

A Reformed-ethical Perspective on Abortion

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Hierdie artikel bied 'n gereformeerd-etiese perspektief op aborsie. Eerstens word 'n kort oorsig van die gereformeerde-etiekdebat oor aborsie in Suid-Afrika aangebied. Uit hierdie debat sal dit blyk dat aborsie op aanvraag geensins aanvaar word nie. Die nuwe Suid-Afrikaanse wetgewing oor die beëindiging van swangerskap word daarom nie ondersteun nie. Die debat erken wel die bepalings/ kriteria waar daar geen alternatief anders as aborsie beskikbaar is nie. Hierdie debat word binne 'n gereformeerd-etiese perspektief geplaas waar die fundamentele beginsels van sola Scriptura, sola fidei, sola gratia en sola Christo erken word as 'n sine qua non en daarom 'n vertrekpunt vir 'n gereformeerd-etiese perspektief. Die perspektief wat in hierdie artikel aangebied word beklemtoon die rol wat 'n kompromis, groei-etiek en verantwoordelikheid kan speel in die hantering van aborsie. Ten slotte word enkele kriteria geformuleer oor hoe om met aborsie vanuit 'n gereformeerd-etiese perspektief te handel.

1. Conceptualisation

Abortion is the intentional termination of pregnancy through human intervention. Abortion on demand is known as *abortus provocatus*. This differs from spontaneous abortion known as a miscarriage. Abortion for medical reasons is referred to as *abortus medicinalis* (see Du Toit, 1978:14). Essential in the current abortion practice is abortion on demand and the right of the woman to decide on the termination of pregnancy (Act 92 of 1996 - *Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act*). This coincides with legislation such as the famous landmark decision of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) (White, 2003:100-101).

2. A brief overview of the South African Reformed perspective on abortion

The South African ethical debate on abortion has experienced many changes during the past three decades. In 1973 the Dutch Reformed Church appointed a Commission to formulate guidelines (indications) for when abortion would be ethically acceptable. This was followed up with D.A. du Toit's (professor in ethics at the Theology Faculty at Stellenbosch University) book "Die Christen en aborsie" (1978) ("The Christian and abortion"). For many years this book was regarded as the standard South African reformed ethics reference book on abortion. In Du Toit's study, abortion on demand was rejected on the basis of Christian values. Two fundamental perspectives directed the decision. *Firstly*, the sixth commandment forbids murder and *secondly* the Christian anthropological view is that life begins with conception. Based on these perspectives the conclusion was that since life begins with conception, unborn life should be protected as any other human life. If the termination of life (unqualified) is murder, then abortion is also murder. These perspectives were influenced by, amongst other things, the view on the authority of Scripture, the application of the Ten Commandments to (all) ethical problems and the unconditional belief that life begins with conception. The abortion legislation promulgated in 1975 (Abortion and Sterilisation Act, Act 2 of 1975) was supportive of a Christian-driven ethic. J.A. Heyns' trilogy on theological ethics (*Teologiese Eتيك 1-3*), J.H. Smit's *Eتos en eتيك* (1985) and L. Uys and J.H. Smit's *Clinical Ethics* (1985) also rejected abortion on demand. In these books the theological orientation and ethical perspectives similar to those of Du Toit were followed.

The author presented the same views in his monograph on abortion, *Aborsie: Geboortebeperking of Moord?* (1987) ("Abortion: Birth control or murder?"). In addition to the abortion debate was the question of whether abortion is a form of contraception or whether it is cold-blooded murder? Abortion on demand was labelled as murder. Abortion for reasons such as an unwanted pregnancy was rejected as birth control and also labelled as murder.

A fair conclusion on the debate during the 1970's and 1980's would be to say that abortion was characterised as unethical, against God's will and command and in conflict with a Christian-ethical view on life. Conception was seen as the beginning of human life. Unborn human life warranted the same ethical respect and protection as human life itself. Some indications were formulated for the ethical justification of abortion in very special cases (such as juridical, medical and psychological cases).

