

ABORTION: AN ORTHODOX VIEW

By: Mary Pier

Because this is the first issue of the publication, I thought that it would be appropriate to explain the purpose of the column. Every month this column will have a new topic — a topic that affects Orthodox teens. Sometimes we find that we do not know the traditions and beliefs of the Orthodox Church as well as we thought. This column is aimed at enlightening ignorance and confirming what you may already know. It's not meant to be a "holier than thou" thing, but an objective presentation of the Church's beliefs and traditions. I hope you find this month's topic interesting.

Abortion, as we all know, is the killing of an unborn child. Abortion in our country has been legalized since 1973. It is the view of our country and government that it is the choice of the mother to decide the future of her unborn child. The Church's belief is not the same as society's. For Orthodox Christians and many other religions, abortion is considered murder. From the moment of conception, the Church, in keeping with Biblical teaching, holds that human life exists. The church professes that the so-called "blob of tissue" (in the words of the pro-choice lobby) inside the mother is a sacred human life and no one but God has the right to decide the future of that child.

Many pro-choice advocates will argue this point. They say that abortion is the mother's choice because it is her body, her child, her womb, and her life. As Christians this should shock us as being absolutely selfish and wrong. For in fact it is God's body, God's child, God's womb, and God's life. One of the foundations of our Orthodox belief is the teaching that God creates everything. He breathed life into the dust that was Adam, and gave him life. Just as God is the only one who can give us life, He is the only one with the power and right to take it away.

Another argument of those who are for abortion is that during the first weeks of pregnancy the embryo and fetus are not "viable." This basically means that the child cannot live by itself outside the mother. They would argue therefore that it is a part of the woman's body, and not a separate entity of life. The Church, of course, does not adhere to this belief at all. From the moment of conception, a new life had been cre-



Orthodox bishops participate in a pro-life march.

ated. The same is actually true of a newborn child. Without someone to feed and care for the newborn, it would die. We do not accept the belief that just because the child cannot live by itself that it is not

human and alive.

Many people will argue that in rare situations, abortion is the best alternative. The Church takes each of these cases separately and makes judgments for each individual situation.

A common situation that is proposed is: "What if the mother was raped, and the child that she would have is of a man that violated her in the cruelest way? The child would only be a tangible reminder of that horrible time." The Orthodox Church condemns rape but does not view abortion as the best possible solution to the woman's problem. First, the Church never says that the woman must keep the baby. She can carry the baby to term and then put it up for adoption. I am not going to pretend that I know what a woman goes through in childbirth, but my mother has told me that all the pain, the suffering, the labor and discomfort are forgotten when the doctor puts your child in your arms for the first time. If a mother cannot deal with her child because it is a reminder of rape, there is still the option to put the child up for adoption. The Church, in this case, does not accept the idea of abortion as a solution to the problem because there is an alternative.

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Now here comes the tricky part. There are some cases and situations where giving birth may endanger the life of the mother. "What if the mother has a serious illness, such as cervical cancer, which indicates a more than likely chance that treating the mother may endanger the child?"

This is a very serious and sensitive issue. The Orthodox Church tries to take each case separately and fairly. A mother may be afflicted with cervical cancer and be pregnant at the same time. In rare cases it may be necessary for the mother to undergo treatment to save her own life during the pregnancy. If the child inside of the mother's womb dies as a consequence to that procedure, the Orthodox Church does not view it as an abortion. The intent of the treatment was to save the mother's life, not kill the child. The child's death was an unfortunate casualty of trying to save the mother's life. If a woman found herself in a medical situation like the one just mentioned, she should pray and talk with her priest, as well as her husband if she's married, to determine what is best.

There are rare situations where the Church accepts and understands the circumstances that cause the death, or abortion of an unborn child -- like the situation above. It is still viewed as killing, but judgment is, as always, ultimately left to God. But all too often in our society, abortion is diminished to just another form of birth control, where the "problem" of an unexpected child can be eliminated easily. We as Christians should stand firmly behind the Church's belief that it is wrong and inhumane.