

Dr. C. Everett Koop Speech at the White House

KOOP: Thank you very much. You're embarrassing me.

Ladies and gentlemen, there will be almost 4,500 abortions performed in this country today. We're dealing with a problem of extraordinary magnitude. We deal with it today because of a Supreme Court decision that was made in 1973, when the Supreme Court declared the unborn baby to be a non-person and removed, therefore, from the unborn child all the protection hitherto afforded that child by the Constitution.

The Court case that goes under the name of Roe vs. Wade was the turning point. On that occasion the Justices of the Supreme Court said we do not know when life begins. Then two years later in a case known as Danforth, the Justices said it in a little different way. They said on the basis of present knowledge, we do not know when life begins. And then in 1983 in a series of cases brought before the Supreme Court they had a new opportunity to pull back from their hard-nosed position because they could have and should have said we now do know when life begins because we have all the evidence of the test tube baby. But instead of that they reaffirmed their position and we have gotten exactly what we had in 1973.

On the first year of this President's Administration was the time when it might have been possible to turn this around with some type of human life legislation, amendment or otherwise, but we lost our chance in 1981. The pro-life forces had differing opinions about the direction in which we should go and, I think it's not unfair to say, they were somewhat in disarray. So here's where we are.

I would like to make it clear to this group that I believe what the Scriptures say when they say that man was created in the image of God, and I think that if you start in Genesis and go right on through the Bible you will find this reiterated time and time again. You'll recall that in the altercation between Cain and Abel, where Abel was killed, God said if there would be any retaliation he would punish seven-fold. When after the flood God made the covenant with Noah, he said that if by man man's blood is shed by man shall that man's blood be shed. One of the Ten Commandments said "Thou shalt not kill," and that had nothing to do with war or man's slaughter, it had to do with premeditated murder. Jeremiah speaks of having been commissioned by God to be a prophet while he was still in the womb and on several occasions Isaiah speaks about the unborn baby as though he was very much a person. So without going into further references by chapter and verse let me just summarize it by saying that in my opinion the Bible screams from cover to cover that life is precious to God.

Now abortion is just one of many things we are concerned about in reference to life issues. I have repeatedly called attention to the fact that there is sort of a "domino effect" out there in reference to these life issues. The first domino that fell was the domino of abortion and it fell with a very loud thud. Everybody knows about it and it has separated our people as no other issue has since the days of slavery. The second domino to fall was infanticide. It fell silently because infanticide is homicide, homicide is punishable by law and people therefore do not advertise that they are committing homicide. In

addition, the protective facade of hospitals has kept infanticide well within the confines of small groups consisting of parents, a doctor, a nurse and perhaps a social worker. The third domino is falling and that is euthanasia. Infanticide is euthanasia in an age group but whether or not that third domino falls all the way will depend in days to come very much upon the efforts of people like you. So any attention that you pay to abortion, remember, will have much wider effect on these pro-life issues. It is certainly fundamental to the moral concepts involved in life issues -- you could say it is the lynchpin which holds them together. If we could turn around Roe vs. Wade then life would once again have value and the worth of every human being would be reestablished. And in similar fashion if we minister to those who are tied up in the abortion dilemma we will do that by providing alternatives to them. And if we can provide alternatives to abortion, we can also do the same thing for infanticide and euthanasia. I think the chance that the President has of appointing judges to the Supreme Court during his administration is the only hope that we have in turning things around in the foreseeable future.

When I made the films and wrote the book Whatever Happened to the Human Race with Francis Shaefer and we took these films on seminars of two days each to 20 cities in America, we really were not quite prepared for the cold response that we got from the evangelical churches. They were cold to us just because we mentioned the social issues of abortion, infanticide and euthanasia and as a result I was in the habit of saying, in my opening lecture at those seminars, that so many conservative Christians know that their account is settled with God and that their citizenship is in heaven that they are more interested in the hereafter than they are in the here and now. And I think that because of the social gospel implications and the generation that preceded this one that when one talks about a social issue there are many conservative Christians that confuse the two and get very concerned that we are retreating to a social gospel of this century. As time went on in those seminars and I got to know our audiences better I did frequently say on the occasion of answering a question or two, that if indeed the conservative Christian Church had acted in days gone by in a more loving, compassionate manner to women who were pregnant and did not wish to be, we might have avoided at least part of the social issue which we are discussing today. So remember it is not enough just to be against abortion of these other problems; you have to have something to offer instead. There really is but one alternative to abortion and that is to have the baby. But after that has happened there are several options that are open to us.

I would remind you that before we had government programs, before we entitled the people of this country to many, many benefits that it was organized religion that always saw to the care of the sick, the disadvantaged, the poor, the underprivileged and so on. I think that organized religion must retrieve that role which served so well in days gone by. You people can do that far better where you are than we can from here in Washington. And you can do it in a way that witnesses to Christian love. You may think that you are doing it corporately but you are really acting individually and that is in line with what it should be, because, whether you're talking about society in general or about churches in particular, we do have the admonition that we are indeed our brother's keeper and we are not going to be able to legislate things like this until we see the change in individual hearts of individual people.