During the latter part of the 1980's and up to the present, however, a more critical debate has emerged. In a *festschrift* contribution to W.D. Jonker, D.A. du Toit (1989) debated the beginning of life in the context of the emerging bio-ethics. This emergence has been precipitated by the phenomenal developments in medicine and technology. Du Toit indicates that conception is no longer regarded as the only view representing the beginning of life. He refers, amongst other things, to the “magical” point which represents the question of when life begins. He also refers to the so-called visible foetus. In these diverging views medical developments such as nidation, segmentation and the primitive neural groove are all presented as the (only?) beginning of human life.

New studies debate abortion in the context of embryo research, feminism and population development. Following on these new dimensions added to the debate on abortion, new legislation and the debate on the authority of Scripture (as basis for ethics) also contributed towards the taking of a new look at abortion. Important issues were opened during this debate.

Research on embryos

Research on embryos is also on the agenda (see Smit, 1991b). Van Niekerk (2006:209) adds his voice to this debate, stating that he cannot understand why people are upset when an embryo is used in research to enhance human life. He says that immediately after conception one cannot even tell if this will be a single person only – chances are that it may be twins (cell division must still take place). If one cannot determine this for certain, how can one be against research on embryos to improve life? For him the emphasis is on *life*. He says that life – including unborn life – is precious in God's eye. Research can improve life (Van Niekerk, 2006:207). Van Niekerk (2006:209-211) places a high value on human life and the respect thereof. This can also be extended to unborn life, but for him unborn life is not that absolute. Abortion is ethically permissible for psychological or health reasons or in cases such as rape. The same argument applies for research on embryos. The criteria are informed consent and decision-making within an approved research programme at a recognised institution. Ethical approval by an ethical committee is essential.

Although this perspective is highly appreciated, life is not something that can be loosened from man. Life is not something that we can willingly let go of – as if it were an object that can be given away. It is for this reason that life itself cannot be the norm to promote research on embryos or not.

Feminism

Another dimension in the abortion debate is *feminism*. Du Toit (2004:823) reminds the reader of the role of subjectivity and of how a feminist perspective can make one more sensitive towards issues such as abortion. Consider the following example: is the woman's body simply there as an instrument to keep the foetus alive (does she have a body?) or is she taking care of herself which will also be to the benefit of the foetus (is she her body)? The first question partly involves the woman in her pregnancy, and the second question confirms the woman's involvement in her pregnancy. Although of a theoretical nature, this kind of perspective reminds us that womanhood and what happens to the body (for example abortion) cannot be separated.

Unfortunately abortion is very often seen as only an intergrowth to the body (see Burggraave, 2000:171). Pregnancy cannot be loosened from the woman since it is part of the creation order that women have the ability to carry unborn life.

Socio-economic challenges

Deist (1991) argues that the church should reconsider its view on abortion in the context of socio-economic problems experienced due to the population explosion and its accompanying poverty. Smit (1991a) reacts to this emphasising that socio-economic reasons can never constitute the norm for abortion. It would be unrealistic to think that abortion can address a population explosion that cannot be controlled by man.

Alongside the matter of the population explosion, is the issue of quality of life. The question is posed as to whether abortion is really so bad when one looks at the increase in the number of street children, youth crime, children who become parents, etc. (see Goosen & Louw 2000:265). Here, too, abortion is the shelving of the problem rather than the solution to the problem. To resolve the problem of abortion, the reasons for abortion should be addressed, rather than using abortion to solve the problem. In the long run it will be no solution at all.

New legislation

The debate is further problematised with the 1996 legislation in the *Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act* (Act 92 of 1996). Whereas abortion was a criminal offence according to the 1975 act, it was decriminalised in terms of the 1996 act. The 1996 act was amended in 2004 (Act 38 of 2004, *Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Amendment Act*) to open access to

abortion clinics and abortion procedures. In the 1996 legislation the protection of unborn life is subjected to the individual choice of the mother. One could refer to this situation as a democratising of morals. Whereas Christian ethics advocates the protection of unborn life, the latest legislation on abortion promotes individual choice as norm for the situation. What is also alarming is that the current abortion legislation does not promote responsibility in ethical decisions, the importance of relatives in decision-making or the protection of unborn life. In two to three decades the focus has shifted from no abortion on demand to abortion on demand.

