When it comes to Dobbs, 57 percent of Americans disapprove of the Supreme Court’s decision while only 41 percent approve (Blazina). Additionally, in about 40 states the majority of the public supports the legalization of abortion, while the majority in only 10 states supports the criminalization of abortion. With many more than just 10 states issuing bans on abortion, this means that current state laws are not reflecting public opinion representative of their own state (Grumbach and
These inconsistencies between the Supreme Court’s decision, current laws on abortion, and public opinion demonstrate a failure in the democratic system to represent the majority of American citizens.

Lemieux argues that overturning Roe will lead to an increase of hierarchy and domination in the US while undermining the equal citizenship on which democracy is based (1). Rather than resolving current inequities that undermine US democracy, the overturning of Roe v. Wade will exacerbate inequities (Lemieux 5). Scholars have outlined some of the predictable, and already occurring, consequences of overturning Roe are increased barriers or overall denial of time-sensitive abortion care; higher risk to the mental and physical health of pregnant people; increased maternal morbidity and mortality; greater gender, racial, and class disparities when it comes to health; and possible enforcement schemes that threaten rights outlined in the First and Fourth Amendments (Daum; Kulczyski; Lemieux; Williams et al.).

As we have already seen with the overturning of Roe, many states have put total or near total abortion bans into place. However, it is unlikely these bans will decrease abortion rates. Studies have found that abortion is more common in countries where the procedure is restricted and where women have less bodily autonomy whereas abortion is less common in countries with safe abortion access (Bearak et al.). Illegalizing abortion will not only fail to decrease abortion procedure rates, but it will also lead to an increase in the rate of unsafe abortions. Even in cases of other reproduction-related incidents, such as spontaneous miscarriage or ectopic pregnancies, obstetricians have already begun refusing care for fear of wrongful accusation or legal suits (Kulczycki 925-926).
Therefore, overruling *Roe* will impact women beyond just those who are seeking abortions as fears of surveillance and legal risks arise among healthcare providers.

Not only will overturning *Roe* fail to decrease abortion rates, but it will also cause many other consequences related to access, socioeconomic status, and health that will facilitate White supremacy. Daum argues that the Supreme Court is engaging in racist biopower techniques which intentionally put pregnant people of color at risk. According to Foucault, biopower is defined as a multitude of diverse techniques that are used to subjugate bodies and control populations. The United States is no stranger to the use of biopower and has repeatedly exploited the bodies, labor, culture, and resources of people of color to maintain White wealth and power. Examples of biopower include the enslavement of Africans and forced reproduction to create a domestic enslaved labor force. Overturning *Roe* is itself an act of biopower as the Supreme Court’s decision allows states to subjugate women’s bodies to government control and ultimately facilitate reproduction. Furthermore, the Supreme Court’s decision ignores the variety of identities and experiences of pregnant people and instead groups them into a single story of abortion which does not take into consideration the disparities and burdens imposed on different populations of pregnant people, like low-income people of color. Therefore, overturning *Roe* will only increase structural inequities and facilitate White supremacy as the population most likely to be impacted by this decision is low-income people of color who statistically do not have the same options as high-income White people do (Daum 1, 3-4).

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6 Interestingly, Christians used the Bible to support forced slave labor in the early days of America, just as they do now to justify illegalizing abortion.
In terms of access, overturning *Roe* will make it more difficult for people to obtain an abortion, which will impact women of color and low-income women at a higher rate. Women of color and low-income women make up the greatest percentage of those who procure abortions yet these are also the populations that are most impacted by illegalizing abortion (Daum 3). Women of color in the United States are highly economically vulnerable as,

…they earn significantly less than men, overwhelmingly work minimum wage jobs, and often are unable to take advantage of pregnancy or maternity leave because their employers are not covered by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (for example, domestic workers), or they are unable to afford to take unpaid leave (Daum 5).

Making abortion illegal will only decrease economic stability among women of color as they are forced to take on the financial costs of pregnancy and parenting (Daum 5).

Although in their verdict on *Dobbs* the Supreme Court points to insurance and Medicaid to cover most costs associated with prenatal care and labor, they fail to acknowledge the additional costs of pregnancy, including taking time off of work for appointments and delivery, securing childcare for the children one may already have, and paying for transportation to and from healthcare facilities (*Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* 34; Daum 6). Additionally, further disadvantaging people who already lack economic resources will continue a cycle of inequity as their children are born into low-income households where economic mobility is much more difficult to achieve with compounding racial inequities (Daum 5). Oppositely, women who are well-off, typically White women, will have an easier time procuring abortions. Even if they are located in a state in which there is a total ban, those who are high-income have the
resources to travel to another state for an abortion. Therefore, for low-income women access to abortion will become much more limited than for a high-income woman, creating a cycle of oppression that continues to disadvantage low-income women.