Now, what might you do individually, or, with your church do collectively, in reference to these alternatives. I think the first thing that's needed is attitudinal change. You can provide non-judgmental support, out of religious compassion, to a girl or a woman who is pregnant and would rather not be. Frequently you can provide that support to her family and to the father of that unborn child. (Almost everybody neglects the father; please don't forget him, he is extraordinarily important in this triangle.) You can be also the agent of religious reconciliation in a family that is shattered by pregnancy -- usually of an unmarried girl and, very commonly this days, of a teenager. You can begin to have positive input into the mental and physical health of the mother-to-be and her unborn child. The interesting thing that I see happening is that our critics, who say that all we are is against abortion, have had their criticism blunted by the rise throughout this country of crisis pregnancy counseling services that are doing just the thing we are talking about here today. As I say these things to you I have a sensation of deja vu because I said them so many times 25 years ago. We were, in those days, serving largely a Christian clientele. In the late 1950's abortion was not only illegal -- it wasn't even talked about. An abortionist was about the slimmest thing that anybody could refer to in the medical profession. I used to present the need of unmarried pregnant women to evangelical churches, usually in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and almost always in Mennonite churches. We provided the kind of crisis pregnancy services that you'll be hearing more about today. I raise it at this time only to tell you that having had that experience 25 years ago and having seen it continue until Roe vs. Wade made it almost impossible to go on because there were very few pregnant women seeking our counsel. The range of services known as alternatives work and they work beautifully. We used to arrange for hospitalization of the pregnant woman. Her doctor was the best obstetrical available. We saw that during the time she lived in one of those Mennonite families she had counseling, that she had the proper legal advice -- because most were planning adoption -- and the results were gratifying. The problem pregnancy was solved, babies found their way to childless homes, and post-partum girls went back to further their education or to resume their jobs. But, most of all, families that had essentially evicted a daughter were very frequently reconciled to her when they saw, by contrast, the love and concern of total strangers toward their daughter.

Now to get back to what you can do. You can provide a haven for a girl in a good home, when she would rather not live in her home or has been asked to leave by her family. You can make arrangements with obstetricians and other medical personnel to aid you in providing the very best of care for the unborn child and the mother. You can sort out the financial cost, you can give advice on insurance coverage, you can be an advocate for your patient with the various public and private agencies that might be helpful to her and to her child in the future and you can present, and I would stress this most earnestly, you can present the advantages of adoption over any of the other options that exist to an unmarried woman. All the counseling in the world, all the advice, all of the good intentions will not accomplish a thing without the provision of this loving home and the skillful management of the other things that I have just mentioned for certain girls who need someone not just to suggest options but to really take over.

Let me give you an example from my former incarnation as a surgeon. If one of my residents asked me what medical school he or she ought to consider for additional training, I could say here's a list of all the options as far as medical schools are concerned, they're all pretty good, good luck, go out and find one. But that's not the way to do it. I would say there are a number of places that you could seek further training but having watched you and knowing your personality, knowing what I think are your attributes and your potential, there are only three places I think you ought to apply to and this particular one is the one I'd go for first because it's the best. In counseling a woman who is pregnant and who would rather not be about her options, I would also say: this particular one is the one you should go for first because it's the best solution, and that is adoption. Even in this sexually permissive society it is not optimal to raise a child as a single, unmarried parent. Girls who do that are looked upon by others in our society as being promiscuous -- easy marks -- and it is very common for single women who raise a child in this fashion to have another child eventually by the same arrangement. My son is a minister in the Presbyterian Church and he and his wife, who then had two children, took into their home a pregnant young lady because her father had kicked her out because she refused to have an abortion. She has since married a young man she met in that church who knew all about it. And the family -- my family that took her into their home -- perhaps learned the most. My grandchildren learned what that kind of love can produce for her and for all concerned. But perhaps most of all the community saw what happened, they understood what happened and surprisingly enough a tremendous number of people in my son's church got hold of him and said if your father ever has another pregnant girl be sure you come to us first.

Now there are two aspects of this problem nationwide. Adoption is not stressed as much as it should be and I would remind you that there is a profound difference in the attitude toward adoption in this country than there was even ten years ago. We also find that the racial barriers to adoption have dropped largely in the past ten years. The most impressive thing to me, having spent my life as I have with handicapped children, is to realize how rapidly you can put a child up for adoption as handicapped and have the child adopted almost immediately. We do have adoption problems in this country but they are for older children. Everybody wants a baby. I believe there is probably no such thing in this country any longer as an unadoptable new born baby and I'll make that clear to you in just a moment.

I'd like to return just for a minute to scripture, if I might, and go to the book of James where on the first chapter he says "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress." Now you say what's that got to do with abortion. Just this: the unmarried pregnant girl is worse off than a widow because of many factors, among which is the fact that she lacks certain societal perks that the widow has and that are withheld from someone who is unmarried and has a pregnancy or a delivery. Some translations of that version of James read -- instead of the way I read it orphans and widows -- the fatherless and widows. If ever anyone is fatherless, believe me it is the unborn child of an unmarried girl. You can not only save a baby and provide a loving solution for a pregnant woman but you can provide a blessing for a childless couple whose emotional state and anxiety is frequently far worse than that of the unmarried pregnant woman you're trying to help.

Thank you very much.