The right to life and death: What do Presbyterians say?

Mary. Templer
University of Windsor

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/4231

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email (scholarship@uwindsor.ca) or by telephone at 519-253-3000 ext. 3208.
NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S’il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l’université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d’impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l’aide d’un ruban usé ou si l’université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partiel, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d’auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.
THE RIGHT TO LIFE AND DEATH:

WHAT DO PRESbyterians SAY?

by

Mary Templer

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the Department of Religious Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1992
The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ABSTRACT

This thesis describes the official positions of the Presbyterian Church in Canada on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and the process the Church underwent to arrive at these positions. The theological and ethical principles upon which these positions are based are evaluated, and the work of the authors referred to by the Presbyterian Church in its research is discussed.

Five ordained Presbyterian ministers and twelve lay Presbyterians were interviewed with a view to discovering their understanding of the Presbyterian Church’s positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, their personal opinions and experiences of these issues, and their perceived role of the Church in dealing with these topics.

The interviews were analysed in terms of their content, and a number of conclusions were drawn. The thesis ends with some recommendations based on the material gained from the interviews. The recommendations refer to ways of improving the internal communication within the Presbyterian Church, how to involve the laity in the formation of official policy formation on ethical issues, and how the Church could be more helpful to people dealing with abortion and euthanasia.

----------------------
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iv

INTRODUCTION 1
Outline of Thesis 3

CHAPTER 1: THE PRESBYTERIAN POSITIONS: CAPITAL PUNISHMENT
ABORTION AND EUTHANASIA 5

The Role of the Bible 5
Structure of the Presbyterian Church 10
The Issues: Capital Punishment, Abortion and Euthanasia 11
Capital Punishment 11
Abortion 21
Euthanasia 28

CHAPTER 2: SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE 36

Capital Punishment 37
Abortion 46
Legal Considerations 47
Medical Considerations 50
Fetal Considerations 50
Physical Indications 51
Psychiatric Indications 52
Moral Considerations 53
Euthanasia 61
Legal Considerations 64
Medical Considerations 70
Moral Considerations 72

CHAPTER 3: THE PRIMARY RESEARCH 78

Research Methodology 78
Interviews with Ordained Ministers 81
Knowledge and Understanding 82
Personal Opinion 83
Personal Involvement 87
Methods of Communicating and Teaching 90
Interviews with Lay Members of the Presbyterian Church 93
Knowledge and Understanding 94
Personal Opinion 95
Personal Involvement 101
Perceived Role of the Church 103
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE PRIMARY RESEARCH

Effectiveness of the Internal Communication within the Presbyterian Church

Personal Opinion

Influential Factors in Forming Personal Opinion

Perceived Role of the Church in Dealing with Capital Punishment, Abortion and Euthanasia

Summary of the Information Gained from the Interviews

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Anticipated Results of this Study

Reasons for these Findings:

For Poor Communications between the Head Office and Local Churches

For the Perception of the Church as Unhelpful in Dealing with Capital Punishment, Abortion and Euthanasia

Unanticipated Results of the Study

Recommendations

APPENDIX # 1: Consent Form: Ordained Ministers

APPENDIX # 2: Consent Form: Lay Participants

APPENDIX # 3: Interview Form: Ordained Ministers

APPENDIX # 4: Interview Form: Lay Participants

BIBLIOGRAPHY

VITA AUCTORIS
INTRODUCTION.

The impetus for doing this study comes out of my experiences in the Presbyterian Church both as a staff worker and as a member of a local congregation. As part of my job I am involved in family counselling and youth work, and over the last few years I have become aware that many people in our congregation are struggling with the issues of abortion and euthanasia, particularly euthanasia, and yet few feel free to openly discuss their thoughts with "the church". This seems to be either because they feel the church is not concerned with these issues, or people feel they will be condemned by the church for behaviour or opinions that are not approved of by the church.

It is a concern as a staff worker that members of the church feel this way, because in fact the Presbyterian Church in Canada is very interested in these issues, and has done some excellent research on these topics. However, although all this work is being done by the head office, which is situated in Toronto, it has become apparent that there is difficulty in communicating this knowledge to local Presbyterian churches throughout Canada. This is manifested by the fact that when talking to lay members of the Presbyterian Church, the majority have no idea that the Presbyterian Church has taken any official positions on these issues, or has published any information on these topics. As a result, large numbers of Presbyterians are not benefitting from
this material, and many do not see the Church as a source of help in formulating opinions on these issues.

This is the background against which this study is set, and out of which the aims of the study were formulated. The aims are:

1. To study the official positions of the Presbyterian Church in Canada on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and to find out the procedure followed by the Church to arrive at these positions. The reason that these three issues were chosen is that they are of relevance to the lives of a large number of people, and they are linked together by the same underlying principles. The principle of the sanctity of life is a fundamental issue underlying the taking of human life in capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and it might be helpful in discussions on these topics for people to see the connecting principles.

2. To study how effective the internal communication system is within the Presbyterian Church in Canada, as evidenced in the flow of communication between the head office and local congregations.

3. To find out how ordained ministers and lay members of the Presbyterian Church in Canada think about and experience capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and to ascertain how they perceive the role of the Church in dealing with these issues.
Outline of Thesis.

The first chapter explains the official positions of the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and the procedures followed to arrive at these positions is outlined. The theological assumptions and biblical bases underlying these issues are discussed, and the structure of the Presbyterian Church is explained in terms of the decision making procedures which are followed in arriving at and implementing policy statements on ethical issues.

The second chapter surveys the literature on which the Presbyterian positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia are based. The literature that is discussed in this chapter is that which is listed in the bibliographies at the back of each of the three study guides published by the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment,\(^1\) abortion,\(^2\) and euthanasia.\(^3\)

The third chapter involves the primary research. The research methodology is described and the interviews with the research subjects are reported in terms of the interview content. The responses of the subjects to the interviews are considered under the following headings:- understanding of the official positions of the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment,

---

1 Hangman - A Study Resource Kit, (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1983).


abortion and euthanasia; personal opinion; personal involvement, and perceived role of the Church.

The fourth chapter involves an analysis of the information gathered from the primary research. This analysis is done under four headings: - effectiveness of internal communication of the official positions of the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia; personal opinion on these issues; causes of personal opinion, and the perceived role of the Church in dealing with these three issues.

The fifth and concluding chapter presents a summary of the findings of the primary research, and offers some future recommendations on communication within the Presbyterian Church, as well as on pastoral care and counselling regarding abortion and euthanasia. All the recommendations are based on the results of the primary research.

The research done in this study is qualitative in nature because it was considered that the characteristics of qualitative methodology are best suited to this kind of study, in which a small number of people are interviewed in depth. This approach gives scope for the interviews to be a combination of both structured questions as well as unstructured discussion in which the participants are encouraged to express their own experiences and thoughts about the topics.

\[\text{References:}\]


CHAPTER 1.

THE PRESBYTERIAN POSITIONS:— CAPITAL PUNISHMENT, ABORTION AND EUTHANASIA.

This chapter focuses on the biblical and theological bases for the Presbyterian Church in Canada's views on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. It is necessary to first examine how Presbyterians view the Bible, and how the Bible is used in formulating ethical policy decisions. A summary of the structure of the Presbyterian Church and the decision making procedures is then given. A description of the official positions of the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia is presented, and the process the church went through to arrive at these decisions is explained.

The Role of the Bible.

One of the major doctrines of the Presbyterian Church is the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture. The Bible, comprised of both the Old and the New Testaments, is seen as the Word of God, and is one of the main ways in which God communicates with people today. This does not mean that the Bible is taken literally, as it is acknowledged that the Bible is not written from the perspective of modern science, but rather

these writings are believed to reveal truths about God and about people. It is believed that the Bible is inspired by God, in the sense that the thoughts of the people who wrote the Bible were motivated and guided by God, and therefore the Bible does not contain any untruths or falsehoods. It is acknowledged that the books of the Bible were written within a cultural and historical setting, and it is important to know and understand something of the historical and cultural background in which the various books were written if one is to understand the truths contained in the writings, and to avoid misinterpretations.

This view of the Bible is expressed in a booklet called "The Living Faith", a statement of faith and doctrinal beliefs published by the Presbyterian Church. In this the following is stated:

"The Bible has been given to us by the inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life. It is the standard of all doctrine by which we must test any word that comes to us from church, world, or inner experience....The Bible, written by human hands, is nonetheless the word of God as no other word ever written. To it no other writings are to be added. The Scriptures are necessary, sufficient, and reliable....The writing of the Bible was conditioned by the language, thought, and setting of its time. The Bible must be read in its historical context".2

Because the Bible is viewed in this light, when Presbyterians are trying to form an opinion on an ethical issue, we attempt to look for guiding principles in the Bible, and use these principles as a basis for forming an opinion. This is not an easy thing to do, as these principles can be interpreted in a

---

variety of ways, or even in conflicting ways. For example, the principle that we should do to others as we would like them to do to us, could mean for one person that euthanasia should be practiced to relieve suffering, and to another person it could mean that life should be preserved at all costs. There are many ethical issues which are not addressed directly in the Bible, and so general themes and principles have to be applied. As these principles are interpreted differently by different people, the application of them frequently varies from country to country, from culture to culture, or changes over a period of time.

