

INDUCED ABORTION AS A VIOLATION OF CONSCIENCE OF THE WOMAN

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WHY SHOULD WE CONCERN ourselves as to whether or not a woman's conscience is violated when she obtains an abortion? What difference does it make? Is it important? Whether conscience is followed, or whether it is violated, is of considerable importance. This is particularly the case in the faith-communities in which many of us are affiliated. If one does not follow one's conscience, it is a sin. There is guilt. A violation of conscience alienates a person from God. Confession and repentance are necessary to restore that relationship. That is very important. The eternal destiny of the individual may depend on it.

In its 1965 Declaration on Religious Freedom, Vatican Council II said: "On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience.... In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience.... Nor, on the other hand, is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious."ⁱ In this statement the conscience of the individual is very important. But God is the sovereign, not only with respect to divine revelation, but also in order that a person may come to know and have a relationship with Him.

Consider also the statement of a major Protestant denomination regarding abortion. It declared that the right to have an abortion is a necessary prerequisite to the exercise of conscience, and it urges its congregations and individual members to "affirm women's ability to make responsible decisions, whether the choice be to abort or to carry to term."ⁱⁱ In this statement it is the woman's conscience which is autonomous. All that is required is that the decision be "responsible" in the eyes of the woman. Whatever the decision, the other members and congregations are admonished to affirm it. Under this abortion-doctrine there is no higher authority than a "responsible decision," no requirement of the imperatives of divine law, no Biblical authority, and (not incidentally) no acknowledgement of the beliefs of the founder of the denomination, who condemned abortion as a monstrous crime and killing.ⁱⁱⁱ There is a particular irony in all of this because this denomination is the very one that was known to stress the sovereignty of

God. Now, instead of God as sovereign, it is Eve, the one who ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. This is not merely a debate within a single denomination but has a close parallel in the legal arena as well.

Conscience also has legal significance. For example, the Minnesota State Constitution says: "the right of every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience shall never be infringed"—that is, beliefs are absolute. "Nor shall any control of or interference with the rights of conscience be permitted... but the liberty of conscience hereby secured shall not be so construed as to excuse acts of licentiousness or justify practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of the state."^{iv} Other states have similar provisions, e.g., "actions based on conscience are not absolute."^v The distinction between beliefs being absolute and actions or practices based upon those beliefs as subject to regulation or prohibition is an important one to remember, although it appears to have been forgotten by the U.S. Supreme Court in its abortion-decisions.

The most significant legal connection between conscience and abortion is found in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992), which re-affirmed *Roe v. Wade*. In *Casey* the Court attempted to establish abortion as a liberty protected by the Constitution by an appeal to conscience. The Court stated: "The abortion decision may originate within the *zone of conscience* or belief.... The destiny of the woman must be shaped to a large extent by her own conception of her *spiritual imperatives* and her place in society" (emphasis added).^{vi} Is the decision to have an abortion an exercise of conscience, and does it, as the decision of the Supreme Court indicates, represent a "spiritual imperative"? The Court, although it made such a suggestion, offered no evidence or support for these statements that abortion is a matter of conscience or spiritual imperative.

In regard to abortion, conscience has important social and political aspects. For example, in an interview while considering becoming a candidate for the U. S. Presidency, Colin Powell addressed the situation of a woman considering abortion: "If it is her choice to abort, it's a matter between her, her doctor, her family, *her conscience and her God*."^{vii} Similarly, President Bill Clinton in a letter to Senator Orrin Hatch about the proposed ban on partial-birth abortions, said: "I have always believed that the decision to have an abortion should be between *a woman, her conscience, her doctor, and her God*."^{viii} Some have speculated that the reference to abortion as a matter of conscience is part of a new strategy of those who support legalized abortion in order to replace the previous "I'm personally opposed, but..." rhetoric. Some observers believe that this new strategy arises out of a *Newsweek* poll which asked about support for abortion using the phrase "It's a matter

between a woman, her doctor, her family, her conscience, and her God." Reportedly, when asked in that form, 72% of those responding called it "about right." This represents a gain of thirty points over the abortion-rights support registered in the latest Gallup poll, which asked about abortion without using the words *God* or *conscience*.^{ix}

But do those who use the word *conscience* understand its meaning? Do they understand what happens to the conscience of women before abortion, at the time of abortion, and in the days, months, and years that follow? A careful analysis of the meaning of the word *conscience* and an understanding of how the decision to have an abortion is made make clear that having an abortion violates the conscience of at least most women.

