Life Issues in the Pew—An Overview of Pertinent Life Issues

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Presentation Outline

- The Culture in Which We Live and Its Impact on Us
- Life Issues Faced Daily
  - Contraception
  - Fertility Treatments
  - Abortion
  - Genetic Testing & Treatment
  - Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research
  - End-of-Life Dilemmas

Elements Shaping Today's Medicine

- Rising cost of health care
- Worship of technology
- Patients not cared for by same doctors or nurses
- Patient autonomy = "I have a right to say what happens to my body"

Cost Pressures

Growth in National Health Expenditures as a Percentage of GDP

Troubling Issues About Cost

- Increasing health care costs cannot continue
- How will Presidents, Governors, National and State Legislators, and Health Care Administrators seek to control costs?
  - Will some treatments no longer be covered by insurance?
  - Will doctors be encouraged to limit treatments for patients who need extended care?
Belief in Evolution

- Why might behavior in schools be influenced by the teaching of evolution?
- Unwed birth rates up 325% since 1963
- Violent crimes up 995% since 1963
- Loss of respect for human life
- If evolution is true, there is no way to tell right from wrong

The Bible Verses Evolution

- If creation is true, man brought death into the world.
- If evolution is true, death brought man into the world.

The Culture of Death

- Since Roe v. Wade in 1973, the US culture has come to view life as expendable
- That culture of death has permeated all American society
- Judge Greer would not have made the same judicial determination about Terri Schiavo 40 years ago

The Culture of Death

- “When God is forgotten...life itself becomes a mere ‘thing,’ which man claims as his exclusive property, completely subject to his control and manipulation” (Evangelium vitae).

Loss of the Biblical Story

Resulting in:

- “The end justifies the means” mentality in public ethics—no act is wrong
- “Live and let live” mentality in personal morality—no one morality applies to all

Life Issue in the Pew #1: Contraception
### Contraceptive Use
- 11.6 million women used the Pill in 2002, which is the leading method among young women.
- Female sterilization is the leading method among women over 35.
- 98% of women of reproductive age have used one or more methods.
- 82% have used the Pill at some time in their lives.
- No statistical significance between Protestants and Catholics in use of the Pill.

### Confusing Definitions
- **Birth Control:** use of any means to prevent birth of children
  - Prevent conception (union of sperm & egg)
  - Abortion (called "abortifacients")
- **Pregnancy:** two definitions
  - Begins when the sperm unites with the egg at conception
  - Begins when the "fertilized egg" implants in the uterus from day 10-14 after conception.

### Forms of Birth Control 1
- **Abortive**
  - Surgical
  - Chemicals injected into the uterus
  - The copper IUD—likely irritates the lining of the uterus, preventing implantation
  - Drugs taken to expel the embryo (RU-486)
- All of these directly end the life of the unborn.

### Forms of Birth Control 2
- **Contraceptives:** attempt to prevent the sperm from fertilizing the egg
- Examples of methods that are clearly contraceptive
  - Abstinence
  - Natural Family Planning
  - Coitus Interruptus (very unreliable)
  - Barrier Methods (condom, diaphragm, the cervical cap, and spermicides)
  - Surgical sterilization (tubal ligation, vasectomy)
  - The medicated IUD (Mirena).

### Forms of Birth Control 3
- Likely are contraceptive, but the true method of action is somewhat in doubt
  - Emergency Contraception
  - "The Pill", Oral Contraceptives
  - Long-lasting hormonal injections (Depo-Provera)
- Christians need to be aware of potential harms.

### Ethical Issues about Contraception
- Is it morally appropriate and/or medically safe to "control birth" with contraceptives?
  - Outside of marriage?
  - Within marriage?
- If it is appropriate to use contraceptives:
  - When can they be used?
  - Which ones may we use?
Life Issue in the Pew #2: Infertility

**Infertility**
- Infertility is defined as the inability to achieve pregnancy after one year of unprotected sex.
- Infertility affects about 5.3 million Americans or 9% of the reproductive age population.
- 15% of women of childbearing age in the US have taken advantage of fertility service.
- Current statistics for each clinic are posted on the web at: www.cdc.gov/ART

**Use of Reproductive Technology**

**Causes of Infertility**

**Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART)**
- Drug Therapy
- Artificial Insemination
- Cloning (perhaps in the future)
- In Vitro Fertilization (IVF)
  - Variations: GIFT, ZIFT, TET
  - Procedures to increase success of IVF: superovulation, embryo freezing, surrogate mothers, assisted hatching, ICSI or “egg drilling”

Credit: Serono Laboratories
How IVF Works
- Stimulate ovaries to produce many eggs
- Retrieve eggs (via surgery)
- Mix eggs with sperm in a dish & incubate
- Transfer 2 to 4 embryos into uterus

Surrogate Motherhood
- A child could potentially have three sets of parents!
- His birth mother and her husband
- His genetic mother and father (and their spouses)
- His adoptive mother and father

Ethical Issues about Fertility
- "My wife and I can't have children. We intend to use IVF to 'make' a baby."
- Use of fertility treatments outside of marriage
- Negative impact upon children
  - The child as a "project"—identity crisis
  - Health concerns
- Negative impact upon marriage
  - Side effects of fertility treatments
  - Cost of fertility treatments

Abortion Numbers
- Abortion Rate per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44 for the United States:
  - 29 in 1980-81 (highest)
  - 19 in 2005 (latest available)
- Ratio of abortions per 100 live births:
  - 30 in 1980-83 (highest)
  - 22 in 2005 (latest available)
- Abortion numbers are decreasing but still 1,206,200 were conducted in 2005 (about 47 million since 1973)
- About 1 in every 5 pregnancies ends up in abortion!