What this means is that although Presbyterians, along with many other denominations, use the Bible as a basis for forming opinions on ethical, social, political and religious issues, they do not assume that the Bible gives clear cut, decisive answers on all issues. This explains, for example, how the Presbyterian Church in Canada could be an advocate for capital punishment, based on a biblical position, at one time, and an advocate against capital punishment, also based on a biblical position, at another time. This does not invalidate the Bible in any way, it rather shows that the truths contained in the Bible can be applied to different times and different cultures. The Bible is frequently referred to as the living word of God, and the very word, "living," denotes change and growth. Thus the Bible is not seen as a static and inflexible book of rules, but rather as a
collection of writings which reveal the nature of God, and which
give guiding principles on which we are to base our lives.  

In formulating positions on capital punishment, abortion and
euthanasia, the Presbyterian Church in Canada has used the Bible,
the works of Christian writers, and the thoughts and ideas of
secular authors to help come to an acceptable position. The
positions taken on these issues are not considered binding
decisions. This means that local churches and individual ordained
ministers are either free to adhere to or to disagree with the
positions taken by the Presbyterian Church as a whole. Rather,
these positions are made public as statements of belief on behalf
of the Presbyterian Church as a whole.

The Presbyterian Church feels that it is important to make
public statements on ethical issues as well as on theological
issues, otherwise the Church becomes irrelevant to society. In
an effort to do that, the Presbyterian Church has published a
Social Action Handbook, in which a number of social and ethical
issues are addressed. In the introduction to this book Brian
Fraser writes,

"We have done a grave disservice to Christianity in the
twentieth century, we members of Christ’s Church. We
have taken a formative public reality, the Christian
faith, and transformed it into a plausible private
option".  

---

3 Berkouwer, G.C. *Studies in Dogmatics: Holy Scripture.* (Grand

4 Wills, Anne (ed.) *Social Action Handbook.* (Toronto:

5 Fraser, Brian. In "Introduction", *Social Action Handbook,*
p.iv. 
Fraser then goes on to quote Os Guinness as saying,

"Who can take seriously a faith which claims to speak to all of life but has tamely withdrawn from the areas which are central in modern society? ‘Jesus is Lord,’ Christians say, but what do they show? He does not appear to be Lord here...nor there...nor anywhere much where it matters. This almost total evacuation represents a rout of the first order, effectively giving the lie to Christian claims of sovereignty and lordship".6

W. Pottinger7 addresses the need of translating our faith into action when he says,

"We (Presbyterians) are just beginning to discover that our people want a faith that not only talks, but acts. In the 1982 National Research Project in our denomination, one of the statements to which the respondents were to react was, ‘I believe faith in Christ demands my involvement in social questions.’ Of the 989 answers, 69% agreed or strongly agreed. Only 6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remainder could not decide. Our people do want the church to help them deal with victims of crime, with issues related to capital punishment, with the ethics of genetic engineering, etc".

It is in an effort to enable both the clergy and lay people to apply their faith to ethical and social issues that the Presbyterian Church has researched and published its stand on a number of ethical issues, including capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. In order to comprehend how the Presbyterian Church undergoes this process of research and publication, it is necessary to understand how the Church is structured.

---


**Structure of the Presbyterian Church.**

The Presbyterian Church of Canada is governed through a system of church courts. There are four such courts, the highest of which is the General Assembly, followed by the Synod, the Presbytery and the Session. Each court is subject to the one above it. These courts are composed of ordained ministers and ruling elders, who are lay people elected by their local congregation to the position of elder, which is a life-time appointment.

Every local congregation has a Session, the lowest of the four courts, and it is comprised of the minister and all the ruling elders of that congregation. It is the Session that runs local congregations, and it is responsible to the Presbytery.

The Presbytery, the second of the courts, is comprised of all ministers and representative elders from each pastoral charge in a given geographical area. The main concern of this court is the well-being of local congregations within its geographical domain.

The Synod is the court responsible for the good order and effectiveness of Presbyteries in a given geographical area. The number of Presbyteries in a Synod varies but is usually around four or five. There are eight Synods and forty-four Presbyteries in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. The minister and one elder from each Presbytery within Synod’s bounds are members of Synod and are expected to attend yearly meetings.
The General Assembly is the highest court, and it meets annually. Each year one-sixth of the ministers on the Presbytery rolls and a matching number of elders are expected to attend the meetings of this court. Thus an attempt is made to ensure that the decisions made by the General Assembly are representative of Presbyterians across Canada. The General Assembly decides on matters of policy, doctrine and discipline, and it serves as the final point in matters of appeal from lower church courts. Some decisions made by the General Assembly are binding decisions, particularly on matters of doctrine. This means that all ordained ministers and local churches are required to adhere to these decisions, both in terms of belief and practice. Policy statements on ethical matters are also agreed upon at the General Assembly; however, these are not binding decisions, but are guidelines to be followed by local congregations and individual members of the Church. It is in this court that policy statements about capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia are made.

The Issues: Capital Punishment, Abortion and Euthanasia.

Capital Punishment.

In 1954 the Presbyterian Church in Canada stated that it was in favour of capital punishment. The church drew up a statement on capital punishment, which was adopted by the 80th General Assembly and forwarded to the joint Parliamentary Committee on the Revision of the Criminal Code.
This position was supported by Scripture and the following reasoning:

"The civil magistrate may inflict punishment on evil doers, after due process of law, to reform the criminal and deter the community from overt acts of wrong as well as vindicate the majesty of the law.

"The right of the State to inflict capital punishment is currently being called into question. Yet we would affirm the right of the civil magistrate to impose the death sentence for crimes like malicious and deliberate homicide. The State is given this right as the minister of God. (Rom. 13), and it shall have this right as long as evil continues to disturb the social order.

"This is not a matter of private vengeance or public violence, but the manifestation of the divine wrath and judgement through God’s civil servant, the State. The magistrate wields the power of the sword as the representative of God for the punishment of evil doers and the protection of the community, whether he acknowledges God or not.

"It cannot be denied that earthly justice does not possess the perfection of the divine. Nor is it insisted that capital punishment shall be applied in every case. But we would affirm the right of the State to exact the supreme penalty when required by the crime. And we would observe that the abolition of capital punishment in a sinful society would have the effect of rendering insecure the lives of men and women made in the image of the sovereign God, while encouraging contempt for the law.

"The civil magistrate is thus empowered of God to restrain evil by the enforcement of just laws. But the hope for the renewal of society is to be found in the Gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ". 

The scripture references given by the Presbyterian Church in Canada in support of this statement are:

On the punishment of malicious murder by death -

---

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man". Gen. 9:6

"Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death". Exodus 21:12-14.

On the terrible sin of murder against man made in God’s image -

"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness". James 3:9

Genesis 9:6 is again used to back up the position that murder is a sin.

There were a number of theological assumptions on which the 1954 statement in support of capital punishment was based. It was felt that it was the duty of moral citizens to avenge offences against God and that every crime involves a breach of God’s law and is punishable as such. Romans 13:1-7 was heavily drawn upon to support the view that the state authorities have been placed there by God, and therefore to disobey them is to disobey God. The reference in verse 4 to ‘the sword’ was taken literally, and seen as justification of punishment by death. It

---

9 Other scripture references used in support of punishment of malicious murder by death are Lev. 24:17; Num. 35:21; Deut. 19:11,13; Rom. 13:1-7; Acts 25:11.
was on these assumptions that the 80th General Assembly, in its statement in support of capital punishment, said,

"This (the right of the state to take a life) is not a matter of private vengeance or public violence, but the manifestation of the divine wrath and judgement through God’s civil servant, the State. The magistrate wields the power of the sword as the representative of God for the punishment of evil doers and the protection of the community, whether he acknowledges God or not". 10

The concept of human beings made in the image of God was also used to support capital punishment. The murdering of a person is to be seen in the light of the fact that a life which was made in the image of God has been taken, and this aspect of the crime lends it its severity. Thus Gen. 9:6 in connection with James 3:9 was used as an argument in favour of capital punishment. Since we are made in the image of God, to kill another person is a direct offence against God. A number of Old Testament passages were also used to support this argument, for example Exodus 21:12-14, which reads

"Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate".

The statement in favour of capital punishment was also made on the basis of a number of moral and ethical assumptions. The preventative aspect of punishment was seen as valid, and it was seen that by enforcing capital punishment the state was fulfilling its right and duty to protect itself and its members from injury and loss. Thus we have incorporated as part of the

statement on Capital Punishment in 1954 the sentiment that to abolish capital punishment would expose innocent people to more danger, as well as encouraging contempt for the law.\textsuperscript{11}

The statement then goes on to say that the civil magistrate is empowered of God to restrain evil by the enforcement of just laws, and it is implied that this includes the taking of a life.

It was also felt that capital punishment was a deterrent to others, and that the enforcement of this law helped to minimize the number of murders.

Only three years later, in 1957, this statement came up for review, and a special committee on capital punishment reported to the 83rd General Assembly. As a result of the work done by this committee, the 83rd General Assembly adopted a resolution referring the matter to the Board of Evangelism and Social Action for further study, and also encouraged all the local presbyteries to initiate their own studies into the question of capital punishment.