DEFINING THE MEANING OF *CONSCIENCE*

In order to demonstrate that having an abortion generally violates the conscience of women, it is first necessary to determine what the word *conscience* means. It has had different meanings over the years. Older decisions tend to view conscience in a Judeo-Christian perspective, which recognized the sovereignty of God. For example, in a conscientious objector case decided by a Federal Court of Appeals in 1943, the court stated, "Religious belief arises from a sense of the inadequacy of reason as a means of relating the individual to his fellow men and to his universe.... It is belief finding expression in a conscience which categorically requires the believer to disregard elementary self-interest and to accept martyrdom in preference to transgressing its tenets.... It may be justly regarded as a response of the individual to an inward mentor, call it conscience or God, that is for many persons at the present time the equivalent of what has always been thought a religious impulse.^x At least as late as 1952 the U.S. Supreme Court declared in a case upholding release-time education that "we are a religious people and our institutions presuppose the existence of a Supreme Being."^{xi} And in 1954, in response to the perceived threat of "atheistic communism," the words *under God* were placed into the Pledge of Allegiance: "one nation under God." But this declaration was short-lived as a matter of public-policy.

In *U.S. v. Seeger*, a 1965 case involving a conscientious objector, the Supreme Court defined "religion" as "a given belief that is sincere and meaningful that occupies a place in the life of its possessor parallel to the belief in another orthodox belief in God."^{xii} In the case of *U.S. v. Nordolf* (1972), a draft-board attempted to order a person who claimed to be a conscientious objector to report for induction into military service without considering the claims of conscience of the draftee. In this case the court defined conscience as "a knowledge or feeling of right and wrong, with a

compulsion to do right; moral judgment that prohibits or opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle."^{xiii}

In a 1971 conscientious objector case decided by the Supreme Court, Justice Douglas stated (in dissent) that "conscience and belief are the main ingredients of First Amendment rights.... Conscience is often an echo of religious faith. But... it may also be the product of travail, meditation, or sudden revelation related to a moral comprehension of the dimension of a problem, not to a religion in the ordinary sense."^{xiv} An example of conscience not based upon religious belief was recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *U.S. v. Welsh*, a case in which the Court granted a conscientious objector an exemption from military service on the basis of conscience. The essence of Welsh's conscientious objector beliefs were quoted in the opinion thus: "I believe that human life is valuable in and of itself; in its living, therefore, I will not injure or kill another human being. This belief (and the 'duty' to abstain from violence toward another person)... is essential to every human relation."^{xv}

The beliefs of Welsh were praised by Justice Douglas as representing the essence of religion. In fact, his beliefs appear remarkably close to the statements of Jewish theologian Martin Buber as to what represents the obligations of conscience. This case, although favorable to protecting human beings, had no precedential value in *Roe v. Wade*, decided only a few years later. There the court permitted violence and destruction of human life in the womb, based upon the "choice" made by a woman and her doctor. In *Roe v. Wade* human life was no longer considered valuable in and of itself, but only if someone else placed value on it. In order to do so, it said that life in the womb was only "a theory of life" and created the fiction of "potential life"—in fact, there is actual life in the womb with potential, not potential life. Thus in *Roe v. Wade* a medical model replaced a moral model. No longer was there a duty to abstain from violence, and the value of life became relative, not valuable in and of itself.

Eminent authorities in other fields have also attempted to define the meaning of *conscience*. Origen, a theologian of the early Christian church, defined "conscience" as a correcting and guiding spirit accompanying the soul, by which it is led away from evil and made to cling to good.^{xvi} German philosopher George Friedrich Hegel stated that "true conscience" is the disposition to will what is absolutely good.^{xvii} Philosopher Immanuel Kant observed that when a moral issue presents itself and demands action, then "conscience speaks involuntarily and inevitably."^{xviii} Martin Buber defined conscience as "the capacity and tendency of man to distinguish between those of his past and future actions which should be approved and which

should be disapproved. Conscience only rarely fully coincides with a standard derived from the society or community."^{xix} The Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas observed that "conscience implies the relation of knowledge to something applied to an individual case.... Conscience is said to witness, to bind, to stir up, and also to accuse, torment, or rebuke."^{xx}

A violated conscience is recognized by disapproval, accusation, torment or rebuke. Those who express personal guilt, remorse, regret, or other self-reproach can be said to feel that they have violated their conscience. Perhaps the most important single aspect of a violated conscience is guilt. However, influential elements of modern society believe that guilt should be trivialized, relativized, or eliminated entirely. In his book *Without Guilt and Justice* Walter Kaufman stated that "Guilt feelings are a contagious disease that harms those who harbor them and endangers those who live close to them. The liberation of guilt spells the dawn of autonomy."^{xxi} Swiss psychiatrist Paul Tournier has lamented the modern loss of conscience. In a book entitled *The Whole Person in a Broken World* he writes: "Modern man thinks he has eliminated the world of values, the world of poetry, the world of moral consciousness; but he has only repressed it and is suffering from it.... Our materialistic and amoral civilization no longer answers the deepest needs of the soul.... Modern man suffers from a repression of conscience."^{xxii}

THE INFLUENCE OF THE THERAPEUTIC MODEL

A very important influence on the loss of significance of conscience and the attempt to eliminate guilt and remorse is the modern rise of the therapeutic model. Sociologist Christopher Lasch has written, "The contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious. People today hunger not for personal salvation... but for the feeling, the momentary illusion of personal well-being, health, and psychic security."^{xxiii} Another observer has written, "Morality is no longer a prominent feature of civil society. In the 80's politicians abandoned it, Wall Street discarded it, televangelists defiled it... but as virtue drained out of our public lives, it reappeared in our cereal bowls... and our exercise regimens... and our militant responses to cigarette smoke, strong drink and greasy food. We redefined virtue as health."^{xxiv}