The ethical debate following on this new legislation has reaffirmed the ethical view of the past on abortion. It has also opened up a new concern: the absolute freedom of the woman to take a decision on the termination of the pregnancy without the consent of the father is ethically questioned.

Authority of Scripture

A further issue has been introduced into the abortion debate. In the past Christian ethics was based on the authority of the Scriptures. Now, however, not all Christian ethicists share the same views on the authority of the Scriptures. People think and do differently from what they thought and did in the past. This does not mean that the Bible cannot be the foundation for a social ethical discourse or framework. Although the authority of the Bible is called into question, this does not mean that for Christians the authority of the Bible no longer exists (see De Villiers, 2004). Indicative of the new theological developments is De Villiers's remark that people are still thinking in too linear a fashion on a very complex problem.

Reformed indications for abortion

Based on these overviews, it is evident that a reformed ethical perspective does not support abortion on demand, that cases for abortion such as socio-economic development challenges are rejected and that developments within post-modernity impact on issues such as the authority of Scripture in ethical debates. Another observation in the abortion debate is that it is presented as a solution to another ethically problematic situation (unwanted pregnancy, for example): it is the situation (the unwanted pregnancy) that should have been addressed (for example through taking on a responsible sexual life) in the first place.

3. Objective of the article

The objective of this article is to formulate a reformed ethical viewpoint on abortion against the background of the revised legislation (Act 92 of

1996) and new debates in ethics. This study will be primarily a literature study. From the literature a theoretical framework will be developed on the basis of a conceptual framework. The aim is to promote the body of knowledge on abortion from a paradigm-specific approach (Kumar 2005: 30-37). Such a framework is necessitated by the question: *What kind of ethics should be followed by the church?* Following on the question, is the debate regarding whether a duty ethic (deontology) or responsibility ethic should be followed. A duty ethic implies prescription whilst a responsibility ethic is based on people's maturity and freedom of choice. It is also questionable whether authoritarian pronouncements are supportive of pastoral guidance (Goosen & Louw, 2000: 262/263).

4. The contours of Reformed ethics

4.1 Conceptualising Reformed ethics

To define reformed ethics a conceptual understanding of "reformed" and "ethics" is needed. In presenting a conceptual understanding the point of departure is that reformed is the paradigm influencing the science (read ethics). This approach implies that paradigmatic presuppositions are influencing our scientific practice (Strauss, 2002; Strauss, 2006).

This article opts for a *reformed* approach to ethics. Reformed in this context means to adhere to and confess the Biblical values of Christ only (*sola Christo*), faith only (*sola fide*), grace only (*sola gratia*) and the Bible only (*sola Scriptura*). Salvation from sins is only possible through Christ on the basis on faith which is given to man by grace only. Within the context of the reformed tradition the authority of the Word holds a strong position. Whoever accepts the authority of the Bible acknowledges God's authority over the lives of people and will follow the Biblical principles for people's lives. These principles shouldn't be understood as rationalistic conceptual constructions but as an expression of the core of Christian life¹ (*coram Deo*). This truth clashes with the nihilistic postmodernism which cannot accept formulated confessions. This comment represents the paradigm opted for. To be reformed is therefore more than a confession: it is a way of thinking according to which man orientates his life. This observation represents the influence of paradigms on science.

1 Burger's (2005) vocational theology outlines the integration of the Christian vocation into the everyday life. The argument is that through work man is reacting to God's command that people should live a responsible life (also see Lategan, 2006).

Reformed ethics means that the principle and values of the Reformation will impact on the ethical analysis, interpretation and understanding of a specific situation. *Reformed ethics* can be outlined as the study of what Reformation-driven values and norms apply to a particular situation. Reformed ethics is the paradigmatic-specific approach to formulating values and norms for a situation. Reformed ethics will build, amongst other things, on the confession that God is the Creator of all life, the authority of Scripture and that man should in all his acts be responsible to God, etc. The next paragraph will inform these statements.