Not only are there significant socioeconomic consequences of overturning Roe, but there are also significant health consequences. Childbirth is more dangerous for women than abortion, as women are 14 times more likely to die from childbirth than abortion (Daum 6). When it comes to the health of pregnant women, Stevenson estimates that in states which enact complete abortion bans, maternal deaths could increase by 21 percent (2021). This increase in maternal mortality will further impact women in marginalized groups who face compounding health inequities (Kulczycki 924).

Williams et al. conducted a study in which they examined maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity pre-Dobbs and reviewed this information by state and associations with race, ethnicity, and rurality. Researchers found maternal mortality rates were higher in restrictive states as compared to protective states and that these mortality rates were higher for Black and Hispanic populations and rural populations than for White, non-rural populations (Williams et al.). Additionally, Williams et al. found that White maternal mortality rates in protective states are almost double the maternal mortality rates in comparable countries. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the maternal mortality rate for Black women is three times higher than that of White women (Peterson et al.). If states enact a total or near total ban on abortion, this rate will increase exponentially for Black women as compared to White and Hispanic women, with a 33 percent increase for Black women as compared to the average increase of 21 percent across all races. Even when keeping unsafe abortion constant, the impact of
denying wanted induced abortions in the US would increase maternal mortality significantly (Stevenson et al.). It is surprising to note, that while restrictive states have a higher maternal mortality rate, they have a lower severe maternal morbidity rate. Williams et al. state that this lower morbidity rate could be attributed to the higher maternal age that is present within protective states as severe maternal morbidity increases exponentially once a woman is above the age of 35 (Williams et al. 2).

In addition to heightened rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, overturning Roe will have serious consequences for the mental well-being of women. Many states with total bans have no exceptions in cases of rape or incest. Forcing women to carry a fetus that is the result of either of these circumstances can result in extreme mental and emotional trauma (Daum 6). In his statement on Dobbs, Justice Alito discussed arguments made by the pro-life side which furthered the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe. Alito noted, “that States have increasingly adopted ‘safe haven’ laws, which generally allow women to drop off babies anonymously; and that a woman who puts her newborn up for adoption today has little reason to fear that the baby will not find a suitable home” (Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization 34). In Alito’s statement, it seems that there is relatively little concern over the emotional and mental impacts of anonymously dropping a baby off. According to Daum,

The reality is that after one relinquishes a baby they return to a family, community and workplace where they are not anonymous, their pregnancy existed, and they continue to carry the physical burdens of pregnancy (for example, vaginal bleeding, follow up care for cesarian sections and vaginal tears, lactation, postpartum hormones) and the emotional burdens of surrendering a child for life (6).
Therefore, safe haven laws do not free a woman from the physical aftereffects of pregnancy nor the emotional trauma that comes with surrendering a baby that they carried for nine months.

In addition to safe haven laws, Alito points to adoption as an alternative to abortion. In a footnote, Alito quotes study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention which states, “[N]early 1 million women were seeking to adopt children in 2020 (i.e., they were in demand for a child), whereas the domestic supply of infants relinquished at birth or within the first month of life and available to be adopted had become virtually nonexistent” (34). Here, Alito claims that high demand for adoption is a strong argument for the anti-abortion side. Rather than emphasizing the protection of those who must sustain the costs of pregnancy and labor, Alito instead emphasizes supporting those who are looking to adopt. While those who are the most unable to procure abortions are people of color, those who are most seeking to adopt are overwhelmingly White. Alito frames this issue of adoption versus abortion as a business transaction in which the babies of people of color are used to fill the demand of White adopters. Here, the biopower of subjugating the bodies of pregnant people of color directly benefits White people and treats children of color as a commodity to fix the baby shortage (Daum 6). Overall, the decision of the Supreme Court will not only have a negative impact on the health and socioeconomic status of all women across the United States, but will disproportionately hurt women of color and low-income women, furthering White supremacy in this country.

