

TAKING A STAND

THE CHURCH RESPONDS TO MORAL ISSUES CONFRONTING CHRISTIANS

Living in the midst of a sinful world, Christians often are confronted with moral issues for which they can find no easy answers, and no clear "Thus saith the Lord" to follow.

Responding to such dilemmas, the Seventh-day Adventist Church commissioned a number of task forces to wrestle with some of the most significant issues and to prepare guidelines and position statements that would be faithful to scriptural principles and would offer a clear voice in providing moral help for its members.

The task forces finished their work this past summer and presented four documents to this year's Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee (October 5-12). Committee members and invitees discussed, amended, and then adopted the proposed guidelines and position statements covering abortion, temperance, environment, and care for the dying.

Because these documents are of high interest, we are printing them here before the rest of the official minutes—which we usually carry in late January or February. This printing will serve as the official publication of minutes regarding these actions.

As you read these items, remember that the documents on abortion and care for the dying are *guidelines*, not church policy. They are intended to be pastoral in nature, providing help to individual members as they personally struggle with the issues. The other two documents state the official church position on temperance principles and the environment. Editors.

STATEMENT I

GUIDELINES ON ABORTION

VOTED. To approve Seventh-day Adventist Guidelines on Abortion as follows:

Many contemporary societies have faced conflict over the morality of abortion.¹ Such conflict also has affected large numbers within Christianity who want to accept responsibility for the protection of prenatal human life while also preserving the personal liberty of women. The need for guidelines has become evident, as the church attempts to follow Scripture, and to provide moral guidance while respecting individual conscience. Seventh-day Adventists want to relate to the question of abortion in ways that reveal faith in God as the Creator and Sustainer of all life and in ways that reflect Christian responsibility and freedom. Though honest differences on the question of abortion exist among Seventh-day Adventists, the following represents an attempt to provide guidelines on a number of principles and issues. The guidelines are based on broad bibli-

cal principles that are presented for study at the end of the document.²

1. Prenatal human life is a magnificent gift of God. God's ideal for human beings affirms the sanctity of human life, in God's image, and requires respect for prenatal life. However, decisions about life must be made in the context of a fallen world. Abortion is never an action of little moral consequence. Thus prenatal life must not be thoughtlessly destroyed. Abortion should be performed only for the most serious reasons.

2. Abortion is one of the tragic dilemmas of human fallenness. The church should offer gracious support to those who personally face the decision concerning an abortion. Attitudes of condemnation are inappropriate in those who have accepted the gospel.

Christians are commissioned to become a loving, caring community of faith that assists those in crisis as alternatives are considered.

3. In practical, tangible ways the church as a supportive community should express its commitment to the value of human life. These ways should include: (a) strengthening family relationships, (b) educating both genders concerning Christian principles of human sexuality, (c) emphasizing responsibility of both male and female for family planning, (d) calling both to be responsible for the consequences of behaviors that are inconsistent with Christian principles, (e) creating a safe climate for ongoing discussion of the moral questions associated with abortion, (f) offering support and assistance



to women who choose to complete crisis pregnancies, and (g) encouraging and assisting fathers to participate responsibly in the parenting of their children. The church also should commit itself to assist in alleviating the unfortunate social, economic, and psychological factors that may lead to abortion, and to care redemptively for those suffering the consequences of individual decisions on this issue.

4. The church does not serve as conscience for individuals; however, it should provide moral guidance. Abortions for reasons of birth control, gender selection, or convenience are not condoned by the church. Women at times, however, may face exceptional circumstances that present serious moral or medical dilemmas, such as significant threats to the pregnant woman's life, serious jeopardy to her health, severe congenital defects carefully diagnosed in the fetus, and pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. The final decision whether to terminate the pregnancy or not should be made by the pregnant woman after appropriate consultation. She should be aided in her decision by accurate information, biblical principles, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, these decisions are best made within the context of healthy family relationships.