This led to the Presbytery of Victoria, in 1965, submitting an overture on the Abolition of Capital Punishment to the 91st General Assembly. In this overture the Victoria Presbytery requested that immediate representation be made to the Federal Government with a view to the abolition or suspension of the death penalty, and that a special representative committee be appointed to re-examine the position of the Presbyterian Church

\textsuperscript{11} Acts and Proceedings of the 80th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1954.
on capital punishment with a view to preparing a new statement on this matter.

The decision of the 91st General Assembly in response to this overture was:-

"That a special representative committee, including representatives from the Board of Evangelism and Social Action, be appointed to re-examine the position of our Church on capital punishment in the light of the Scriptures, with a view to preparing a new statement on this vital matter and report to the General Assembly in 1966".12

In 1967 this committee recommended that no change be made in the statement in support of capital punishment adopted in 1954. However, despite this recommendation, the General Assembly of that year (1967) passed a motion that "...without prejudice to the Statement of 1954, this Assembly favours the abolition of capital punishment"13.

During the six years following the 1967 statement, considerable research and study was done, which ultimately led to a change in thinking about capital punishment. In 1974 a new study paper on capital punishment was issued by the Presbyterian Church, and in response to this five presbyteries found themselves favouring abolition, one was undecided and one reported that it had studied the subject but took no position.

In 1976 the Board of Congregational Life, which was responsible for the study paper, went on record supporting the


abolition of capital punishment and resolved to inform all members of the House of Commons of this decision.

Thus we see how the Presbyterian Church changed its opinion on capital punishment from being firmly in favour of it to holding a position against it. Once again, this decision was based on a number of theological, ethical and moral assumptions.

It was pointed out that early Christians were generally opposed to capital punishment, and this only changed as the Church became more powerful and was more closely allied with the State. In more recent years the views of the early Christians have been revived, particularly by the Anabaptists and Quakers, and an attitude of sympathy with human suffering and a horror at the destruction of human life has been once again stressed.

Instead of viewing crime as an offense against God which must be severely punished by those who are less sinful, the Christian attitude to punishment is now influenced by the New Testament teaching that we are all members of the same body, and that if one part of the body suffers, we all suffer.14 This enables us to place more stress on the causes of crime, including murder, and on attempting to alleviate these causes.

It was also felt that in the past the Presbyterian Church had perhaps resorted to a rather crude form of biblical literalism, in which isolated verses or texts, mainly from the Old Testament, were used to support the stance of favouring capital punishment. Instead of this approach it was felt that it

14 1Cor. 12:26.
is important to take the wholeness of Scripture into account, and to try to determine over-all themes or principles, rather than resorting to so-called proof-texts to back up one's argument.

One such principle that occurs throughout Scripture is redemption, and it has been asserted that capital punishment must be viewed in the light of Christ's redemptive purpose. The characteristic Christian attitude to all people, however they have behaved, should be redemptive, and with this in mind, capital punishment seems to be wrong as its object is to end a life, not to heal or redeem it.

The arguments of the late Archbishop William Temple and of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth were used in support of a stand against capital punishment. Barth claims that in capital punishment society quite arbitrarily surrenders its obligation in relation to the criminal, and he feels that in relation to God's retributive justice, it somehow lacks the 'humility' which people ought to have in bearing witness to the righteousness of God. It was acknowledged, however, that Barth did suggest that there are some borderline cases in which capital punishment might be justifiable.

When the Presbyterian Church was debating the issue of capital punishment during the late 1950's and 1960's, not from a theological but from an ethical point of view, controversy developed along two different lines. On the one hand there was a utilitarian view which posed the question from a point of view of expediency - "What will yield the best results for society as a whole?" On the other hand there were those who upheld abstract
justice as the final consideration, and felt that the issue revolved around whether or not the State has the right to take a life, and should not revolve around the practical issues of such things as the cost of keeping long term prisoners, or whether or not capital punishment serves as a deterrent.

In the end, both of these points of view were taken into account in deciding against capital punishment. It was acknowledged that there is great disagreement as to whether capital punishment is a deterrent, as often one sensational crime is followed by another, without apparent regard for the death penalty. Statistics taken from countries and states in which the death sentence has been abolished indicate that in such places the homicide rate has in fact dropped. It was felt that the role of the church is not to judge, but rather to address the issues which might lead a person to murder, and so to minister to all people in society. It was felt that the danger of error in determining the guilt or innocence of a person is not a valid argument either for or against the death penalty, and rather stresses the importance of taking every possible step to provide a just and adequate judicial system.

In supporting the abolition of capital punishment the Presbyterian Church mentioned the following reasons:¹⁵

1. By Christ's atoning sacrifice on the Cross, He has paid the death penalty for everybody, and no more sacrifices are needed.

2. The death penalty conflicts with the mind of Christ and His law of love, the essence of which is to reform.

3. By its use of capital punishment, the state renounces its obligation to the criminal and precludes the opportunity for reformation.

4. All the countries which have abolished capital punishment, all statistics and all evidence, go to show that capital punishment does not prevent murder.

5. The retributive and deterrent aspects of capital punishment can be adequately served by life imprisonment.

6. By the use of the death penalty, the state brutalizes itself and attacks the very thing it desires to teach and protect, namely, the sanctity of life.

It was stressed that the Church should recognize its role of finding ways and means of reducing the tragedy of homicide, and that the Church's ministry of reconciliation and the gospel of grace are essential in this effort.

In 1981 the decision to support the abolition of capital punishment was re-affirmed, and it was recommended that education about capital punishment be encouraged by all local churches.

In 1985, when once again the issue of capital punishment was being debated on a national level in Canada, the 111th General Assembly reaffirmed the opposition of the Church to capital punishment and agreed to communicate this opposition to the Prime
Minister, the leader of the official opposition and the leader of the New Democratic Party.

It is obvious that the Presbyterian Church in Canada has spent a great deal of time and energy in debating the arguments for and against capital punishment, and that the issues were well researched. This issue provides us with an example of how the Church can take a stand on an ethical issue, and then later reverse the decision, even though at the time it was felt that both points of view were biblical, moral and ethical. From 1965 until the present time the Presbyterian Church has maintained its position against capital punishment.

Abortion.

"Abortion is one of the most volatile and contentious issues of contemporary life. For over a decade it has elicited an extreme, seemingly irreconcilable polarization unmatched by other social issues."\(^{16}\)

It is an issue that simply will not die down, despite prolonged attempts to form adequate legislation and practice. One of the reasons that abortion continues to be such a divisive and unresolved issue is because the majority of people appear to feel ambivalent about abortion, and may perhaps publicly hold to one view and yet privately hold to another.

---

This ambivalent attitude to abortion is addressed by Kathleen McDonnell when she asks the question "Why does the abortion issue not 'cool down'?" She says that this is because most people, even the pro choicers, do not see abortion as just, right and their due. For most women, even those who have had abortions,

"abortion is still a source of shame and a dark secret. Abortion inspires ambivalence more than anything else."

In 1967, two years before the new Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau adopted a number of amendments to the abortion section of the criminal code, the Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted the following resolution regarding abortion:-

"Be it resolved that the General Assembly ask Parliament to amend the law with regard to abortion to make therapeutic abortion lawful, when the continuance of a pregnancy endangers the mother's life or is likely seriously to impair her physical or mental health, when authorized by a panel of qualified medical authorities."

Four points were mentioned in support of this resolution.

1. It was acknowledged that an abortion involves a decision which is fraught with serious moral and spiritual implications.


2. It is morally indefensible to legalize abortion in order to reduce the number of illegal abortions, or as a method of population control.

3. The mother's life is a matter of even greater importance than the life of the fetus, and when the physical and mental health of the mother are threatened by the pregnancy, an abortion may be appropriate.

4. It was noted that Criminal Code Section 209(1), (2) provides for the preservation of "the life of the mother of a child that has not become a human being", but is ambiguous about the legality of such abortions. This places doctors in a difficult position and leaves them open to prosecution.

This resolution was forwarded to the government of Canada, and a brief was prepared on the basis of the resolution and presented to the House of Commons Committee on Health and Welfare in November 1967.

In 1972 this resolution was reaffirmed by the 98th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. In addition to this, a request was made to provincial governments to maintain a close supervision of all therapeutic abortion committees within their jurisdiction to assure adequate consultation with the mother and, if possible with the father and the family physician before permission for abortion be granted. This request was made because of concern over the sharp increase in the number of legal abortions being performed each year in Canada.
The 98th General Assembly also made a strong request to all ministers and local churches to engage in studies and discussions on the 1967 resolution on abortion in the context of sex education, education in family life and education in the problem of world overpopulation.

In 1975 the matter of abortion was again raised, and the 101st General Assembly granted a request to:-

"urge the Government of Canada to take the necessary steps to ensure that the laws of the land respecting abortion are not abused."\(^\text{20}\)

This Assembly also adopted a recommendation from the Board of Congregational Life regarding a conscience clause for medical practitioners and staff. The Minister of Justice of Canada, the Law Reform Commission and, subsequently, the provincial governments were notified of this action. The resolution recommended that a law be enacted to protect medical workers from demotion, suspension or discharge from employment who refuse on grounds of conscience to take part in abortions.