IV. Conclusion
Throughout the history of the United States, views on abortion have consistently gone back and forth. Although abortion was a common practice and widely accepted by the public in the early to mid-1800s, doctors and politicians were the ones whose outlooks on abortion ultimately dominated society. This is no different from today as politicians and other governmental agencies continue to spearhead the anti-abortion movement. Although now involved in the pro-life movement, the Christian Church was not always in support of illegalizing abortion. The history of the Church’s involvement in the pro-life movement is relatively short compared to the history of the Church as a whole. However, through outside influences like politics, the Church was ultimately pushed to take a conservative stance in the abortion debate. As it stands today, many Church members and US citizens still do not agree with the decision to overturn Roe and believe abortion should be legal in at least some circumstances. These majority viewpoints more closely align with long-held Christian traditions which allowed abortion in the early stages of pregnancy. As seen from the history of abortion in the United States, Christianity was not always associated with being anti-abortion and many in the Christian Church today do not agree with anti-abortion viewpoints.
CONCLUSION

I. Summary

In this paper, I examined the question is Christianity truly anti-abortion like it purports itself to be today. I began my examination by looking to the Bible, Christianity's main religious text, and analyzing common verses used by both those who are pro-life and pro-choice. Next, I analyzed ancient sources outside of the Bible to determine where abortion-related beliefs stemmed from. Because Christianity is derived from Judaism, I included an examination on authoritative Judaic texts, like the Talmud and Mishnah, to understand how early Christian thought correlated to Judaic thought. I then discussed the split between Judaism and Christianity and compared the formation of Christian thought on abortion to that of Judaism. Finally, I reviewed the history of abortion in the United States to understand where modern conceptions of pro-life and pro-choice began, and how the Church became associated with the pro-life movement.

II. Findings

From my research, I have found that based on religious texts, ancient thought, and US history that Christianity is not anti-abortion. To begin, the Bible does not provide a definitive answer on whether abortion is right or wrong. Many on both the pro-life and pro-choice side of the debate cherry-pick Bible verses and apply modern pro-life and pro-choice lenses to them to push their own beliefs. However, in looking at the Bible from a pro-life or pro-choice standpoint, we ignore the fact that the ancient Israelites, and Christ
himself, did not view the abortion debate in these binaries. While the Bible provides some hints to ancient viewpoints on the beginning of life and abortion, it does not directly address abortion as a practice.

With inconclusive evidence in the Bible to respond to the question of whether Christianity is truly anti-abortion, I had to look to ancient texts and thought outside of the Bible. Beyond the Bible, other religious texts and thought point to Christianity being tolerant of, and at times even accepting of, abortion. Because Christianity derived much of its authoritative text, thought, and practices from Judaism, I also decided to research how ancient Jewish leaders responded to abortion. In ancient Judaic texts, religious figures interpreted from the Hebrew Bible that abortion is allowable in circumstances which endanger the woman’s health and that life does not begin at conception as modern Christians believe. As we saw, Christian thought aligned fairly closely with Judaic thought on abortion in the early Common Era, but once Christianity began to rely on the thought of Greek philosophers and adhere to the social standards of the time, it invited in outside thought that was not biblical. It is no surprise then that Christianity began to adopt anti-abortion beliefs as society began to adopt anti-abortion beliefs.

After learning from ancient thought and texts that Christianity was not originally anti-abortion, I wanted to understand how the religion has become heavily associated with the pro-life movement in the United States today. I found that even historically in the US, Christianity has not always purported itself to be a pro-life entity. Abortion was widely practiced in the US throughout the 1800s, and it was not the Church which argued for the outlawing of abortion, but doctors. The Church did not get involved in the abortion debate until later in the 1960s when US bishops founded the National Right to
Life Committee. Despite the common association of the Church with the pro-life movement, many religious groups formed on the pro-choice side, with organizations like the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights and Catholics for Abortion Repeal and Catholics for a Free Choice. Politicians who influenced the Church to get involved in important social topics ultimately led to the politicization of abortion in the Church, but this motion to take a stance on abortion was not born out of the Church itself. Today, many Christian denominations and believers agree that a person should have the right to procure an abortion in all or some circumstances, demonstrating that there remains no firm position on abortion in the Christian Church.