4.2 The authority of Scripture

The authority of Scripture is a much-debated issue ranging from total acceptance of Scripture's authority to the limitation of the Bible to a narrative which sets an example for good behaviour only, to mythological speculation [see Doubell and Strauss (2001) for a discussion of a model for Scripture]. Reformed ethics cannot go without Scripture. An ethic subscribing to fundamental Biblical perspectives such as that God is the Creator of all life, God demands the protection of human life (Exodus 20:13), the central love command (Matthews 22:36-40), the holiness of marriage (Exodus 20:14), freedom of choice subjected to God's will, etc. is essential. These perspectives, and many others, go beyond what is legally permitted or not. If the law allows abortion on demand then one's ethical conviction will still prohibit one from supporting this law. Although abortion (up to the second trimester) can be safely executed, one will still respect human life. A woman can decide on *her own* whether to have an abortion or not, but the conviction of a Christian marriage will remind one that in the creation of new life, man *and* woman are involved. In addition, a Biblical perspective on marriage will point out that the creation of new life is meant *for* the marriage and not *outside* the marriage. These and many other examples cite that one's subscription to the authority of the Bible has an impact on one's view on abortion and its related issues such as the beginning of life, the holiness of life and the protection thereof.

The fact that someone subscribes to the authority of Scripture does not mean that he/ she is blind to scientific developments. The author refers specifically to the scientific debate on the beginning of life (see next paragraph). Science reminds us about the complexity of life and its development but it cannot prove that *human life* doesn't begin in the moment of conception. That there are developmental stages of life (from a zygote, to a foetus to an embryo) is a scientific fact. That life begins at the moment of conception may be a religious belief. These two views should not be conflicting viewpoints in either religion

or science. Van Niekerk (2006:184) rightly remarks that *religious knowledge* and *scientific knowledge* are both legitimate sources of knowledge. The two kinds of knowledge shouldn't be confused. If we do not respect both kinds of knowledge then religion is reduced to superstition and science to ideology.

4.3 The Biblical view on life

A Biblical view on life builds on the *creation* and *protection* thereof. A Biblical view subscribes to the confession that God is the Creator of all human life and that human life starts at the moment of conception. A Biblical view of life is not ignorant of various scientific views on the development of human life such as implantation, primitive strip, brain function or the ability to observe foetal movement, vitality, etc. It does, however, hold on to conception as the beginning of life since all the above-mentioned development criteria are not proof enough that before these stages there cannot be reference to human life (see Du Toit, 1989). In addition, the creation of man is described in the Bible as an act of love by God. The emphasis is on God who creates and not on the different stages of development of unborn life. This is evident from Genesis 1:26 which states that man is created in the image of God (*imago Deo*). Von Rad (1972:59-60) says that this established a special relationship between God and man. Man is "summoned to maintain and enforce God's claim to dominion over the earth."

The protection of human life is linked to the sixth commandment (Exodus 20:13). The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*-text of Exodus 20:13 uses the word 'rasah' which refers to killing of set purpose. The intention of the commandment is to forbid killing as murder, and not punishment for killing another person. This commandment also forbids any consideration about killing somebody (*The Heidelberg Catechisms*, Sunday 40, De Klerk, 1993:134-137). Any unwarranted reason for killing a human being or thoughts about killing somebody are condemned by this commandment (Douma, 1986:163-167). The positive side of this commandment is the assignment that the life of man as the image of God should be protected (Velema, 1983:26; Douma, 1986:133-146 Heyns, 1982:329-331).

Following on this a Biblical view of life demands the following:

- The preservation of life.
- Respect for man as a unique creature.
- Recognition of the uniqueness of man, his personal values, faith and traditions.
- Preservation of dignity.
- Protection and promotion of the welfare of the individual.