In 1976 the 102nd General Assembly was involved in a discussion on the question of what precisely is meant by the "life" and "health" of the mother. It was noted that with the current advances in gynaecology and obstetrics, the danger of a woman’s death through complications arising from pregnancy is slight, and it is also very infrequent that the continuation of pregnancy might result in the mother’s permanent physical impairment. Despite this, a relatively large number of abortions

occur, and these are authorized by legally constituted therapeutic abortion committees.

In the light of this it was suggested that "life" ought to mean more than simply being alive, and consideration ought to be given to the threat of an unwanted pregnancy to a woman's total life, in relation to her family, her work or her environment. It was pointed out that there are circumstances that may not be "life-threatening", but could be "life-devastating". In the same way, "health" may be seen to include questions of social or economic well-being. Furthermore, the question of the health of the fetus should be considered. If it is indicated that there is a 50% chance that a child will be born deformed, deficient or with a lethal disease, should abortion be considered as a feasible option? The same question arises if there is the likelihood of the child being neglected, abandoned or deprived.

During these discussions the issue of rights was raised, both the rights of the mother and the rights of the fetus. It was stated that the question of rights involves the issue of the quality of life, as an unwanted pregnancy may be seen as a threat to a woman's right to a certain quality of life that she possesses or is attempting to acquire. If a fetus seems to be unhealthy, does it have a right to be born either healthy or not to be born at all?

It was acknowledged that the right to live is a fundamental right that must be affirmed. This principle must be applied to all people, including the unborn, as it was felt that there is no
point in time when it can be asserted that the fetus does not qualify as human life.

"It is unseen, unconscious, dependent and perhaps unwanted, but these are not grounds for its termination."21

It was concluded from this line of reasoning that the interpretations of "life" and "health" must be strict. In the case of the word "life", it ought to have the plain meaning of life as distinct from death, and that danger to life means the danger that the person might die. The claim of danger to "health" is more complex as there is no way to produce a catalogue of "disease states" or conditions that constitute medical indications for abortion. In these cases the law, which provides that therapeutic abortion committees which are accountable to the Minister of Health in the Province, and have the responsibility of making decisions in difficult cases, would be supported.

In 1977 the General Assembly requested the Provincial Ministers of Health that therapeutic abortion committees be instructed to give priority to the principle that the unborn has the right to life and that only a danger to the mother's health indicating the likelihood of permanent or prolonged mental or physical impairment be regarded as grounds for abortion.

In 1988 the 114th General Assembly passed a recommendation requesting the Board of Congregational Life

"to continue to study the implications of whatever legislation may emerge dealing with this subject (of

abortion) and take appropriate action that is consonant with our Church's stated position..."22

This recommendation was made bearing in mind that the Government was discussing the issue of abortion, and in fact Bill C-43 An Act Respecting Abortion was tabled on November 3, 1989. In 1991 the 116th General assembly stated that the Presbyterian Church does not support Bill C-43, and a recommendation was passed that the House Leaders of the Senate and the special Committee of the Senate be informed of this opposition. Bill C-43, which is a criminal Code measure, stated that abortions are legal when one doctor determines that the pregnant woman's physical, mental or psychological health is at risk. The reasons for the objection to Bill C-43 were that it made abortion a purely medical decision, whereas the Church believes that abortion has serious moral and spiritual implications. It was also affirmed that abortion is not an entirely individualistic decision, and some process needs to be in place where the value of the community, the rights of the unborn, and the rights of women are brought to bear on each decision. It was also noted that Bill C-43 did not provide protection for those who refuse to participate in an abortion on grounds of conscience, nor does it guarantee access to medical services for women, who after serious consideration, decided to have an abortion. Thus it was felt that this Bill was not satisfactory to any party, and it was therefore not supported by

---

the Presbyterian Church. The Bill barely passed the House of Commons and then was narrowly defeated in the Senate.

To date the position of the Presbyterian Church in Canada on abortion is that it is against abortion on demand, as it believes that there is no point at which the fetus can not be regarded as a human being, and that all human beings have the right to life. However, it supports abortion when the continuance of a pregnancy literally endangers the mother's life, or is likely to seriously impair her physical or mental health, and when such an abortion is authorized by a panel of doctors.²³

Euthanasia.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada does not at present have an official position on the topic of euthanasia, in the sense that no resolutions on this issue have been passed by the General Assembly. However, this ethical issue has been discussed and studied, and the Board of Congregational Life has published a booklet called Euthanasia – A Christian Perspective,²⁴ in which an attempt is made to present the major points to be considered when confronting euthanasia, as well as the principles to which the Presbyterian Church adheres when forming opinions on this issue.


²⁴ Tattrie, George, Euthanasia – A Christian Perspective, (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1982.)
In the introduction to this booklet by Dr. Tattrie, Rod Ferguson states,

"For at least the last twenty years, the Presbyterian Church in Canada has been struggling with the question of euthanasia. It has been studied and discussed in all parts of the Church. Papers have been written, revised and re-written. Groups in congregations and experts have argued pro and con from the perspectives of ethics, theology, personal and professional experience, law and medicine. Changing times and circumstances alter viewpoints and the issue needs to be rethought in their light. The issue may never be decided once and for all nor will it just go away. It is a question that touches everyone in one way or another as the frequent enquiries we receive testify."^{25}

Despite the fact that study papers have been published by the Presbyterian Church on euthanasia,^{26,27} it is difficult to determine from this literature exactly what the Church is recommending. This is particularly true in the case of the principles which are outlined as being important in formulating answers to the questions raised by the issue of euthanasia. The first of these principles addresses the issue of active euthanasia, but the language used is difficult to follow, particularly for a lay person attempting to understand what the Church is recommending.

This first principle states that:

---


"euthanasia, in the sense of the direct termination of a life for the purpose of the relief of the suffering of the terminally ill, should not be accepted as an adequate response to such suffering". 28

A footnote is then added, which says:-

"To state that this is not an adequate response is not to deny that, in the relatively rare cases of uncontrollable human suffering it might not be the only response. By human suffering we understand an affliction of which the individual is aware, the result of which is a distortion of the human personality and the diminution of the ability of that personality to reflect the Image of God with which he or she was endowed". 29

It appears that what is meant by this is that active euthanasia, even for the purpose of the relief of the suffering of the terminally ill, is an unacceptable response to such suffering. However, it is acknowledged that, although this might not be an adequate response, in the relatively rare cases of uncontrollable human suffering it might be the only adequate response, particularly when the degree of suffering is so great that the very essence of the person is destroyed. In such cases active euthanasia would at least be understandable.

The second principle states:-

"that in all his relationships, man is to honour the value and dignity of the neighbour. This means that nothing can be done with or to the neighbour that does not protect, enhance and affirm that value and dignity. Any medical procedure that violates that value and that dignity, no matter what the motivation or interest of its utilization, is forbidden". 30


This principle is then expanded to include the fact that medical practitioners are expected to utilize all available medical techniques to protect that dignity, and that failure to do this is as much a violation of the neighbour’s dignity as an act of commission. It is not clarified whether or not protecting a person’s dignity could include the shortening of that person’s life so that he or she can die with dignity.

The term "neighbour" presumably means anybody with whom we interact. This second principle then seems to be addressing the use of experimental medicine or technology, and the use of medical procedures which are more for the benefit of the doctor or the family than for the patient. Once again, if the stating of these principles is for the benefit of lay Presbyterians, it might enhance knowledge and communication if they were stated in a more direct and simple fashion.

The third principle refers to the fact that "humanity is sustained in relationship".\textsuperscript{31} We must acknowledge that we are all dependent on one another, as we are created as relational beings. Therefore, we should not leave anybody in isolation, particularly people who do not have the resources to overcome isolation. This means that right up to the point of death, medical care procedures must recognize and nurture the patient’s ability to relate to others, no matter how minimal that ability might be.

The fourth principle states that:-

"Ultimate reality is God and His love, not life or death. Therefore, the former and not the latter are to be worshipped. This means that medical practice should recognize the sovereignty of this God and His will for man. God wills life for man. Medical practice is required to do all in its power to reflect that will. Medical practice has no authority to take from man the life that is his by right".32

(Presumably women and children are also included in this.)

This principle emphasises God's will for people to have life, and the obligation of medical practitioners to do all in their power to sustain that life, which is every person's right. Implicit in this is that it is always God's will for a human life to continue.

In order to make sense of this principle, it needs to be taken in conjunction with the next principle, which states that:-

"The power of death challenges the right of God to the life of man. The mortality of man makes him vulnerable to this challenge. This reality is also to be acknowledged by medical practice. Consequently, when the limit placed on mortal existence has been reached, that is, when human life has lost its capacity to reflect the Image of God in relationship, medicine has no warrant to attempt to exceed this limit through the use of "extraordinary means".33

The fourth principle suggests that doctors do not have the right to deliberately end a person's life. The fifth principle states that doctors do not have the right to aggressively extend a person's life beyond a certain point, that point being when the individual life is no longer able to "reflect the image of God in


relationship". The distinction between these latter two principles can only be made by drawing on the difference between active and passive euthanasia, a distinction which is frequently discussed by numerous writers.