Sociologist Philip Rieff says that the therapeutic model follows the model of psychological man, whom he describes as "a child not of nature but of technology—not committed to the public life and most unlike religious man. Psychological man is anti-heroic, shrewd, carefully counting his satisfactions and dissatisfactions, studying unprofitable commitments as the sins most to be avoided."^{xxv} Thus terms such as *free will, guilt, good* or *evil* have no place in the therapeutic model.^{xxvi} The therapeutic tolerates no revealed, eternal, and

commanding truths. Instead, it represents an assault, more and more successful, upon all sacred barriers, according to Rieff.^{xxvii} The therapeutic model is far removed from the person who disregards elementary self-interest and accepts martyrdom in preference to transgressing conscientiously-held beliefs.

But these modern elements fail to recognize that guilt as a result of the violation of conscience has an intrinsic aspect not derived from external influences. Nor can it be eliminated by science or technology or by a perfection of the technique of abortion. Nor can conscience be reduced to a calculation of the various risks and potential benefits from taking a certain course of action. Neither can it be trivialized because the consequences of violating one's conscience can have a profound influence on subsequent behavior and also may result in influencing or determining one's eternal destiny.

Influential elements in modern society have also attempted to claim that guilt or its absence is merely a matter of social conditioning, and some have claimed that it is the pro-life opposition to abortion that causes the woman to feel guilt about abortion. But Buber points out that guilt is not simply acquired from transgressing ancient taboos or social customs or laws or parental values. In a 1948 presentation made to an international conference on medical psychotherapy he stated, "there exists real guilt, fundamentally different from all the anxiety-induced bugbears that are generated in the cavern of the unconscious. Personal guilt, whose reality some schools of psychoanalysis contest, and others ignore, does not permit itself to be reduced to the trespass against a powerful taboo. Each person stands in an objective relationship to others.... It is that person's share in the human order of being, the share for which that person bears responsibility. This responsibility or share in the human order is the action demanded by conscience."

ABORTION COUNSELING PRACTICES

With this as background, let us examine contemporary abortion-counseling practices. An examination of the literature on abortion-counseling as well as various forms used to provide information and consent by the woman at the time of the abortion, reveals that there is no discussion of (or even information about) the morality of abortion. Abortion-counseling does not use concepts of right or wrong. There is no effort made whatsoever to encourage a woman to examine her conscience. In abortion-counseling the woman is autonomous and the presence of another being in the womb is down-played or eliminated entirely. In abortion-counseling there is no

human order of being. No reference to even a possible or potential relation to another is mentioned.

When abortion-techniques are described to women *via* film or models, the womb is empty. The impression is left that there is nothing being aborted. Personnel in the abortion-facility use terms such as *tissue* or *products of conception* and never *baby* or even *fetus*. These dehumanizing terms are also used in consent-forms and in other information provided to the woman at the time of the abortion. The failure accurately to describe exactly what is being removed has been criticized as a deprivation of informed consent and a moral decision by the doctor on behalf of the woman.^{xxviii} The woman is also autonomous. The role of the male is marginalized or non-existent, at least in the legal context, and at the abortion-clinic as well. The U.S. Supreme Court has guaranteed this by its 1992 ruling in *Casey* that a husband is not even entitled to notice before his wife obtains an abortion.

While abortion-counseling, in theory, is supposed to be non-directive, in actual practice it is contrived and manipulative. It makes "therapeutic" exceptions instead of providing full and complete information. In abortion-counseling the emphasis is placed on effective contraceptive usage, but there is no attempt to encourage abstinence from sexual intercourse out of wedlock. (The vast majority of women who obtain abortions are unmarried.^{xxix}) These counseling techniques rely on a risk-benefit analysis with a pronounced bias in favor of the benefits of abortion and the detriments of childbirth. Abortion-counseling claims to be in response to the "choice" of the woman but does not protect the woman's conscience.

The risks and benefits which are discussed omit any reference to moral or religious considerations. Instead they concentrate on bodily and reproductive concerns. If the church with which the woman may be affiliated has taken a position in opposition to abortion, it is not respected. The sole authority is the autonomous self. This is the hallmark of abortion-counseling. This sole appeal to the autonomous self has been criticized by psychologist Paul Vitz as "almost guaranteeing the breakdown of higher ideals into a rationalization of selfishness permeated with narcissism."^{xxx}

Abortionists may also manipulate the women into obtaining an abortion by appealing to her fears. This is done by identifying a predominant fear and then using that fear to gain compliance and "sell" another abortion. Examples may include a fear that parents or a husband will find out that she is pregnant, fear of interruption of school- or career-plans, or fear of death. Those who work in abortion-facilities may themselves have had an abortion. If so, these counselors may actively encourage a woman to obtain an abortion in order that the counselor may feel a little better about having had

an abortion herself. Other counselors may include radical feminists, who as an exercise in power and control encourage abortion.