Reasons for Abortion
- Reasons typically given for abortion from September 1, 2005 issue of Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health:
  - A baby would dramatically change my life 74%
  - I can't afford a baby now 73%
  - I don't want to be a single mother 48%
  - Don't want any more children 38%
  - Partner wants me to have abortion 14%
  - Problems affecting health of the child 13%
“Ethical” Reasons for Abortion

- “Exception Cases” for abortion
  - Physical problem with mother’s health 12%
  - Victim of rape 1%
  - For reason of incest <.05%
- The traditionally cited reasons given to allow abortion actually make up only a small percentage of cases!
- Ethical issues about abortion are fairly obvious

Genetic Testing

- Genetic testing can be done to determine if a person has a predisposition to a disease later in life (e.g., cancer, heart disease)
- Prenatal Genetic Testing (PGT) can be done to determine if there is a genetic disorder before birth
- Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) tests for abnormalities in early embryos

Ethical Concerns with Genetic Testing

- Unnecessary worry about the future
- Inability to secure health insurance
- Employability may be compromised
- Abortion of fetuses whose test is positive
  - Hidden eugenics programs?
  - Discrimination against “imperfect people”?
  - Mistakes can be made!
- Question: Is it ethical to test the unborn for genetic diseases that are incurable?

Genetic Therapy

- Two possible forms of genetic therapy
  - Somatic (body) cell therapy
  - Germline cell therapy
- Which type is more problematic?
- Germline therapy is more problematic since any alteration of germ (reproductive) cells will be passed on to future generations
- Somatic cell therapy may be a boon to those suffering from serious genetic diseases (like Huntington’s disease, hemophilia, or ALS)
Our Marvelous Bodies

- Our bodies have 100 trillion cells
- Made up of about 210 different types
- These types come from one cell called the zygote
- A zygote is the cell resulting from the union of the male sperm with the female egg

Why Are They Called Stem Cells?

- Stem cells are named as such because they can develop into different types of cells.

What are “stem” cells?

- **Adult (also called “non-embryonic”)**
  - Are in the bodies of adults and children
  - Bone marrow
  - Umbilical cords of newly born babies
  - Amniotic fluid around babies
- **Embryonic (come from embryos)**
  - Human embryos from fertility clinics
  - Aborted fetuses
  - Cloned embryos
The Promise of Stem Cells

Arguments from Supporters of Unrestricted Stem Cell Research

- An early embryo (“pre-embryo”) does not have the rights of a person
- Technological imperative—no rational person ought to slow scientific progress
- The ends justify the means—the benefits of future treatments far outweigh the loss of embryonic life
- We need to do research on both embryonic and stem cells

The Real Reasons?

- Money
- Fame

Practical Arguments Against Embryonic Stem Cell Research

- Tissue Rejection: stem cells derived from embryos are not our tissue
- Mutations: embryonic stem cell lines are unstable
- Cancer-causing potential: serious cancers seen in lab animals treated with embryonic stem cells

Research Fraud: Wang Woo-Suk

- Disgraced because of ethics violations
- Fabricated data
- Paid women $1,447 for eggs
- Received eggs from his own female staff members
Lack of Results

- Most dramatic breakthroughs have been with adult stem cells—over 75 treatments now in use
- Guess how many human diseases are being treated by embryonic stem cells?
- Experts say that it could be 20 years before we see treatments in use from embryonic stem cells

Adult Stem Cells: A Way Around the Problem

- Umbilical cord blood was coaxed into making lung cells and insulin-producing cells
- Stem cells found in amniotic fluid were shown to be as flexible as embryonic stem cells
- The creator of Dolly the Sheep abandoned cloning research in favor of “direct programming,” a technique that makes stem cells without destruction of human embryos.

Adult Stem Cell Breakthroughs

- Stem cells in baby’s teeth used to repair stroke damage
- Possibility of making new teeth & treating baldness!

The Core Ethical Issue: “The Tower of Babel” Syndrome

Issues Concerning Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research

- People don’t know the scientific and ethical differences between adult and embryonic stem cells
- People don’t know about the successes achieved with adult stem cells and lack of success with embryonic stem cells
- People don’t know that Democrats and Republicans, and Christians and non-Christians, oppose embryonic stem cell research

Life Issue in the Pew #6: End-of-life Dilemmas
Most Commonly Asked Questions about Care at Life’s End

**Issues Concerning End of Life**
- What laws govern end-of-life care?
- What is a Do-Not-Resuscitate Order and can we agree to that?
- When may we withhold or withdraw treatments?
- What happens when we can no longer make medical decisions on our own?
- What is an Advance Directive, and how should we word that?

**A Christian Approach to Withholding or Withdrawing Treatments (Gilbert Meilaender)**
- If the disease process is terminal and death is immanent (within a few days)
- If the treatments are useless (futile)
- If the burdens of treatment far outweigh the benefits they might hold for the patient
- Ask: "will the treatment benefit the life this patient has" not "is his/her life worth living" (refuse treatments not life)

**Three Christian Principles for End-of-Life Care**
- Christian Principle 1: “Always to Care”
- Christian Principle 2: “Never to Kill”
- Christian Principle 3: “Not to Prolong Dying”

**Conclusion: The Gospel and Christian Ethical Decision Making**
- Check out the facts to the best of our ability, discover truths, and reject untruths (people need information)
- Bring pertinent Biblical and Confessional truths to bear on the situation (involvement of the Pastor)
- Carry out the best God-pleasing option as guided by the Holy Spirit and informed by God’s Word (the Great Commission)
- Trusting that God will forgive us if we repent of a decision made incorrectly (a reliance on the cross of Christ)
  - From Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Ethics