The sixth and last principle refers to the question of living wills. This principle states that:

"...we minister to the neighbour when we support him or her in the exercise of his or her capacity to discharge responsibility. Consequently, the neighbour's decisions, with respect to the type of medical treatment he or she is to receive in certain situations, when these decisions are made when the individual has the use of his or her faculties of reason, judgement and understanding, should be acknowledged. We are to respect the neighbour's right to take responsibility for the life that has for a time, been entrusted to him or to her".  

It is not suggested that living wills be considered as legal documents, but rather that the patient's wishes, whether expressed orally or in written form, should be respected.

From these principles it appears as if the Presbyterian Church is against active euthanasia on the grounds that God is sovereign and as such is the giver and taker of human life. Passive euthanasia is acceptable because this involves allowing a human life to run its natural course, without aggressive intervention from the medical profession. The value and dignity of each human being is stressed, and therefore everybody should


be encouraged and enabled to make responsible decisions about his or her own medical treatment, and these decisions should be honoured. If a person explicitly indicates that life is no longer tolerable and death would be preferable, it is unclear from these principles whether the Church would support active euthanasia or not.

In an interview with Dr. Ray Hodgeson, the chairperson of the Church and Society Committee, the committee responsible for the formulation of policy statements on ethical issues, he said that it is likely that within the next few years the Presbyterian Church will be making a formal policy statement on euthanasia. Dr. Hodgeson feels that in this statement the sanctity of life would be stressed, but that this would not necessarily mean an inordinate technological intervention merely for the sake of prolonging physical life.

In this chapter the role of the Bible in the Presbyterian Church was discussed, and it was shown how the doctrine of the authority of Scripture has a major impact in connection with the formation of ethical and social policy statements. The structure of the Presbyterian Church was then explained in terms of the decision making procedures which are followed in arriving at policy statements. The policy statements of the Presbyterian Church in Canada on the issues of capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia were then examined, and the procedures followed in the formulation of these statements was outlined.
When studying these issues, the Presbyterian Church looked at the work of a number of different authors, whose ideas were incorporated in the formulation of the ethical positions taken by the Church. The work of these authors is therefore relevant to an understanding of the thinking of the Presbyterian Church, and the following chapter will be devoted to a survey of the literature on which the Presbyterian positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia are based.
CHAPTER 2.

SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE.

The previous chapter began by examining how the Bible is perceived and used in the Presbyterian Church, and the doctrine of the authority of Scripture was discussed in connection with the formation of ethical and social policy statements. The structure of the Presbyterian Church was then explained in terms of the decision making procedures which are followed in arriving at policy statements. The remainder of the chapter discusses the issues of capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia as seen by the Presbyterian Church, and the biblical and theological principles upon which the positions are based.

This second chapter focuses on a survey of the literature on which the Presbyterian positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia are based. The literature that was used is listed in the bibliographies at the back of each of the three study guides published by the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment,\(^1\) abortion\(^2\) and euthanasia.\(^3\) This literature was used as a basis for discussion of the issues, and in the case of capital punishment and abortion, principles were then drawn from

\(^1\) Hangman - A Study Resource Kit, (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1983).


\(^3\) Tattrie, George. Euthanasia - A Christian Perspective, (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1982).
the material discussed, and policy statements were drafted, based on these principles. These policy statements were then presented to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and adopted, as is described in chapter 1. In the case of euthanasia, the literature is used to present the various sides of the euthanasia debate, but the Presbyterian Church has as yet not adopted any policy statements on this issue.

**CAPITAL PUNISHMENT.**

As has been described in Chapter 1, the Presbyterian Church in Canada moved from a position of favouring capital punishment up until 1976, to a position against capital punishment, which it has maintained to the present time.

In order for the Church to come to a complete reversal of its position on capital punishment, it is obvious that a process of re-evaluation and a new way of thinking had to be undergone. While the Presbyterian Church was undergoing this process of change in thinking, three critical issues in connection with capital punishment were considered, namely, how Scripture is to be used in forming ethical policy decisions, the principle of justice, and the principle of deterrence.

One of the first areas that was focussed on in this process of change was how Scripture is to be used in formulating ethical
policy decisions. The work of Robert McAfee Brown\textsuperscript{4} was influential in encouraging a different way of using the Bible when looking for guidelines about capital punishment. Brown points out that the Bible can be used to support almost any point of view on an ethical issue if only isolated texts are highlighted. Brown\textsuperscript{5} makes this point by saying:

"The Bible does not give us a blueprint...for a Christian political order. Whenever you find someone quoting isolated bits of Scripture to "prove" a point with regard to some specific piece of legislation, you are entitled to be suspicious....Anyone can find what he or she wants in the Bible by stressing the things that agree with his or her position and ignoring the things that do not. It is particularly easy to lift statements out of context in playing this fruitless game".

In a study resource kit put out by the Presbyterian Church\textsuperscript{6} comments like these are used to show that perhaps in the past this text-juggling approach had been used in connection with capital punishment, and that it was time to use a different approach. This study resource kit\textsuperscript{7} says:

"Because of the inadequacy of a text-juggling approach, we will need to move into a deeper kind of study in order to discover a more complete understanding of biblical truth related to use of the death penalty in our day".


\textsuperscript{6} Hangman – A Study Resource Kit, (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1983).

\textsuperscript{7} Hangman – A Study Resource Kit, p.11-A.
The work done by the Interchurch Task Force for the Continued Abolition of the Death Penalty\(^8\) is also used as a basis for the formulation of the changing theological views of the Presbyterian Church on the death penalty. In the Position Paper published by this task force\(^9\) the following quote is used to promote continued abolition of the death penalty:--

"It is an illegitimate use of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, to quote texts in order to argue in our time, for the retention of the death penalty... The question of the death penalty in our opinion, ought to focus not on whether a convicted murderer "deserves" to die. The focus should be on us; should Canadians as a community try to break the escalating spiral of violence by refraining from violence even as deterrent".

Another author that was influential on Presbyterian thinking was Dave Llewellyn\(^{10}\), and he points out that although the death penalty was advocated in the Old Testament, the conditions under which it was used were very specific to the circumstances of Israel at the time. Llewellyn also points out that the judicial procedure under the Mosaic law was significantly different from our judicial procedures, for example, under Mosaic law the

---

\(^8\) This Task force had its origins in the Interchurch Task Force on Responsible Alternatives to the Death Penalty of the Canadian Council of Churches, which began its work in 1975. The Task Force was reactivated in 1978 when it became clear that restoration of the death penalty would be a continuing public issue.


standard of proof required for conviction amounted to certainty, as opposed to our standard of reasonable doubt, and conviction required the testimony of more than one witness, with no circumstantial evidence allowed. These and other differences made it much more difficult to convict a person of a capital offense under the Mosaic law than it was under our judicial system. Llewellyn\textsuperscript{11} also points out that the Mosaic law prescribes the death penalty for eighteen different crimes, including adultery, homosexuality, rebelling against parents and cursing God. So if we use the Mosaic law to support a position in favour of capital punishment, we certainly would not want to use the same law in deciding what crimes should be treated as capital offenses, thus making it difficult if not impossible to uphold a consistent application of the Mosaic law to our situation.

Comments such as these caused the Presbyterian Church to re-evaluate their interpretation and application of biblical passages such as Gen. 9:6,\textsuperscript{12} and Exodus 12,14\textsuperscript{13}, which were the passages used to support the 1954 statement in favour of capital

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{12} "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of god has God made man".

\textsuperscript{13} "Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death. But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death".

punishment. Instead, it was felt that biblical passages need to be understood in terms of the context in which they were written, and that when looking to the Bible for guidance in forming ethical opinions, the Bible needs to be examined as a whole, and general principles and themes need to be studied, rather than isolated texts.

A second concept that was examined by the Presbyterian Church in coming to a position against capital punishment is the notion of justice. The work of Albert Wells was helpful in this regard, as he points out that in the Bible "justice is an exceedingly rich and dominant theme". Wells goes on to say that at least three aspects of the total biblical view of justice need to be recovered, especially as it is expressed in the Hebrew prophets and in the teachings of Jesus, if we are to attain a more adequate understanding of this concept.

The first of these aspects of justice is succor and support for the victims of crime. Wells points out that although the biblical bias toward the oppressed and downtrodden clearly mandates that concern for victims of violent crime should be our


16 Wells, Albert N. "Toward a More Biblical Understanding of Justice", The Presbyterian Outlook, April 26, 1982.

17 Wells, Albert N. "Toward a More Biblical Understanding of Justice", The Presbyterian Outlook, April 26, 1982.
first consideration, nevertheless our pre-occupation is with elaborate, expensive efforts to apprehend and prove the guilt of those who committed crimes. Our efforts to minister to the victims of crime are feeble compared with our efforts to apprehend and try criminals. This emphasis is not true to the biblical sense of justice.

A second component of biblically inspired justice is the protection of society. While it is true that society must be protected from people who commit violent crimes, the basic concern here is protection, and not justice defined as "getting what one deserves", or retribution, and certainly not revenge. This is contrary to one of the theological assumptions on which the 1954 statement in support of capital punishment was based, which was the idea that it is the duty of moral citizens to avenge offences against God, and that every crime involves a breach of God’s law and as such must be punished.