Abortion-clinics may also prominently display pro-abortion slogans on their walls in the waiting room and provide literature from such groups as Catholics for Free Choice in a deliberate attempt to erode and undermine any existing religious precepts or idealistic values which may be different from a decision for abortion. In one particular abortion-malpractice case, a woman had an abortion at age 16. Afterwards, she promised God that she would never have another abortion. In later years she got married and had three children. Marriage-problems ensued and her husband left when she was pregnant. She had severe economic difficulties. Despite her vow to God that she would never have another abortion, she found herself at an abortion-clinic. At the clinic she was very ambivalent. Despite her financial difficulties, the abortion-counselor told her not to take money from the pro-lifers protesting outside. And instead of respecting the woman's Catholic beliefs, she gave the woman literature from Catholics for Free Choice and urged her to obtain an abortion.

Possible psychological problems following abortion, including guilt, regret, and remorse, receive little attention in abortion-counseling, and when they are discussed the presentations tend to be misleading and inaccurate. For example, in a handout at a Planned Parenthood affiliate on "Facts about Early Abortion," the information is primarily limited to a brief description of how the abortion is done, with foreseeable problems limited to possible bodily injury or future reproductive problems. Under a section entitled "Emotional Problems" it states that "emotional problems after abortion are uncommon, and when they happen they usually go away quickly. Most women report a sense of relief, although some experience depression or guilt. Serious psychiatric disturbances (such as a psychosis or serious depression) after abortion appear to be less frequent than after childbirth." Although guilt is acknowledged as a possibility, it is trivialized and the emotional problems are greatly understated.

Another informational handout used by an abortion-facility entitled "Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy Aftercare" includes a section on "Feelings after the Abortion." It states: "What's important for us to realize is that positive, negative, ambivalent feelings are natural after an abortion. Any of the negative or confused feelings tend to pass away with time. We need to accept them as part of us and not put ourselves down for having them.... It is possible, though rare, to have a few days of depression. This may be due to hormonal changes that take place in our body when a pregnancy ends, whether by abortion, miscarriage, or full-term delivery." This informational

handout makes no reference at all to guilt, only to possible "negative feelings." It attempts to place induced abortion in the same category as miscarriage or childbirth by reference to "hormonal changes." Again, the range of psychological and emotional problems following abortion is considerably understated. Still another abortion-facility which is part of a chain of abortion-clinics in several states has no discussion at all relative to emotional or psychological problems following abortion in any of its forms or the handouts provided to women.

The frequent experience of guilt by women following abortion exists even in the absence of legal prohibitions against abortion. Nor is the personal guilt eliminated by counselors or others attempting to be "non-judgmental." Abortion-counseling makes the assumption of modern liberalism, which believes that every individual is a person of many parts who assembles him or herself. Every person can be a self-constituting creature, manufacturing oneself by choosing purposes and values by whatever principle he or she wishes from the universe of possibilities. In this view freedom is defined as a hostility toward conventions.^{xxxix} The possibility that there is an objective reality of general application is never considered. Thus, counseling at abortion-clinics is at least indifferent to the conscience of the woman, and at worst actively exploits and manipulates her into a decision for abortion that violates her conscience.

Instead of better health for the woman, her health is now worsened, despite the claims of the proponents of abortion to the contrary. Childbirth is protective against breast-cancer; induced abortion is not. Women who have abortions are much more likely to be found in a psychiatric hospital than child-bearing women. Induced abortion leads to more destructive and impaired relationships than other pregnancy-outcomes. The evidence of physical, psychological, and social deterioration following repeated abortion is particularly persuasive. This is most important, because about 60% of U.S. women age 30 and over have repeated abortions.^{xxxix} At least 32 areas of health and well-being have been identified where this deterioration takes place. These include increased isolation, lower self-esteem, distress and anxiety, less stable relationships, increased psychiatric hospital admissions, suicide attempts, more depression, increased smoking, drug and alcohol use, more grief, communication-breakdowns, increased risk of ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage and infertility.^{xxxix} Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "whoever does injury or violence to the natural will suffer for it... The natural is the true means of protection of the preserved life.... The natural is the safeguarding of life against the unnatural.... This is what underlies the maintenance and recovery of physical and mental health."^{xxxix} The myriad

number of medical, psychological, and social problems tell us that abortion is unnatural—it destroys life, not only of the life in the womb, but of individuals and societies.

