

International Positional Statement

Abortion

1. Statement of the Issue

Abortion is defined as an operation or other procedure to terminate a pregnancy before the foetus is viable. This definition describes an 'induced or elective abortion' and is the issue under consideration in this positional statement. This issue should not be confused with 'spontaneous abortion' or 'miscarriage' when a pregnancy ends due to 'natural' causes.

Every year 210 million women worldwide discover they are pregnant. Of these pregnancies 80 million will not reach full term. Of these, 42 million are terminated by induced abortion, of which 20 million are illegal. ¹

2. Statement of Position

The Salvation Army believes all people are created in the image of God and therefore have unique and intrinsic value. Human life is sacred and all people should be treated with dignity and respect. The Salvation Army accepts the moment of fertilisation as the start of human life. We believe that society has a responsibility to care for others, and especially to protect and promote the welfare of vulnerable people, including unborn children.

The Salvation Army believes that life is a gift from God and we are answerable to God for the taking of life. As such, The Salvation Army is concerned about the growing ready acceptance of abortion, which reflects insufficient concern for vulnerable persons including the unborn. We do not believe that genetic abnormalities that are identified in an unborn child who is likely to live longer than a brief period after birth are sufficient to warrant a termination of pregnancy.

The Salvation Army recognizes tragic and perplexing circumstances that require difficult decisions regarding a pregnancy. Decisions should be made only after prayerful and thoughtful consideration, acknowledging the tremendous pressures that occur during an unexpected pregnancy. There is a responsibility on all involved to give the parents of the unborn child, particularly the woman, appropriate pastoral, medical and other counsel. The Salvation Army believes that termination can occur only when

- Carrying the pregnancy further seriously threatens the life of the mother; or
- Reliable diagnostic procedures have identified a foetal abnormality considered incompatible with survival for more than a very brief post natal period.

In addition, rape and incest are brutal acts of dominance violating women physically and emotionally. This situation represents a special case for the consideration of termination as the violation may be compounded by the continuation of the pregnancy.

The Salvation Army affirms and supports professional people engaged in the care of pregnant women who feel on religious, moral or ethical grounds, that they cannot be involved in any way with the procuring or undertaking of an abortion.

3. Principles, Facts and Information

Abortion is not a new social phenomenon:

Induced abortion – the deliberate action of terminating a pregnancy – is not a new procedure. It has been recorded in history including ancient Chinese and Egyptian societies and Roman and Greek civilisations. The patterns of abortion employed around the world and throughout the ages are remarkably similar. When women have been faced with unwanted pregnancies some have turned to abortion – regardless of religious or legal sanction and often at considerable risk.

Women seek abortions for complex reasons

Abortion should not be seen as a quick response to an inconvenient or unplanned pregnancy. The many and complex reasons women seek abortion cannot simply be dismissed as frivolous or unconsidered. The individual context demonstrates many of the difficulties that women face globally in all walks of life. Some reasons for unplanned pregnancies are more predominant in context of poverty, war or commonly occurring violence against women. Many of the reasons that women do not, or are unable to, protect themselves against unplanned pregnancy are influenced by cultural, social or economic factors.

Rape as a weapon of war

Rape, forced prostitution, and other forms of sexual violence occur in time of war not only as the choice of individual soldiers but also as a military tactic to humiliate and demoralize the enemy. The documented incidents number in the multiple thousands. Those who become pregnant as a result bear the burden of being continuing reminders of the military impotence of their whole community.

4. Biblical and Theological Principles

A number of biblical and theological principles underpin The Salvation Army's position on abortion.

The sanctity of life

The Salvation Army believes in the sanctity of human life. Humankind was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). All people – without exception – are of value to him, holding a special place in his creation (Psalm 8:5), irrespective of age, gender, race, religion, health or social status, or their potential for achievement. The Bible makes it clear that human life is sacred: it is God who gives life (Acts 17:25) and God who decides when it ends (Psalm 104:29). In particular the scriptural principle of the right to life of innocent human beings is firmly established (Isaiah 59:7, Jeremiah 22:3).

The start of human life and personhood

God's concern for humanity includes life in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16, Jeremiah 1:5). This is reflected in Old Testament law which imposes penalties upon those who cause the loss of foetal life (Exodus 21:22-23). The visit of Mary to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45) seems to demonstrate the continuity of life from the foetal stage. Although not specifically mentioning abortion, these texts imply that any decision deliberately to end an unborn life is a violation of its ongoing sanctity and is therefore a serious issue requiring justification to God.

Free will

Part of God's gift of life to humanity is our free will and the ability to make decisions (Proverbs 1:29; Isaiah 7:15-16). Some people would argue that, despite the notion of sanctity of life, the mother has the right to choose whether or not she wishes to continue with a pregnancy and that her right to do so supersedes the right of the unborn child to life. This is not consistent with the Christian belief in a God who cares for and defends the weak and the marginalised (Leviticus 19:14, 33-34) and who is a God of justice (Psalms 140:12, 146:7-9). The notion of human rights must be accompanied by that of human responsibility. In the case of abortion, the Christian's responsibility to defend those at risk is not to be set aside.

5. Practical Responses

The Salvation Army holds to the Christian ideals of chastity before marriage and fidelity within the marriage relationship, and encourages everyone to live consistently with these ideals.

A serious commitment to the protection and care of the unborn calls us to a commitment to the prevention of unwanted pregnancy through means such as access to reliable birth control, safety in relationships, and societal respect of women.

The Salvation Army takes seriously the needs, rights and responsibilities of parents and unborn children when considering the matter of abortion. When an unwanted pregnancy occurs, The Salvation Army counsels that the parents receive caring support for their emotional, physical, social and spiritual needs, and that the unborn child be carried to term.

We acknowledge that legal provisions for women to terminate pregnancies exist in some countries. Alternatives to termination should always be fully explored when counselling the pregnant woman and those supporting her and her unborn child. The Salvation Army seeks to support women who have had an abortion, with care and respect in a loving and compassionate manner without discrimination. The Salvation Army will also show love, compassion and fellowship to all people affected. The Salvation Army recognizes that the

decision to terminate a pregnancy carries emotional and physical implications for many years, often damaging relationships and personal self-worth.

Unwanted pregnancies are sometimes the result of poor social conditions, poverty and war. The Salvation Army will advocate for a society that promotes wholeness, freedom, quality of life and the development of the potential of all persons.

Approved by the General—November 2010

The views expressed in this international positional statement constitute the official position of The Salvation Army on the issue addressed, and they may not be modified or adapted in any way without the express written permission of International Headquarters.

Sources:

Brown, H. Abortion round the world. *British Medical Journal*. 335(7628) (2007):1018-9.;

Sedgh, G, S Henshaw, S Singh, E Åhman, and IH Shah. Induced abortion: estimated rates and trends worldwide. *Lancet* 370 (2007): 1338–45.

See the Guttmacher Institute for regularly updated data: www.guttmacher.org

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