A third cornerstone of justice as outlined by Wells\(^{18}\) is the principle of restitution or compensation. Obviously there can never be total compensation for a life that has been taken by violence, but taking the offender’s life in return does not improve the situation. However, it is possible for offenders to make restitution for the pain and oppression they have caused, and in addition, society needs to be willing to share in such efforts at restitution because it also has a share of responsibility for most crimes committed by individuals. This

would have an impact on prison reform and the rehabilitation of prisoners, the effectiveness of which is heavily dependent on the co-operation of societal institutions such as business, factories and churches.

William Temple\textsuperscript{19} was also referred to by the Presbyterian Church in connection with the principle of justice and punishment. Temple pointed out that the Old Testament law of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was not a licence to exact vengeance, but to the contrary it was a limitation of vengeance in an extremely violent society. What this injunction meant was that people were not to take more than one eye for an eye, nor more than one tooth for a tooth. The whole purpose of the old law was to set a limit to the nature of the vengeance which might be exacted, and when Jesus came, he carried the principle of limitation of vengeance further by saying that retaliation for the sake of retaliation must not be exercised at all.

These principles of justice are incompatible with the death penalty, and as a result of this thinking, the Presbyterian Church in Canada began to re-align its thinking by focussing on principles of justice, as opposed to a concept of the Church fulfilling its duty by exacting punishment and retribution.

\textsuperscript{19} Temple, William, The Ethics of Punishment. (The John Howard Anniversary Sermon preached at the Church of St. Martins-in Fields, 1930).
A third consideration of the Presbyterian Church in connection of its stand on capital punishment was deterrence. Traditionally the principle of deterrence has been one of the strongest arguments used by those in favour of the death penalty. However, as more and more countries in the world began to abolish capital punishment, it became easier to conduct studies on the effect the absence of capital punishment had on the murder rate. As Jack Costello\textsuperscript{20} points out, the death penalty as deterrence theory is disproved by every study that has been done. For example, in Canada the death penalty has not been inflicted since 1962, and in the following two years the murder rate stayed at 1.4 per 100,000, that is, at the same level, as it was in 1962. In 1965 it increased to 1.5, but fell to 1.3 in 1966. After 1963, the murder rate in Canada has remained almost stationary, even showing a slight tendency to decline.\textsuperscript{21}

Similar evidence comes from studies done in Holland, Great Britain and the United States. Britain's Royal Commission on Capital Punishment in 1953 said:-

"The general conclusion which we have reached is that there is no clear evidence in any of the figures we have examined that the abolition of capital punishment has led to an increase in the homicide rate or that its introduction has led to a fall".\textsuperscript{22}


Despite the fact that all studies seem to point clearly to the direction that capital punishment has no effect on the murder rate, the public had a difficult time believing this, and even after the abolition of the death penalty in Canada, many people felt that capital punishment was a deterrent.

A study done by Vidmar and Ellsworth\textsuperscript{23} illustrates this point. In this study the question was asked if factual information about deterrence was relevant in forming public opinion about capital punishment. The study concluded that the answer to this question is no, as 55% of American and Canadian subjects who approved of capital punishment would continue to approve of it even if it had no greater deterrent effect than imprisonment.

In March and April 1966 the Canadian House of Commons debated a motion to abolish the death penalty, and the motion was finally defeated after extensive debate by the narrowest margin ever recorded in Canada (143 votes to 112). However, the arguments put forward by the abolitionists were influential in subsequent debates leading to the abolition of the death penalty in Canada, and this in turn also influenced the thinking of the Presbyterian Church. On the issue of deterrence, one of the abolitionists in the 1966 House of Commons debate, T.C. Douglas,\textsuperscript{24} said that capital punishment brutalizes the society.


that uses it without providing any effective deterrent that
cannot be provided equally well by life imprisonment. He pointed
out that all of the evidence which can be gathered seems to
indicate that the death penalty is not a unique deterrent. In
support of this the study by Thorsten Sellin is quoted, which
compared states in the United States of America which have
retained and abolished the death penalty. This study concluded
that abolition had no visible effect on homicide rates.

These three concepts, namely, a different approach to the
use of Scripture in forming ethical policy decisions, justice,
and deterrence, were the major factors that were considered by
the Presbyterian Church when they reversed their position on
capital punishment from a retentionist to an abolitionist stand.
The work of the writers mentioned above as well as others was
used to formulate the current policy statement, and has guided
the Presbyterian Church in subsequent discussions on the issue of
capital punishment to maintain this position.

ABORTION.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada describes its own stand on
abortion as a "middle-way position on abortion". This means

Row, 1967).

26 Tattrie, George. Abortion - A Christian Perspective. (Toronto:
that the Presbyterian Church affirms the traditional Christian position that abortion involves the taking of human life and is, therefore, morally indefensible. However, it does accept that there are situations in which abortion, though immoral, might be the lesser of two evils, and consequently, the Presbyterian Church does not advocate an absolute prohibition of abortion. Thus the Church is in favour of abortion when the mother's life is in danger, or if there is a threat of serious impairment of physical or mental health to the mother.

When studying the issue of abortion, the Presbyterian Church considered this topic under three headings: - legal, medical and moral, with the major emphasis placed on moral considerations. The work of a number of authors was consulted by the Presbyterian Church as part of their study of abortion, and these authors were influential in enabling the Presbyterian Church to form and maintain their position.

Legal Considerations.

When considering the legal implications for abortion, the work of an American ethicist, Daniel Callahan\(^2\) was heavily drawn upon. Callahan distinguishes three types of abortion laws that have been used to regulate abortion in various societies, namely, restrictive, moderate and permissive.

Restrictive legal codes are framed on the assumption that every fetus is either a human being or a potential human being

and therefore is entitled to the protection of the law. The sanctity of human life is strongly emphasised. The emphasis of moderate legal codes is to reduce illegal abortions, to relieve difficult pregnancy situations, and to enable governments to be in a position to supervise abortion procedures. Moderate codes also try to provide women with a freedom of choice which is impossible under highly restrictive codes, or which is liable to abuse or compromise under permissive codes. Permissive legal codes make abortion easily obtainable, but sometimes this makes the woman vulnerable to pressure from friends and family to choose an abortion whether she wants one or not.

In 1969 the Federal Government of Canada chose to adopt a moderate legal code with regard to abortion when it passed legislation, the major thrust of which was to prohibit induced abortion except when the life or health of the mother was endangered.28 The Presbyterian Church also takes a moderate stand on abortion, rejecting a restrictive code on the basis of the principle that sometimes a choice needs to be made between two evils, and in such circumstances the life and the health of the mother should be chosen above that of the life of the fetus, and rejecting permissive codes on the principle that every fetus has the right to be born, and that abortion should not be used as a method of birth control.

Callahan \textsuperscript{29} points out that a solution to the legal problem of abortion is not a solution to the moral problem, and that abortion is primarily a moral or ethical issue. In order to deal effectively with the problem of abortion, people need to find a way of developing a set of ethical principles and moral rules to help them act responsibly, and to justify their own conduct in their own eyes. The Presbyterian Church certainly agrees with Callahan's observation that legislation does not address the moral issue, and this is why the abortion law was not particularly effective. The Church recognizes that society itself is divided on the ethics of abortion, and this is at the basis of the problems experienced with implementing an abortion law. The Presbyterian Church comments that:

"Our society itself is divided on the issue and the implementation of the abortion law reflects that division. What is involved in addressing the issue is fundamental beliefs and attitudes about the nature and meaning of life, the responsibility of individuals to themselves and to others, the nature of the respect owed to all life, and the nature and origin of human dignity." \textsuperscript{30}

This led the Presbyterian Church to focus on the moral aspects of abortion, but in order to do that effectively, some comments needed to be made about the medical and physical aspects of abortion.


Medical Considerations.

Once again it was primarily the work of Daniel Callahan\textsuperscript{31} that was used by the Presbyterian Church as a basis for their considerations of the medical aspects of abortion.

The medical aspects of abortion can be drawn into three categories: fetal, physical and psychiatric. The first relates primarily to the physical well-being of the unborn life, the second relates to the physical well-being of the mother, and the third relates primarily to the mental and emotional well-being of the mother. The Presbyterian Church feels that all three of these aspects are important and should be taken into account when considering abortion.

Fetal Indications.

In defining what is meant by a fetus, Paul Ramsey's\textsuperscript{32} definition is used, which states that a fetus refers to that form of life between the embryonic and the independent state of existence. The transition from the one state to the other occurs after approximately eight weeks, by which time the basic equipment needed for human life is present in its initial stages. The Presbyterian Church raises the issue that increased medical technology increases the moral dilemmas with regard to abortion, as it is now possible through the procedure of amniocentesis to determine whether or not a child will have a genetic defect.