THE DENIAL OF CONSCIENCE AT THE TIME OF ABORTION

Perhaps the most important evidence that making the decision for abortion does not fall within the legally protected zone of conscience or spiritual imperatives is found in a comprehensive article entitled "Abortion Counselling" written by Uta Landy, then Executive Director of the National Abortion Federation (NAF). The NAF is one of the foremost advocates of abortion and has about 400 abortion-clinics as members of the organization. It has established standards for the practice of abortion. A review of this article leads to the inescapable conclusion that women who decide to have an abortion most often are in the midst of a major personal crisis in the face of an unplanned pregnancy and deny their conscience in the process. The article examines the various behavioral patterns of women who seek abortion. Ambivalence, guilt, anger, and deep confusion are identified as "major themes" that consistently arise in the decision-making that leads to abortion. These themes are a strong indication that, for most women, the decision to abort most likely represents a violation of conscience or ideals.

Landy identifies four types of reaction by women in a crisis-situation. These include the "spontaneous approach" in which the woman makes the decision quickly without thinking too long about it. Landy warns that, while this approach produces a quick resolution, the decision and its consequences might result in regret later. A second type of reaction to a crisis is the "rational-analytical" type in which the woman weighs her options carefully. But this type of woman is so pre-occupied with being rational that she fails to take her emotions into account.

A third type is the woman who takes the "denying-procrastinating" approach in which she initially denies she is pregnant and has many reasons why she cannot make a decision. Fourth, there is the "no-decision-making" approach, in which case the woman refuses to make a decision herself and instead allows others, such as her husband, boyfriend, parents, doctor, or counselor, to make the decision for her. She consequently refuses to take responsibility for the decision and is prone to blame others for having the abortion.^{xxxv} Based upon the findings of this article, it is reasonable to conclude that women who make decisions to abort without adequate reflection, or are overly rational, or who engage in procrastination and denial, or who let others decide, are very likely to leave their moral or religious values behind in the process.

The findings and conclusions in Landy's article are not unique. Several other studies have also shown that the abortion-decision may be severely conflicted, as indicated by high levels of pre-abortion stress, as well as by guilt or anger, self-reproach, anticipatory grief, or high levels of anxiety. Those who have observed women prior to their induced abortion have noticed pronounced personality-changes. For example, a psychiatric counselor has said, "the 24-hour period prior to the woman obtaining an abortion is a period of intense anxiety and ambivalence."^{xxxvi} Researchers at Duke University who studied women upon their arrival at a Raleigh abortion-clinic also found a generalized stress-response syndrome. Four distinct coping styles were identified. Women tended to be either "approachers" or "avoiders" and marked by anxiety, depression, denial and intrusion. These researchers found similar responses between the women who sought abortion and bereaved populations.^{xxxvii}

Similarly, an intense grief-response was found in a 1982 study of 80 women at Midtown Hospital (Atlanta GA) at a pre-abortion counseling-session. Pre-abortion grief was found to be higher than grief-responses six weeks later. The authors concluded that the decision to abort may initiate the grief-reaction.^{xxxviii} A 1981 study of 55 British women who requested abortion for mental health reasons used a hostility-questionnaire which measured the urge to act out hostility, to criticize others, and to project delusional (paranoid) hostility, self-criticism, and guilt. Prior to their abortion, the mean hostility-score was about two standard deviations above the normal mean. The hostility-scores were similar to those of psychiatric populations. The predominant direction of hostility was toward self-criticism and guilt.^{xxxix} All of these studies tend to demonstrate that the woman is in a crisis at the time of her abortion and is attempting to cope with guilt, grief and remorse.

In Carol Gilligan's frequently cited book *In a Different Voice*, Kohlberg's theory of justice was contrasted with the values considered by women, both before and after abortion.^{xl} She found that nihilism was an important aspect of the thinking process as revealed in their personal stories. She observed that women frequently seemed to want separation but also attachment. They tended to recast the moral judgment from a consideration of the good to a choice between two evils. Moral dilemmas were seen in terms of conflicting responsibilities. The women asked themselves, "Why care?" in a world where the strong end relationships. The author concluded that the abortion-decision centers on the self. The woman focuses on taking care of herself because she feels that she is all alone.

The patterns of thought described in Gilligan's book contrast sharply with Buber's idealistic views. He says, "Each person stands in an objective

relationship to others.... It is that person's share in the human order of being, the share for which that person bears responsibility. This responsibility or share in the human order is the action demanded by conscience."^{xii} Not only is it the woman obtaining the abortion, but those who may have encouraged her to do so, or otherwise participated, also bear their share of responsibility for the abortion.

CRISIS-BEHAVIOR AS A REASON FOR VIOLATION OF CONSCIENCE

Isolation of the woman by treating abortion as her personal and private choice also fails to take adequate account of the crisis-situation in which women involved in decisions regarding abortion often find themselves. The types of coping methods described by Landy provide ample evidence that the woman is frequently in a crisis. According to those who have studied crisis-theory and crisis-situations, one of the worst things a person can do is to become isolated. Isolation often leads to bouts of depression and self-pity and to loss of self-control. It may result in primitive methods of coping behavior in an attempt to resolve the crisis. Persons in crisis are also very susceptible to the influence of others who may try to aid in resolving the crisis. Thus, with a minimum effort on the part of the counselor, mental health professional, or family-member, a maximum amount of leverage may be exerted upon the individual.