The Biblical view can be framed within the following values for human life which are also applicable to unborn life. These values are:

- the preservation of life;
- the recognition of the uniqueness of people and their personal values, faith and traditions;
- the preservation of dignity and the welfare of the individual;
- freedom of choice;
- the right to basic medical care;
- that suffering should be relieved; and
- that every person has a need for justice, affection and esteem.

What is very clear is that core values for human life are also assigned to the unborn life. Following on this, is the logical deduction that unborn life is *ethically* equal to human life.

4.4 Compromise in ethics

A compromise has to do with the choice between two *conflicting* norms/values in a borderline situation (Lategan, 2002). In a borderline situation one has no other choice than to make such a choice. A relevant example is where the continuation of the pregnancy will endanger the life of both the mother and the unborn child. One of them will lose their life if the pregnancy is not terminated. The sixth commandment demands the protection of life, including unborn life. To abort the unborn life is unethical, yet to let the mother die is unethical as well. The reality of the situation is, however, that one life can be continued. Since these norms are in conflict with each other, a conflict of interest is created (see Buys, 1976:5). It then necessitates a choice between one of the norms in a borderline situation. This choice is referred to as a *choice between the lesser of two evils*. It is an evil to abort the embryo but it is a greater evil to let the mother die due to the fact that she is already in a relationship (marriage, family); who will take care of the newborn baby if there is no mother?, etc. It is in these situations where the compromise comes into play. Essentially the compromise is an ethical figure dealing with ethical dilemmas in borderline situations. It is not applicable to situations where there is no conflict of interest. Since not all norms can materialise in a borderline situation, a choice has to be made to secure the best possible solution in such a situation².

2 For an in-depth study of the compromise, see Lategan (2002).

One can rightfully ask whether utilitarianism is not at stake here? Isn't it about the counting of heads (ethics based on a democracy vote)? Can we justify the decision by simply deciding what is best for the biggest group? (see Van Niekerk, 2006:213). In answering these questions, it must be emphasised that a compromise is presented in a situation where no options are available other than to choose the lesser evil. This cannot be reduced to utilitarianism. The intention is never to choose what is the best for the biggest group but what is the best in a particular situation.

The value of the compromise for the abortion debate is threefold. Firstly the compromise always wants to bring the best possible solution to a borderline situation. Secondly it strives towards the materialisation of norms in a borderline situation. Thirdly the compromise strives to bring the least harm possible.

4.5 A growth ethic

Rodger Burggraeve advocates an ethic of growth. Fundamental to this ethic is the approach that although the ethical choices one makes might not be the perfect choices, they are still aiming at meeting the ideal for the situation. The choices made will guide one always to aspire to the ideal situation. Within his growth ethic there are several ethical guidelines that can assist in making a reformed ethical choice³. Firstly, Burggraeve calls for a Christian engagement. Secondly he argues in favour of mercy in ethics. Thirdly he frames it within an ethic of growth.

God is the cause for ethics. One cannot place his/her faith in God without reaching out to other people (Burggraeve, 2000:198). When Burggraeve (2000:81) calls for a Christian engagement it is based on the love for God who demands that we love our neighbours like ourselves (Burggraeve, 2000:81). The first sign of God's love is that He gives life (Burggraeve 2000:48). *Life is therefore fundamental in ethics*. Life can therefore be associated with God's love. Responding to God's love implies a total change of mind and behaviour (Burggraeve, 2000:52). This response affects one's ethical behaviour. It includes one's attitude towards other people and their lives (not as two separated units). At the basis of it all is God's love which is the core of an evangelically-inspired ethic

3 The author is mindful of the fact that Burggraeve is Catholic but this does not imply that a Reformed perspective cannot build on some of his ideas. See Jonker (1992) for a discussion of different confessions and their meaning, for amongst others, reformed faith.

