

# Christian Faith and the issues of life: Life issues considered in the context of the Apostles' Creed

— by Gerrit Dawson

## "...The Holy Catholic Church, The Communion of Saints..."

Justifying abortion requires certain mental gymnastics. One must think atomistically, as if each person's body were an isolated entity, under no obligation to or dependence on others. Within the island realm of the body, each person is sovereign. There are no ultimate claims from without which we must heed, no ultimate duty to others which can require sacrifice to fulfill. I am I. What happens within my body falls within the realm of my sovereign choices. Hence, abortion can be construed as a choice of a woman about her body, with no binding regard either to the father or the baby. Viewing human beings this way, we come to believe the rhetoric concerning "the right to choose."

The Apostle's Creed enshrines a very different way of looking at what it means to be human. We affirm our belief in the "holy, catholic church." In doing so, we recall the oneness of all believers in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and remember that the Creed was composed before there were denominations. We profess the "communion of saints," the mystery that Christians are united across the miles, and even across the years. Scripture teaches this reality in many ways. We share in the one Spirit of Jesus (I Cor. 12: 11). We are members of Christ's body, and so of one another (Eph. 5:30). Together we comprise the branches flowing out of Christ the vine (John 15). Those who have gone before us in Christ now form a great cloud of witnesses, cheering us on in our race of faithful service and growth in holiness (Heb. 12: 1). Let's look at three implications of this communion of saints for the topic of abortion.

### **1. We are not alone and we do not belong to ourselves.**

The triune God has his very being in relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has made us in his image, and so we, too, are relational beings.

We come into being because of the profoundly intimate relating of a man and a woman. The image of communion may indeed be distorted by lust, violence, or a failure to love. But the act of union nevertheless speaks to a reality beyond the moment. Two are joined sexually in such a way that a oneness occurs and a new life emerges from that union.

Even the detachment of the plastic instrument in a medical fertilization cannot completely obscure the reality that new human being requires the seed of



a man and the egg of a woman. Moreover, an embryonic human being cannot live without being in relationship to his mother, just as a newborn baby requires constant care in order to grow and thrive.

Even the most independent adults discover upon reflection how profoundly interconnected we all are. From food production to waste removal, from transportation to medical care, from exchange of currency to disaster relief, we live in interdependence.

For Christians, these relationships go even deeper. We share in the Spirit of Christ, and realize this oneness in the communion of prayer, shared worship, and united works of love and mission. We are joined to our ascended Head, deriving our life from his life, our direction from his direction. We know the intimacy of our spirits meeting in unity through our union in Christ. Thus, no decisions occur in a vacuum.

Autonomy is merely a myth for any person, but for the Christian pretensions to autonomy are simply idolatry. We belong to one another. Paul writes directly, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are

not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (I Cor. 6: 19). The communion of saints reminds us profoundly that we are never free to make decisions as if we were independent of others. Abortion is a searing wound upon the body of Christ, and we are all affected by it.

### **2. This very interrelatedness calls the body of Christ to be intimately, compassionately involved in one another's lives.**

Abortion is an act of despair. It arises from the recognition at some level that the sexual act which led to pregnancy should not have occurred. Hence, the giving away of oneself in that union led not to the shelter of love and the fruition of life bringing forth life, but to the wasting of life, an embarrassment of vulnerability and a sense of shame for the consequences.

Abortion means parents have looked at the future with this baby and seen not joyful years ahead, but misery and struggle. Abortion means a woman has not felt the community around her value her, claim her, and promise to love her and the baby for the years to come.

The holy catholic church, by contrast, should offer a shining light of hope. Anyone belonging to our communion should know that such despair is not the only option. Those outside our communion should feel the draw of our love and care for one another to such a degree that they fly to our doors when the weight of consequences is upon them. The communion of saints is a demanding call upon the church of Jesus Christ to love in ways far more radical and sacrificial than ever before. I believe we are called

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to look after one another so well that a) the instance of pregnancy outside of marriage is greatly reduced, b) the grace offered means that even children conceived outside of the proper Biblical boundaries (and their parents) are gathered in, claimed for Christ and loved as his own little lambs, and c) parents of children with severe difficulties see the church as the best context for nurturing those children. We are called to love one another out of abortion and into life.

### **3. The communion of saints means abortion is not final.**

We have a word of grace and hope to those who have lost children through abortion. This life is not the end of life. The children of believers are numbered among the company of believers (Book of Confessions, 6.141), and we have a strong tradition of believing that children dying in infancy are included in the election of grace (BOC,6.193). We will see one another. The love between parents and children so abruptly, violently aborted will be restored in Christ.

Even this sin Christ has taken to the cross. Even these deaths are included in the victory of resurrection. Near the conclusion of his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes concerning Christians who have died. He describes them as “those who have fallen asleep.” The very phrasing speaks of a separation that is temporary. He wants to teach so that they “may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” Christians grieve, deeply. But we need not despair. When Christ gathers his own at the last day, the dead will be raised and then the living will be caught up together with them. So, Paul writes, “we will always be with the Lord” (I Thes. 4: 17).

The communion of saints directs us toward realizing that those Christians who have died are not lost, but are even now in Christ. Our separation from one another is bridged now through our union in Christ through the Spirit. At his return, that separation will disappear completely as we all share in the resurrection of Christ.

Abortion is a stab against the

communion of the saints. It is an act of isolation and despair, with long-lasting consequences. The church that professes to be one universal church in a communion that crosses time and space feels the pain of absorbing such wounds. We bear the grief. But we do not despair. Our Lord to whom we are joined has conquered sin and death. So this doctrine calls us to love at a deeper level, to offer our lives in such a way that people are loved out of the despair of choosing abortion. The church alone has the healing balm of forgiveness for the past and a hope for the future. We are called to minister this love as never before.

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