Various studies have demonstrated that the influence of others is frequently a significant factor in the decision to have an abortion or to bring a child to term. In one study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute during 1987-88 of 1900 women obtaining abortions at various facilities throughout the U.S., it was found that 23% stated as a reason that their husband or partner wanted them to have an abortion and 7% stated that their parents wanted them to do so.^{xiii} Other studies have found even higher figures. A study of post-abortion women in 1993-94 recruited from local post-abortion counseling services found that 58% of the women had abortions because of pressure from a husband, boyfriend, or parents.^{xiiii} However, if women in a crisis-situation are pressured to have an abortion, or take that action to please others, it is likely that the values of these others will be dominant in the process.

WOMEN AS MORAL AGENTS

Other research has also identified various coping strategies used by women who obtained abortions. In one of the studies, all of the coping strategies appeared to be based on abortion as a moral problem. In a 1978 doctoral dissertation by Janice Muhr, a model of abortion decision-making was developed which weighted three kinds of issues: volitional, practical, and

moral.^{xliv} In-depth interviews revealed that women tended to generate rationales which excluded or minimized conflictual levels of meaning and came to view their decisions as relatively free or forced. Four post-abortion adjustment styles were identified, with each characterized by cognitive and behavioral coping strategies: *status quo*, maturation, victim, and victim-persecutor. It was hypothesized that all adjustment-styles were organized around concern for abortion as a moral problem, even for women who did not raise personal moral concerns. For women who experienced abortion as a loss, mourning-processes were blocked because of the moral and volitional nature of the decision. An affective cycle of guilt and loss was identified in some women which did not resolve itself over time.

Maturation as a possible response following abortion might be categorized as a "wake-up" call. For example, one woman who had an abortion at age 16 later related that it made her realize that she was a sinner. She made the important step of taking responsibility for her actions. In later years she committed her life to Jesus Christ. Another "wake-up" call type of response might be to obtain a tubal ligation to prevent further pregnancies, or to decide to abstain from sexual intercourse in the future. Women who view themselves as victims are those who will join organizations such as Victims of Choice, American Victims of Abortion, or Women Exploited by Abortion (WEBA). Those who see themselves as victims are conflicted by the fact that they saw themselves as victims if they bore a child but also as aggressors by their involvement in the death of their unborn child.^{xlv}

TYPICAL THOUGHT-PATTERNS APPEAR TO EXCLUDE CONSCIENCE AS THE BASIS OF ABORTION DECISION-MAKING

There is other evidence, based upon the typical thought-processes of women who obtain abortions, that conscience and moral or spiritual imperatives are not controlling the decision. For example, in a study of women who had abortions in a Baltimore area clinic in 1983-85, it was found that 2 out of 3 exhibited a histrionic personality, 1 out of 3 was narcissistic, and nearly 1 out of 4 had an anti-social personality. Histrionic individuals are prone to denial, may display rapidly shifting and shallow emotions, and will likely over-react to situations when they arise. Usually they tend to show little interest in careful, analytic thinking and tend to be easily influenced by others or by fads. The narcissistic personality is characterized by extreme self-centeredness or self-absorption. The emotional reactions of narcissistic individuals are frequently dominated by rage or shame. Thus they may not express guilt-feelings, at least until they have matured at some time in the future. Anti-social personalities frequently engage in unlawful acts, are

irritable and aggressive, often fail to plan ahead or are impulsive. They also tend to lack regard for the truth and are reckless regarding their own or others' personal safety. The author concluded that the clinical picture of personality-disorders exhibited by these women suggests that "it is one of somebody who has been wounded early in life, has difficulty in relationships, and has tremendous difficulty with intimacy."^{xlvi}

PRAGMATISM PREVAILS OVER PRINCIPLE

The reasons given by women for having abortions indicate that the basis for decision-making is pragmatic and not based on conscience. The 1987-88 Guttmacher survey found that the most important reasons for obtaining an abortion were: (1) the woman is concerned that having a baby would change her life, (2) the woman can't afford a baby now, (3) the woman has problems with a relationship or wants to avoid single parenthood, (4) the woman is unready for responsibility, (5) the woman is not mature enough or is too young to have a child.^{xlvii} All of the reasons given in the survey were pragmatic in nature, and none referred to religious or spiritual reasons. All reasons involved the avoidance or dissolution of human relationships, whether existing or potential. The reasons appear to be far removed from God or a religious impulse. Instead, they appear to be motivated by abandonment, self-interest, weakness, or the influence of others.

THE INFLUENCE OF LEGALIZED ABORTION

The fact that induced abortion is legal also appears to be an important influence on the decision to have an abortion. In a study of 252 women-members of WEBA, 70% said the law had played a major role in their moral perception of abortion, only 6% said it played a moderate role, and 13% said it played little or no role.^{xlviii} When these same women were asked whether or not they would have sought an illegal abortion if a legal abortion had not been available, 75% said they definitely would not have sought an illegal abortion. One woman was quoted as saying, "If it's legal, it must be all right." Similarly, in a study of 344 post-abortion women who were receiving a variety of services at Akron Pregnancy Services in Akron, Ohio from 1988-93, 91% reported legal abortions and only 5% reported illegal abortions.^{xlix} When asked if they would have illegal abortions, only 12% said yes, 58% said no, and 30% had no response. Thus, according to the self-assessment of the women, they were far less likely to have an illegal abortion compared to a legal abortion.