(Burggraev, 2000:81). A visual characteristic of our ethical behaviour is to touch other people (“lichamelike aanraking als etiek”). He uses the example of the Good Samaritan (which is a well-known example in Christian ethics) to illustrate his point (Burggraev, 2000:96). Following on an ethic inspired by God’s love and neighbourly love, is the quality of mercy. Mercy includes mercy towards life (Burggraev, 2000:107). Burggraev (2000:196) defines mercy as ethical motherhood. With regard to neighbourly love he calls for an “extravagant love” (Burggraev, 2000:118 ff). It is characteristic of the Christian ethic to be a paradox or an extravagant ethic. Where the general perception might exist around a topic a new expectation is formulated by Christ. An example can be taken from the mountain sermon: *You have heard ... but I tell you* (Matthew 5:21ff) (Burggraev, 2000:131 ff). In the parable of the Good Samaritan two kinds of ethics are evident: the nature of ethics and how to act ethically (Burggraev, 2000:118).

Social structures can be supportive in implementing our ethical behaviour towards others, but social structures cannot have the last word on ethical behaviour (Burggraev, 2000:122). This is only possible through participation. Participation secures engagement and shared responsibility (Burggraev, 2000:123). No person should therefore be killed – this includes unborn life (Burggraev, 2000:123, 124). Two values are important in ethics: disposition/conviction and actions (Burggraev, 2000:138). These norms influence people’s attitudes towards, for example, abortion (Burggraev, 2000:145). One should also be careful not to cause anybody ethical harm. Abortion is one such example (Burggraev, 2000:201). Ethical misbehaviour is not only evident through physical acts but also through our intentions (Burggraev, 2000:202). Ethics can also raise our resistance/anger against unethical behaviour. Ethical behaviour should never degenerate into fanaticism (Burggraev, 2000:223).

In an imperfect world one should accept that the desired ethical behaviour is not always possible. Although one strives towards the “absolute good” (*vere bonum*) one very often has no other choice than that of the “lesser good” (*minus bonum*). This is an improvement on the smallest evil (*minus malum*) (Burggraev 2000:257). Situations occur where one may exhibit a less desired ethical behaviour (living together) but where one still wants to behave ethically (use a condom to prevent sexual infection and diseases). This is the basis of a growth ethic – one grows towards the ideal situation. A growth ethic represents the “smaller good” (Burggraev, 2000:259). It guides one to meet the evangelical demands. Growth ethics

do not reject a person who does not meet the demands but rather supports the person to do so in the long run (see Burggraave, 1997:147). Burggraave uses the example of Bosnian women who were raped and then had abortions. Although one can never approve of the killing of unborn life, in these circumstances there was no other option open to them. Should they now be condemned? The desired situation is to protect all life (*vere bonum*), but in such a situation where rape has occurred, it cannot be support. The ethical challenge is to be merciful *in* their situation and to guide them ethically through a growth approach to uphold the holiness of life and to grow to a stage where it can be upheld (see Burggraave, 1997:146-148).

When looking at growth ethics the value of this in terms of abortion is obvious. Growth ethics advocates that one should always strive towards the ideal situation (not to kill unborn life). It acknowledges that this is not always possible (example rape). This doesn't mean that the person should be condemned (no forgiveness); instead, the people involved in the situation should be guided to always strive towards the realisation of norms and values as God expects from us (growth ethics).

The author is also not convinced that the growth ethic is an improvement on the compromise (see the remarks on the *minus bolum* and *minus malum*). The compromise deals with a borderline situation where there is no other choice possible than to choose the concretising of that norm that will have the least effect on the situation. The choice is between whatever issues are at stake. In a borderline situation the clash of norms will result as evils. The best way out of the situation is therefore to choose the lesser evil. Once the choice has been made, it is essential that the people involved in the borderline situation should still be guided. It is here that growth ethics come into play. The compromise and growth ethics are therefore not opposing strategies. They are rather complementary ethical approaches to deal with ethical dilemmas in order to get the ideal situation back on track again.

