

## Early Christians & Abortion

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by William Stewart

Several years ago, with an election approaching, a candidate canvassing in our area stopped by my home seeking my support in his pursuit of public office. I politely, but firmly informed him that he would not receive my vote, as we had fundamental disagreements on important moral issues.

We briefly discussed same-sex marriages and capital punishment, but the majority of our conversation focused on abortion. The politician had trouble reconciling my support of capital punishment with my utter detest of abortion. Sadly, he fails to acknowledge two things:

1. When a criminal is put to death, it is not an act of murder, but an exercise of justice afforded to governing authorities (Romans 13:1-7).
2. When an unborn child is put to death, it is not merely a collection of tissue called a “fetus,” but an innocent human being (Jeremiah 1:5).

To strengthen his position, the candidate informed me that the early church supported abortion. He stated that ample evidence could be found in quotes from antiquity to demonstrate that the early Christians were not opposed to the act of aborting a pregnancy. When asked for the evidence, he informed me that he was too busy to supply me with any specifics, but that the testimony of the early Christians should be easy enough to find.

He was right. Evidence of what the early church believed on abortion was not difficult to find. However, it was not what he said, and when I sought to share it with him, he refused to see me. Notice some quotes from the early Christians:

“Thou shalt not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shalt thou destroy it after it is born.” (**Letter of Barnabas 19–74 AD**)

“There are some women among you who by drinking special potions extinguish the life of the future human in their very bowels, thus committing murder before they even give birth.” (**Octavius 30, Minucius Felix - 170 AD**)

“Among surgeons’ tools there is a certain instrument, which is formed with a nicely-adjusted flexible frame for opening the uterus first of all and keeping it open; it is further furnished with an annular blade, by means of which the limbs within the womb are dissected with anxious but unfaltering care; its last appendage being a blunt or covered hook, wherewith the entire fetus is extracted by a violent delivery. There is also a copper needle or spike, by which the actual death is managed in this furtive robber of life: they give it, from its infanticide function, the name of *embuosphaktes*, ‘the slayer of the infant,’ which of course was alive.” (**The Soul 25, Tertullian - 210 AD**)

“To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing, nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to birth. That is a man which is going to be one; you have the fruit already in its seed.” (**Apology 9, Tertullian - 210 AD**)

“(Christians) marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring.” (**Letter of Diognetus - 250 AD**)

“The man, or woman, is a murderer that gives a philtrum, if the man that takes it die upon it; so are they who take medicines to procure abortion; and so are they who kill on the highway, and rapparees.” (**First Canonical Letter 8, Basil the Great - 374 AD**)

“Wherefore I beseech you, flee fornication... Why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? — where there are many efforts at abortion? — where there is murder before birth? For even the harlot you do not let continue a mere harlot, but make her a murderess also. You see how drunkenness leads to prostitution, prostitution to adultery, adultery to murder; or rather to something even worse than murder. For I have no names to give it, since it does not take off the thing born, but prevents its being born. Why then do thou abuse

[continued on page 321004](#)