The fact that abortion is legal also appears to influence women before they even become pregnant. Recent studies have reported that many women will

decide to obtain an abortion even before they become pregnant.¹ However, even if these women obtain an abortion after becoming pregnant, stress-reactions indicating internal conflict are still reported among them in the time-period shortly before their abortion. Again, the influence of legalized abortion on decision-making is apparent.

LONG-TERM GUILT OR REGRET OR OTHER ADVERSE REACTIONS

An investigation of the medical, psychological, and social literature following legal abortion reveals that women may experience depression on the perceived date of the aborted child's birth, anger at not receiving accurate information from abortion-counselors prior to the abortion, resentment at the manipulation by others, or increased sexual activity in an attempt to atone for the destruction of the aborted child by having another replacement-child. Women may contemplate or attempt suicide after abortion. A significant number will initiate or expand their use of alcohol or drugs following abortion. Any of these symptoms represent evidence that women have violated their own standards when they obtain abortions. Specific examples include a 1989 study of 232 post-abortion women seen at crisis-pregnancy centers across the U.S. approximately ten to eleven years post-abortion and who indicated some evidence of post-abortion syndrome. Virtually all expressed guilt from their abortion and 36% said that they had suicidal thoughts following their abortion. Most of these women (76%) were Protestants.ⁱⁱ A study conducted by Open Arms, a religiously oriented post-abortion support ministry, of 828 post-abortion women an average of 8 years thereafter, among centers with which they are associated throughout the U.S., found that 81% expressed guilt from their abortion.ⁱⁱⁱ

Severely adverse reactions following abortion are not limited to Christian or religious women. In a 1965 study of Japanese women (a society not known for being particularly religious) conducted by a Japanese newspaper-chain, only 18% of those polled said that they had no guilt-feelings at all, while more than 60% admitted to some degree of regret or remorse.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ In a small study published by Anne Speckhard of 30 post-abortion women who were stressed by their abortion-experience, all expressed feelings of grief, sadness, regret and loss, 92 % expressed guilt, 60% increased drug or alcohol use, 31% made suicide-attempts, and 65% had suicidal thoughts following their abortion, among their negative reactions. In this sample 72% said that they had no identifiable religious beliefs at the time of their abortion.^{liv} In a sample of 80 women who had abortions at a Baltimore area clinic during 1984-86, intrusive or avoidance behavior was present in two-thirds of the women, even three to five years after their abortions. Some 67.5% of these

Baltimore women reported that religious worship was not important in their lives at the time of their abortion.^{lv}

In David Reardon's 1987 study of 252 women about ten years following their abortion and who were members of WEBA, 94% had negative psychological reactions which they attributed to their abortion-experience. In a further study of a sub-group of 100 WEBA women from the original sample of 252, 91% said that they experienced feelings of guilt and sorrow after their abortion. When asked about their choice for abortion, 54% said it was inconsistent with their prior beliefs and a betrayal of their own ideals, 14% were uncertain, and 28% said it was consistent with their prior beliefs. When asked if they were religious persons prior to their abortion, 38% agreed or strongly agreed, while 47% disagreed or strongly disagreed, with 29% uncertain.^{lvi} The fact that many women (47%) who said they were not religious when they obtained their abortion and yet still subsequently had severely negative psychological reactions is evidence that there is "a law written on the heart" and that obtaining an abortion violates that law.

Random studies on U.S. women who have been asked about their emotional reaction to abortion are very few. In March 1989 a random telephone-interview study of 2533 women aged 18 or older was conducted by the *Los Angeles Times*. Among these women 8% admitted to having had at least one abortion. Of those admitting abortion, 56% expressed a sense of guilt about having had an abortion, and 26% of the women said they "mostly regretted" the abortion.^{lvii} The elapsed length of time since their abortion would have varied widely. The percentage reporting guilt in the *Los Angeles Times* study is higher than guilt-feelings expressed by women in a number of other studies where women were questioned shortly after their abortion. This suggests that guilt as a reaction to abortion may increase over time.