III. Further Research

Although I have included some discussion of the ways in which the Christian Church has responded to and interacted with governing bodies throughout history, further research should be conducted on the ways in which the Bible has influenced political thought and rulings in the United States. The First Amendment of the US Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and prohibits any laws which may restrict the practice of a religion. However, it seems as though the beliefs and practices of the Christian Church have influenced laws throughout US history more so than that of other religions. The Supreme Court’s ruling on Dobbs v. Jackson which allows states to outlaw abortion directly limits the practices of other religions, like Judaism, that believe abortion is allowable, and even necessary, in certain circumstances. As US laws and rulings continue to favor Christian thought, the line separating Church and State is becoming increasingly blurred.
With further research, we could not only begin to understand how US policies have been shaped by the ideologies of the Church, but we could also address the moral question of whether political rulings should be influenced by the Bible. The Bible addresses political issues frequently and many important figures in the Bible are politically involved. However, the Bible also comments on the separation between Church and State. In Matthew 22:17-21, it says,

“Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar or not?” But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.” And they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”

These verses imply that Caesar, who represents the government, is separate from God, who represents the Church. Jesus tells the disciples that they cannot base their idea of what is politically lawful on Him, but instead must independently adhere to both the State and the Church. Therefore, the Bible asserts the principle of separation between Church and State. Other verses, like 1 Corinthians 5:12, tell believers that they are not to hold those outside the Church to the same standards as those within the Church, implying that Christians should not exert their own belief systems or laws on those who are not Christian.

Although I began this project as a response to fellow Christians who celebrated the overturning of Roe v. Wade, I believe it is important for anyone, regardless of religious identity, to understand what the Bible says about divisive issues. In a country where political decisions seem so heavily influenced by biblical thought, it is necessary to know what the Bible says to dispel falsehoods and respond to religiously-motivated
political agendas. Further research into what the Bible says about the separation between Church and State could inform us of the morality of using the Bible to make political decisions in the modern world.

IV. Looking Ahead

In my view, the Church has been entwined in an extremist pro-life narrative that does not reflect the loving and protecting nature of our God. We Christians exist in an echo chamber in which Church leaders tell us “abortion is wrong” and so we blindly believe and accept this false truth. The Bible tells us, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2). Yet from the beginning of the Roman Empire, Christianity has conformed to the world’s ideas on abortion, not looking to God for the truth but seeking the truth from philosophers, doctors, and politicians. This has resulted in events that are not good and acceptable and perfect.

In Louisiana, 36-year-old Nancy Davis learns in her tenth week of pregnancy that her fetus has acrania, a condition by which the fetus is missing the top of its skull, and will die within days of birth. Because of the uncertainty and fear over Louisiana’s new abortion ban, doctors deny Nancy’s request for an abortion. In the end, Nancy must travel over 1,400 miles to New York City to procure an abortion (Vargas). In Texas, Amanda and Josh Zurawski, are finally pregnant after undergoing a year of fertility treatments. At 18 weeks pregnant, they learn that Amanda has cervical insufficiency and the fetus is no longer viable. Although there is a 50 percent chance that Amanda could get an infection if the fetus is not delivered immediately, doctors deny Amanda an abortion because they
do not deem her life to be in danger. Four days later, Amanda’s health plummets and doctors finally perform an abortion after determining she has developed sepsis. Amanda recovers after a week in the ICU but now is unsure whether she will ever be able to conceive again (Campoamor). In Ohio, a 10-year-old girl is raped multiple times and becomes pregnant with her rapist’s fetus. Because of a trigger law, abortion is illegal in Ohio after 6 weeks of pregnancy with no exceptions for rape or incest. The girl is six weeks and three days pregnant. The young girl is forced to travel to Indiana to procure an abortion and, once news leaks of the situation, Republican Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost claims the story is fake news. Yost does not believe the little girl’s story until a month later when her rapist confesses to the crime (Deliso).

These are just some of the stories we know of. The outcome of Dobbs has proven to have costly and almost deadly consequences for women and children of this country, and yet there are Christians who celebrate the overturning of Roe as a win for the Church. Psalm 82:3-4 states, “Vindicate the weak and fatherless;/ Do justice to the afflicted and destitute./ Rescue the weak and needy;/ Deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.” Romans 13:8 states, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” John 15:12 states, “‘This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.’” I ask my fellow Christians, is denying a woman of an abortion until she almost dies protecting the weak? Is asking a young girl to carry and deliver the fetus of her rapist delivering someone out of the hand of the wicked or doing justice to the afflicted? Is denying an abortion in any of these circumstances love?

If we as Christians are called “not to be conformed to this world,” then why have we chosen to define the Church within the binaries created by the world itself? I propose
instead not to view abortion in such a black and white manner, but rather to step outside of the pro-life, pro-choice binary and think about abortion in terms of love, justice, and protection. So, to my fellow Christians, I do not ask you to choose one side of the debate or the other, but instead, choose life.


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BIOGRAPHY

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