4.6 A responsibility ethic

Anton van Niekerk (2006:214-217) argues in favour of an ethics of responsibility. Responsibility means accountability for one's actions (see also Burggraave, 2000:87). It departs from the premise that one is part of a community of people and that one has the duty to act morally. Moral acts include oneself and other people. In all situations one must be responsible. This responsibility is based on universally accepted moral guidelines of society. Needless to say, one is often influenced by utility decisions, and

even then one has to justify one's decisions and actions on moral grounds. The value of a responsibility ethic is that one admits that the decision may be wrong but that reasons for a particular decision can be provided. An ethic of responsibility is a midway between a strict rule morality (casuistry? – L.O.K.L.) and utilitarianism. A strict rule ethic holds onto rules, which are not flexible in practice. Utilitarianism ignores rules and regards them as not important at all. One can also rephrase Van Niekerk's approach and say that a strict rule ethic denies the complexity of a situation and that utilitarianism denies the importance of norms at all. To be responsible is to navigate oneself through these extremes. An ethic of responsibility also acknowledges that man should take responsibility for the society he/ she is living in. But responsibility also links up with the future. One is responsible because care should be taken to leave a better world for the next generation.

Valenkamp (2001:46-48) adds another dimension to responsibility. He says that next to responsibility in ethics one also has to account to God for one's morals. This builds on an individual ethic.

The application of a responsibility ethic to the subject of abortion reminds one that without responsible behaviour one will end up in a *cul de sac*. Responsibility ethics demands responsibility in marriage (faithfulness), sexual behaviour (not to sleep around), birth control (not to take on parenthood before you are ready for it), to recognise mutual respect in relations (one parent cannot decide on her own to terminate the pregnancy), and so forth.

Responsibility ethics should be coupled with the compromise (for borderline situations) and growth ethics (to reach to the ideal norm). The role of the compromise is confirmed by the stance of the Dutch Reformed Church on abortion (morally justifiable in borderline situations). A growth ethic is evident in the pastoral guidance to parents who have to decide to terminate a pregnancy. Responsibility ethics reminds one always to behave according to Christian norms and values for the situation.

4.7 Guidelines for a Reformed ethic

In dealing with guidelines for a reformed ethic, the following can be suggested:

- Ethics is the expression of personal love towards oneself, your neighbour, the environment and social structures. This is in response to faith in God. Reformed ethical decisions are directed by Biblical norms and values.

- Norms and values originate in the Bible. The acceptance thereof is based on the authority of Scripture. The authority of Scripture doesn't imply that values and norms must be implemented as they are. The authority of the Scripture leads one to be directed by what is demanded by the Bible, yet the implementation thereof must still be assessed for the particular situation. A fundamental principle in ethics is the uniqueness of the situation.
- God is the Creator of all life and no life must be destroyed. Although the Bible uses no delicate medical terminology or medical techniques to describe the beginning of life, the impression is left by the Bible that conception is the divine moment of human creation. The intention is twofold. Firstly, the Bible is no medical handbook and will therefore not deal with complicated medical technicalities. Secondly, the Bible doesn't regard any particular stage in life as more precious than any other stage. From the moment of conception until the end of life, all stages of life are equally important and have the right to be protected.
- No Christian ethic can accept the reality of unavoidable borderline situations. In these situations one has no other choice than to be responsible regardless the situation. The responsibility will be to make the correct choice whenever there is a conflict of interests. The compromise can assist one in making the best ethical choice possible in the situation. The value of the growth ethic is not to leave people with the choices they have made but to assist them to continue to aspire to meet the demands of the Bible. Responsibility ethics, the compromise and growth ethics dovetail ethical choices.

5. Abortion in Reformed ethical perspective

Based on the perspectives proposed in this study, one can conclude that a reformed ethical perspective will reject an abortion on demand. In addition, it also rejects the new legislation's philosophy that the women can decide individually whether they wish to continue with the pregnancy or not. For a reformed ethic the view is that human life starts at the moment of conception and therefore abortion is morally wrong. A reformed ethic promotes respect for human life. This does not mean that human life must be protected at all costs. Borderline situations necessitate the termination of a pregnancy. This should not be the rule but the exception.

The creation of new life demands responsibility. An unwanted pregnancy can never be reason enough for its termination. Neither the growth in

population nor the lack of socio-economic conditions can justify abortion on demand. Responsibility is not restored through acts of irresponsibility. Responsibility is essentially answering to God's love for the unborn life.

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