\textsuperscript{32} Ramsey, Paul. "Reference Points in Deciding about Abortion", in Noonan, John T. Jr., ed. The Morality of Abortion, Legal and Historical Perspectives, pp. 72, 73.
then raises the question of whether or not the fetus should be aborted, and should this decision be made solely on the basis of the known presence of genetic disorder, or should such things as the economic and emotional resources of the family also be taken into account. The Presbyterian Church feels that genetic disorder alone does not constitute grounds for abortion, as it is impossible to know ahead of time what the quality of the life of such a child will be like, nor how the family will react to such a child. As Callahan\textsuperscript{33} points out, with the exception of cases where the physical life of the mother is endangered, abortion is seldom the only option, particularly in affluent societies. Families are not necessarily destroyed by a handicapped child, particularly when supportive resources are made available.

\textbf{Physical Indications.}

The Presbyterian Church acknowledges that in a society such as the Canadian one the physical risk of abortion to the mother is minimal, and in fact early abortion is a safer procedure medically than carrying a life to term. However, medical science has reduced to a minimum the physical risks to the mother during pregnancy and child birth, and it is very seldom that the physical life or health of the mother is genuinely at risk. When this is the case, the Presbyterian Church feels that this constitutes adequate grounds for abortion.

Psychiatric Indications.

The third medical area of concern regarding abortion relates to the emotional and mental well-being of the mother, both during the pregnancy and after the birth of the child. With respect to the pregnancy itself, Callahan suggests that it "represents a personal crisis for a woman, bringing about a special interaction of mind and body, self and society", and that this crisis consequently affects a woman's self-evaluation, both as a person and as a woman. The Church acknowledges that the emotional state of the pregnant woman can have consequences subsequent to the birth of her child, as evidence suggests that:-

"premature birth, congenital malformations, emotional disturbances, behavioural disorders, delinquency, schizophrenia, epilepsy and mental sub-normality may all have a relationship to the emotional attitude of the mother towards the fetus or to the emotional circumstances of the pregnancy".

The Presbyterian Church feels that these factors need to be recognized as possibilities, and that

"the possibility of damage to a fetus or to the development of a newborn child as a result of the emotional or mental state of the mother is also a necessary consideration in evaluating the appropriateness of an abortion in a particular situation".

These are the medical considerations which the Presbyterian Church feels are relevant when considering abortion. However, it

---


is felt that in the majority of situations abortion is a moral dilemma, and therefore the moral considerations are the ones that weigh heavily in most decisions regarding abortion.

Moral Considerations.

The main authors whose work was studied by the Presbyterian Church when considering the moral implications of abortion are Daniel Callahan,37 Paul Ramsey,38 John T. Noonan,39 Jonathan Edwards40 and James Gustafson.41

The moral stand of the Presbyterian Church towards abortion revolves around the question of what constitutes human life, and an understanding of our responsibility for unborn life. Tattrie42 points out that there are two ways of answering the question, "What does it mean to be human?" First, a human life form is one in which at least some of the characteristics of our humanity have developed to a particular level. Second, a human life form is one in which these characteristics have the potential to be


actualized. Tattrie points out that if one adopts the latter position, then logically, one must say that the piece of matter which is expelled in an induced abortion, at whatever point in the pregnancy, is a form of humanity. The Presbyterian Church adopts this view, which is the rationale behind its belief that abortion involves the taking of human life and is, therefore, morally indefensible. \(^{43}\)

In an article written subsequent to the study guide on abortion published by the Presbyterian Church, Callahan, writing in co-authorship with his wife, \(^{44}\) says that he feels uncertain about the moral status of the fetus because he cannot find coercive arguments that personhood begins at conception. His own view is that personhood develops over the period of gestation, between twelve and twenty-four weeks, but that nobody can be certain of an exact time when this takes place. This does mean that the fetus has no rights, in fact, Callahan calls his view a "balancing of rights" position, \(^{45}\) because he feels the fetus has some moral standing and moral rights, but not sufficiently strong enough to overcome the rights of women to claim an abortion.

This balance distinguishes Callahan from pro-choice proponents to whom the only issue is the right of the woman to choose. This


\(^{44}\) Callahan, Daniel and Callahan, Sidney. "Abortion: Understanding our Differences". (Loma Linda University Ethics Centre Update, 2:2 March 1986).

\(^{45}\) Callahan, Daniel and Callahan, Sidney. "Abortion: Understanding our Differences". (Loma Linda University Ethics Centre Update, 2:2 March 1986). p.3.
attitude of a balance between rights is very much in line with
the Presbyterian approach to abortion, as the Church strives to
maintain a "middle-way" stand on this issue.

As well as the issue of rights, the principle of the
sanctity of human life is one which carries a lot of weight in
the Presbyterian attitude to abortion. From the Christian
perspective, all people have a value, a dignity and a common
humanity by virtue of the fact that God has visibly claimed each
person, or in other words, the image of God in humankind is
universal. The Presbyterian Church does not claim that the
characteristics of our humanity can be attributed equally to the
fetus and to the fully developed person, nonetheless it does
stress that the potential capacity to exhibit these
characteristics is present in the minute embryo because that
embryo is a product of human generation whose participants
themselves reflect the image of God. From this point of view,
human life, even in its embryonic form, is sacred. It derives its
dignity and value by virtue of God’s valuation of it, and not by
virtue of the attitude taken toward it by those responsible for
its presence.

The Presbyterian Church goes on to develop this point
further by referring to the work of Jonathan Edwards⁴⁶, one of
America’s greatest theologians of the eighteenth century. Edwards
says that our purpose in life is to glorify God, and it is by

---
doing this that we maintain our value and dignity. A fetus has the potential to glorify God, and it is this that gives it its humanity and its value, quite apart from any other factors.

A further moral aspect of abortion that the Presbyterian Church feels is relevant is that of our understanding of our responsibility for unborn life. If we accept that we are created in the image of God and that by virtue of that creation we have a responsibility to act as stewards of all aspects of the created order which have been entrusted to us, then we must accept a responsibility for the unborn life which has the potential to glorify God and reflect His image. With regard to this Paul Ramsey\textsuperscript{47} is quoted as saying:—

"The fact that nascent life is minute and vulnerable and incapable of independent existence does not matter in determining its worth. Certainly, a religious ethic will have special regard for the near-neighbour beneath a woman's heart and the distant-neighbour in foreign lands, for the alien resident or sojourner in the womb no less than for the alien resident or sojourner in the land of Israel - for we know the heart of the stranger, the weak and the vulnerable, and God's special redemptive care for every one of us in like circumstances".

The Church thus clearly establishes that it feels that concern and responsibility for the unborn represents a form of neighbour-love which is required of all of us.\textsuperscript{48} However, as always, the Presbyterian Church takes a mid-way position by saying that although we confer on the fetus a strong claim to

\textsuperscript{47} Ramsey, Paul. "Reference Points in Deciding about Abortion", in Noonan, John T. Jr., ed. The Morality of Abortion, Legal and Historical Perspectives, p.75.

\textsuperscript{48} Matthew 22:37 f.
life, this claim is not absolute, particularly if it conflicts with the claim to life of the mother.

These moral considerations on abortion are based on the premise that abortion is fundamentally a religious issue. In stating this, the Presbyterian Church denies the proposition that abortion can be adequately addressed in non-religious terms, and thus the position taken by Lisa Newton,49 in which she states that abortion is a legal and a political issue, but not a religious issue, is rejected. Newton elaborates her point by saying that:—

"While religious ethical issues are settled by appeals to the will of God, secular ethical issues are settled by appeals to human justice, common rights and duties, and the happiness of the greatest number in the long run".50

Newton feels that, since God has not revealed His will with respect to abortion, this topic cannot be debated with reference to that will, and therefore it cannot be a religious ethical issue.

The Presbyterian Church responds to this by acknowledging that the will of God with respect to abortion is not unambiguously revealed in the Bible. It is also true that one can debate the abortion issue in a non-theistic frame-work, without appeal to a transcendent reference, and it is true that the legal


process should not be encumbered with legally irrelevant material. In spite of this, however, for the Christian, abortion remains fundamentally a religious moral issue. This is because, while scripture does not directly discuss abortion, it does speak throughout of God's concern for His creation in general and for those in particular who are created in His image. Scripture speaks of our responsibility for a faithful stewardship of that creation which has been entrusted to us, and it speaks of God's desire that we all grow into the fullness of that Image in which we are created, and that we have "life, and have it abundantly".\(^{51}\)

As can be seen from what has already been said, the Presbyterian Church takes a moderate approach to the issue of abortion. There are a number of reasons for this, which are explained in the study book published by the Presbyterian Church.\(^{52}\)

1. The Church believes that absolutist positions are defective because they do not sufficiently allow for values other than those they promote to be considered in abortion decisions. A moderate approach is also necessary because each of the opposing absolutist positions in this debate support certain propositions which, from a Christian perspective, are true and must

---

\(^{51}\) John 10:10.

therefore be considered in any decision about abortion. 53

2. As Christians we believe that every life is precious to God, and this includes the life of the fetus. However, no one life has absolute value, but must be viewed relative to other lives and subject to the will of God. This is based on the work of James Gustafson, "God’s Transcendence and the Value of Human Life". 54

3. With regard to the issue of rights, the Presbyterian Church holds that in any abortion decision, the freedom and the responsibility of those affected by the decision should be recognized and acknowledged. Such decision-making should not occur in isolation, but as much as possible in a community setting, meaning those who can provide support, understanding and sensitivity. Yet the people most directly affected, the potential father and/or mother, initially must be given the freedom to exercise their responsibility before God to respond to the consequences of their actions or the consequences of the actions of others upon them. To not allow this freedom is to deny them their humanity. A moderate approach to abortion, by rejecting the absolutist

53 Examples of such propositions are:- the author of life is the Creator God. Therefore we cannot treat life with disrespect or arbitrarily destroy it. We are stewards, not proprietors, or the gifts of God.

approach and by insisting that the humanity of the
people involved in the decision be honoured, has no
alternative but to accept decisions which at times it
considers unfortunate, if not immoral. In this respect,
"a moderate approach to abortion more closely resembles
that of abortion on request, as opposed to its polar
opposite, since the former also seeks to give the
people directly affected by abortion, the decision-
making primacy".  
55

4. A moderate approach insists that all factors in a
situation be considered, so that justice is in some way
served. This moderate approach rejects the proposition
that people and their situations be absolutely subject
to principle, regardless of circumstances. It also
rejects the opposite approach to this, that of pure
subjectivity, which ignores all principles and instead
allows feelings, emotions and the situation itself, to
predetermine a decision. A moderate approach attempts
to incorporate both principles and circumstances. This
involves thinking through the principles involved
objectively, being in touch with subjective feelings and
emotions, acknowledging the immediate life situation of
the people involved, as well as looking at the long-term
situation in terms of physical, psychological,
sociological and economic resources.