5. Christians acknowledge as first and foremost their account-

ability to God. They seek balance between the exercise of individual liberty and their accountability to the faith community and the larger society and its laws. They make their choices according to Scripture and the laws of God rather than the norms of society. Therefore, any attempts to coerce women either to remain pregnant or to terminate pregnancy should be rejected as infringements of personal freedom.

6. Church institutions should be provided with guidelines for developing their own institutional policies in harmony with this statement. Persons having a religious or ethical objection to abortion should not be required to participate in the performance of abortions.

7. Church members should be encouraged to participate in the ongoing consideration of their moral responsibilities with regard to abortion in light of the teaching of Scripture.

¹ Abortion, as understood in these guidelines, is defined as any action aimed at the termination of a pregnancy already established. This is distinguished from contraception, which is intended to prevent a pregnancy. The focus of the document is on abortion.

² The fundamental perspective of these guidelines is taken from a broad study of scripture as shown in the following "Principles for a Christian View of Human Life." [Note 2 continues with box.]

Principles for a Christian View of Human Life

Introduction

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3, NIV). In Christ is the promise of eternal life; but since human life is mortal, humans are confronted with difficult issues regarding life and death. The following principles refer to the whole person (body, soul, and spirit), an indivisible whole (Gen. 2:7; 1 Thess. 5:23).

Life: Our valuable gift from God

1. God is the Source, Giver, and Sustainer of all life (Acts 17:25; Job 33:4; Gen. 1:30; 2:7; Ps. 36:9; John 1:3, 4).

2. Human life has unique value because human beings, though fallen, are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 3:2; John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18, 19).

3. God values human life not on the basis of human accomplishments or contributions, but because we are God's creation and the object of His redeeming love (Rom. 5:6, 8; Eph. 2:2-9; 1 Tim. 1:15; Titus 3:4, 5; Matt. 5:43-48; John 1:3; 10:10).

Life: Our response to God's gift

4. Valuable as it is, human life is not the only or ultimate concern. Self-sacrifice in devotion to God and His principles may take precedence over life itself (Rev. 12:11; 1 Cor. 13).

5. God calls for the protection of human life and holds humanity accountable for its destruction (Ex. 20:13; Rev. 21:8; Ex. 23:7; Deut. 24:16; Prov. 6:16, 17; Jer. 7:3-34; Micah 6:7; Gen. 9:5, 6).

6. God is especially concerned for the protection of the weak, the defenseless, and the oppressed (Ps. 82:3, 4; James 1:27; Micah 6:8; Acts 20:35; Prov. 24:11, 12; Luke 1:52-54).

7. Christian love (agape) is the costly dedication of our lives to enhancing the lives of others. Love also respects personal dignity and does not condone the oppression of one person to support the abusive behavior of another (Matt. 16:21; Phil. 2:1-11; 1 John 3:16; 4:8-11; Matt. 22:39; John 18:22, 23; 13:34).

8. The believing community is called to demonstrate Christian love in tangible, practical, and substantive ways. God calls us to restore gently the broken (Gal. 6:1, 2;

1 John 3:17, 18; Matt. 1:23; Phil. 2:1-11; John 8:2-11; Rom. 8:1-14; Matt. 7:1, 2; 12:20; Isa. 40-42; 62:2-4).

Life: Our right and responsibility to decide

9. God gives humanity the freedom of choice, even if it leads to abuse and tragic consequences. His unwillingness to coerce human obedience necessitated the sacrifice of His Son. He requires us to use His gifts in accordance with His will and ultimately will judge their misuse (Deut. 30:19, 20; Gen. 3; 1 Peter 2:24; Rom. 3:5, 6; 6:1, 2; Gal. 5:13).

10. God calls each of us individually to moral decision-making and to search the Scriptures for the biblical principles underlying such choices (John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 1 Peter 2:9; Rom. 7:13-25).

11. Decisions about human life from its beginning to its end are best made within the context of healthy family relationships with the support of the faith community (Ex. 20:12; Eph. 5:6).

12. Human decisions should always be centered in seeking the will of God (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 6:6; Luke 22:42).