

Killer of the Infant



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It should be noted that for purposes of this article, the term “early church” refers to beliefs occurring before the first ecumenical council, the Council of Nicea, held in A.D. 325 in what is today the city of Isnik, Turkey).

For many years the issue of abortion in America has caused me great anguish; and having always wondered what the early church believed about this matter, I began a thorough search of the subject, delving into a course offered as part of our Ph.D. program at Omega Seminary. In a rather large volume entitled *Early Christian Beliefs*, which examines over 700 topics discussed by the early church, I found numerous articles by well known leaders of the apostolic era concerning abortion, child abuse, the sacrifice of a child to a “god,” or the abandonment of a child after its birth. Truly, my quest yielded tremendous insight; and I was somewhat surprised to learn how seriously this issue was viewed by the early church, and what they actually believed and taught concerning the “killer of the infant.”

Excerpts are listed below, with some articles being slightly abbreviated due to space limitations.

Exodus 21:22, 23 is very clear: *“If men fight and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely...[and]if any lasting harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”*

- 1.) **One of the greatest Church Fathers was Tertullian.** He said: “Among surgeons’ tools there is a certain instrument that is designed with a nicely-adjusted flexible frame for first of all opening the uterus and then keeping it open. It also has a circular blade, by which the limbs within the womb are dissected with careful, but unflinching care. Then a copper spike is driven into the unborn to take its life. From this infanticide method, some gave it the name, ‘Killer of the Infant’.”
- 2.) **Tertullian**, in another article, writes: “Are you to dissolve the conception by aid of drugs? I believe it is no more lawful [and right] to hurt a child in the process of birth than to hurt one who is already born.”
- 3.) **Hippolytus** said: “Women who are reputed to be believers [in Christ] have begun to resort to drugs that produce sterility. They also kill the unborn in their womb after conception, because they do not want to have a child by either a slave or by a common fellow out of concern for their family’s [honor] and their excessive wealth. Satan has advanced his schemes. He leads women to commit adultery and murder at the same time!”
- 4.) **Mark Minucius Felix** said: “Some women drink a medical preparation to kill the future life of the fetus in their wombs. So they commit murder. And these teachings come down from the belief and practice of worshipping [pagan] gods.”
- 5.) **Barnabas** said: “You shall not kill the child by obtaining an abortion. Nor again, shall you destroy the child after he/she is born.”
- 6.) The **Didache** (DID uh kee), an early manual of teaching, said: “You shall not murder a child by abortion, nor kill one who has been born.”
- 7.) Letter to **Diognetus** said: “They [that is, Christians] bear their children, but they do not destroy their offspring.”
- 8.) **Athenagoras** said: “We teach that it is wrong to expose an infant [to the elements of nature]. For those who expose them are guilty of child murder.”

9.) *Clement of Alexandria* said: “Although [pagans] keep parrots and curlews, the [pagans] do not adopt the orphan child. Rather, they expose their own children who are born at home. Yet, they take up the young of birds. So they prefer irrational creatures to rational ones.”

10.) *Tertullian* said: “First of all, you [pagans] expose your children [to the elements of nature], so that they may be picked up [from the roadside] by any compassionate passer-by, one to whom they are not known.”

11.) *Lactantius* said: “I cannot find language to even speak of the infants who were burned [and sacrificed] to Saturn, the god.”

12.) [Speaking of Pagans:] *Lactantius* said: “They either strangle their own children, born from themselves, or if they are too “pious or religious” [to strangle them], they expose them [to the elements of nature to die].”

13.) The *Apostolic Constitutions* said: “You shall not kill your child by an abortion, nor kill the baby that is not born [by any other means]. For everything that is shaped and has received a soul from God, if it is killed, it shall be avenged as being unjustly destroyed.”

It is apparent from the foregoing excerpts that the early church fathers considered this a heinous crime against humanity. Likewise, as twentieth century Christians, we also bear witness to this errant disregard for life as a grievous sin. Nevertheless, it should be noted that our churches today are most certainly filled with tormented men and women haunted by such immoral and ungodly acts committed prior to their salvation experience. To these tortured souls we extend the love of Christ and His enduring pardon for sin, as well as the cleansing of memories and guilt accompanying such acts.

Psalms 103:12 “As far as the east is from the west so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”

*Foregoing excerpts were selected
from the following:
A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs
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