The percentage of women reporting abortion was lower than the actual percentage of U.S. women who would have actually obtained abortions because, at the time of the study, about 13% should have reported one or more previous legal abortions. Based on previous studies comparing women who participated in post-abortion studies with those who dropped out or refused to participate, the women dropping out or not participating were likely to have had more emotional difficulties, be more likely to be repeating abortions, and less likely to want the abortion than the women who participated.^{lviii}

Non-randomized long-term studies of women stressed or traumatized by abortion have found very high percentages of women expressing guilt-feelings. In the Akron study of 344 post-abortion women receiving services at Akron Pregnancy Services from 1988-93, 66% expressed guilt and 54%

expressed regret or remorse from their abortion approximately six years afterward. The average age of these women at the time of their abortion was about 18 years.^{lxix} In Reardon's 1987 study, 91% expressed guilt when interviewed about eleven years later. A 1990 study by a Minneapolis-based post-abortion support-group among religiously oriented women ten to fifteen years after their abortions found that 90% expressed guilt from their abortion.^{lxx} And a 1989 study of 232 women seen at various crisis-pregnancy center in 39 states who exhibited evidence of some post-abortion stress found that virtually all had guilt-feelings from abortion.^{lxxi}

Some short-term studies on special populations have also shown high levels of moral conflict and resulting guilt following abortion. A San Diego study published in 1973 of unmarried women aged 14-20 who had structured, in-depth interviews found that 90% had moral conflicts over the decision, 61.5% expressed strong guilt, and 38.5% expressed minimal guilt, while 42% thought abortion was murder. The average length of time since their abortions was about six months.^{lxxii} In a North Carolina study adolescents seeking abortion were asked their beliefs about abortion. The study found that 34% opposed abortion on request, 20% thought abortion was justified only on medical recommendation, and yet all of the adolescents had abortions without giving any of those reasons for doing so. It was concluded that many had rationalized their guilt by considering themselves "exceptions to the rule."^{lxxiii} A British study which personally interviewed women two to three months post-abortion found that 55% of the women reported guilt from their abortion.^{lxxiv} In one of the leading, early U.S. studies on post-abortion psychological reactions, 24% of New York women reported much guilt or moderate guilt when interviewed about one month post-abortion.^{lxxv} Other reviewers have reported short-term guilt reactions ranging from 10 to 36% in five other studies published in 1972-73.^{lxxvi} Because of these and other studies, some observers have concluded that existing beliefs about abortion may be inadequate guides for decision-making in the face of an abortion-dilemma. In order to overcome this disequilibrium, the woman develops new cognitive constructions of the situation.^{lxxvii}

GUILT AS THE GUARDIAN OF OUR GOODNESS

The encouragement of behavior that does not result in guilt is most important in a social context. Dr. Willard Gaylin, a psychotherapist and author of *Feelings: Our Vital Signs*, has stated in an article that "contrary to the tenets of pop psychology, guilt is hardly a useless emotion.... Guilt..., the sense of anguish that we have fallen short of our own standards, is the guardian of our goodness. It is necessary to the development of conscience

in our children and to the avoidance of anti-social behavior. The failure to feel guilt is the basic flaw of the psychopath, who is capable of committing crimes of the vilest sort without remorse or contrition.... Guilt results when we betray an internalized model of behavior."^{ixviii} Many women betray that internalized standard of behavior when they obtain an abortion.

A VIOLATION OF A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT

The violation of conscience of these women is a violation of a basic human right. Virtually all of the state constitutions in the U.S. protect the rights of conscience from interference by others. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 by the United Nations also recognizes that the right of conscience is part of the dignity of the individual. Thus, a violation of conscience violates the basic rights and dignity of the woman. Those who claim that abortion represents a decision based upon conscience simply do not know the facts.

NOTES

i. *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, Vatican Council II (December 1965) as quoted in *Religious Liberty and Conscience*, ed. Milton R. Konvitz (1968) 23.

ii. *Covenant and Creation: Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion*. Policy Statement of the 195th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), 1983, p. 60.

iii. Harold O. J. Brown, *Death Before Birth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 126, citing John Calvin's *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, trans. Charles W. Bingham, 3: 41-42.

iv. *Minnesota State Constitution* of 1857, Article 1, 16.

v. Virtually all state constitutions protect liberty of conscience, usually by absolutely protecting the right of religious worship, but they make a distinction between liberty and license relative to acts or practices.

vi. *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* 112 S. Ct. 2791 (1992).

vii. *National Right to Life News* (Oct. 11, 1995) p. 2, quoting the Colin Powell interview with Barbara Walters of Sept. 15, 1995 on the *20/20* program.

viii. *National Right to Life News* (March 15, 1996), p.7, quoting a letter dated Febr. 28, 1996.

ix. Naomi Wolf, "Our Bodies, Our Souls" in *The New Republic* (Oct. 16, 1995) 33.

x. *U. S. v. Kauten*, 133 F. 2d 703, 708 (2nd Cir 1943).

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- xi. *Zorach v. Claiborn*, 343 U.S. 306, 313 (1952).
- xii. *U.S. v. Seeger* 380 U.S. 163, 170-71 (1965).
- xiii. *U.S. v. Nordolf* 440 F. 2d 840, 843-44 (C.A. III 1971).
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- xxiv. Barbara Ehrenreich in *Lear Magazine*, as quoted in *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* (August 30, 1990).
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- xxvi. Nicholas Kittrie, *The Right to Be Different: Deviance and Enforced Therapy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1971) 39.
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