These are the principles which underlie the Presbyterian

55 Tattrie, George. Abortion - A Christian Perspective, (Toronto:
Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1984). p.35.
euthanasia, many of these same principles are once again relevant.

**EUTHANASIA.**

As has been mentioned in Chapter 1, the Presbyterian Church in Canada does not at present have an official position on the topic of euthanasia, as no resolutions on this issue have been passed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. However, a great deal of research has been done by the Presbyterian Church on the issue of euthanasia, and a study booklet has been written in order to encourage local Presbyterian churches to study and discuss this issue.

When talking about euthanasia, the Presbyterian Church does not clearly define what is meant by this term, but the strong implication is that the broadest of definitions is to be used. Tattrie\(^\text{56}\) refers to the fact that the term euthanasia is derived from the Greek adverb eu, meaning well or good, and the noun thanos, meaning death. It seems that the Presbyterian Church views euthanasia in terms of John Ladd's\(^\text{58}\) definition, which reads as follows:–

---


"The action of inducing a gentle and easy death which in turn is taken by many to mean mercy killing or some other kind of act, usually of doctors, that hastens a person's death".

This would include a wide range of circumstances, such as:- rights to refuse treatment, rights to indicate one's wishes regarding treatment when incompetent, or the choice of a substitute decision-maker through documents such as a living will and durable power of attorney, rights to refuse artificial hydration and nutrition, rights to non-interference in the commission of suicide by terminally ill persons, rights to assistance in committing suicide, if assistance is required, and rights to be provided with intervention intended to kill the terminally ill person. Thus we see that under this very broad and loose definition, the term euthanasia as used by the Presbyterian Church can in fact refer to a wide variety of situations. Although the practical working out of these situations differs widely, they are connected in that in all cases the aim of the action taken or refused is for the benefit of the person concerned, and is based on the fundamental decision that the quality of life is so poor that the individual prefers death to life.

The Presbyterian Church uses a broad definition of euthanasia despite the fact that a number of authors feel that this leads to confusion, and that we need to be more specific in our terminology. An example of such an author is Margaret
Somerville\textsuperscript{59} who disagrees with the use of broad definitions of euthanasia, as she says that both sides in the euthanasia debate have tended to use loose definitions, but to very different ends, which leads to confusion. She points out that paradoxically, by including within the term euthanasia all of the aspects mentioned above, those against euthanasia may actually be promoting its legalization, and in order to avoid this kind of confusion,

"much more careful and clearly defined terminology must be used in this extraordinarily important debate".\textsuperscript{60}

Despite Somerville's warnings about the dangers of using broad definitions, it is clear from the study book written by the Presbyterian Church that the term euthanasia refers to any acts that lead to the shortening of a patient's life, where the acts performed are for the benefit of the person, where there is no malice, and where these acts are as a result of the wishes of the individual concerned.

In the study book written by the Presbyterian Church, Tattrie\textsuperscript{61} outlines the principles which the Church considers important when attempting to form an opinion concerning euthanasia, and in order to do this, the work of a number of authors has been considered.


\textsuperscript{60} Somerville, Margaret. "People Have the Right to Refuse Treatment", \textit{The Financial Post - Point and Counterpoint}, January 13, 1992.

\textsuperscript{61} Tattrie, George. \textit{Euthanasia - A Christian Perspective}, (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1982).
The main authors whose work has been considered in the writing of the study guide are Jerry Wilson, Daniel Maguire, Joseph Fletcher, Paul Ramsey, and James Gustafson. The issues are divided into legal considerations, medical considerations and moral considerations, with an emphasis on the latter.

Legal Considerations.

In Canada active euthanasia is illegal, and is treated as a criminal act. In fact the Criminal Code of Canada does not make any distinction between active and passive euthanasia, as section 222(1) of the Criminal Code defines as homicide any act which directly or indirectly by any means causes the death of a human being. Section 241 of the Criminal Code says that everyone who a) counsels a person to commit suicide, or b) aids or abets a person to commit suicide, whether suicide ensues or not, is guilty of an indictable offense. This means that, legally, anybody performing an act of euthanasia, could be charged under these sections of


65 Ramsey, Paul, *Basic Christian Ethics*.

66 Gustafson, James. "Basic Ethical Issues in the Biomedical Fields", in *Theology and Christian Ethics*.

the Criminal Code. In practice, however, acts of euthanasia are frequently performed in hospitals throughout Canada, and no charges have been laid in terms of the Criminal Code.

In the fall of 1982, the Law Reform Commission published Working Paper 28,68 in which it was stated that the Law Reform Commission does not favour the legalization of euthanasia in any form. However, in a report put out in July 1983 by the Law Reform Commission,69 as a result of an extensive consultation with members of the public, the legal profession and representatives of the health sciences, some recommendations of amendments to the Criminal Code were made regarding cessation and refusal of treatment. It was recommended that nothing in the Criminal Code shall be interpreted as requiring a physician to continue to administer or to undertake medical treatment against the expressed wishes of the person for whom such treatment is intended, or to continue to administer or undertake medical treatment when such treatment has become therapeutically useless and is not in the best interests of the patient.

It is on the legal presupposition that euthanasia is illegal that the first principle regarding euthanasia as outlined by the Presbyterian Church, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is based.70 In summary, this principle states that active euthanasia is


unacceptable. However, because of the current public interest and concern about euthanasia, the legal systems of many countries are being challenged to make provisions to deal with the fact that many people would like more control about when to end their lives, particularly in view of the sophistication of modern medical technology which can increase the length of a life without necessarily focussing on quality of life.

In response to this kind of thinking on the part of the public, the Presbyterian Church acknowledges that although active euthanasia is usually unacceptable, there are some circumstances where this might be the only acceptable response. (see Chapter 1). Seeing as the Presbyterian Church is currently in the process of thinking through the issues involved in euthanasia, and is encouraging local congregations to express their opinions, it is likely that public opinion will be a factor that influences the position taken by the Presbyterian Church. Current public opinion shows that despite the fact that euthanasia is illegal in Canada, increasing numbers of Canadians are in favour of the practice of euthanasia. A Gallup poll based on 1,022 personal interviews of Canadians during October 1991\(^1\) indicated that "most Canadians favour mercy killing". 75% of those surveyed agreed that doctors should be allowed to end the life of an incurable patient through active euthanasia if the patient made a formal written request.

\(^1\) Windsor Star, 9th October 1991.
When discussing the legal considerations involved in euthanasia, the Presbyterian Church cites Jerry Wilson\(^{72}\) as saying that in Western societies, legal systems affirm the principle of the inherent dignity of each individual, which presupposes three values: the value of life, the value of health and the value of personal autonomy or freedom. (Here the second principle as outlined in Chapter 1 is relevant). With respect to the value of life, the law sees any act that causes or contributes to the taking of life as homicide, and within the medical context, this term applies to any action or omission that hastens a patient's death. This would certainly apply to euthanasia.

With respect to the value of health, the law seeks to protect people from any acts which damage the physical or psychological wellbeing of an individual. Within the medical context this applies especially to negligence or malpractice.

The third value which underlies our legal system is that of personal autonomy. Each individual has control over his or her own body, and nothing can be done to that body without that person's consent. Consequently, any treatment may be rejected by an individual, even if this results in that person's death. This last value is obviously sometimes in conflict with the first value, that of respecting life, and in some cases a choice has to be made between two conflicting values. Because of the fact that

there are at times conflicting values, the Presbyterian Church was quick to acknowledge that, although it supports the validity of these three values, there are numerous difficulties in applying them to euthanasia.

One of these difficulties revolves around the fact that the law does not take into consideration the question of motive. Increasingly, motive is seen as important in considering situations in which people are delivered from suffering without their formal consent, and it is recognized that two acts may be externally similar but intrinsically dissimilar. The difference lies in the motive for which an action is taken, and this is why a central concept in defining euthanasia is that the action taken must be for the benefit or good of the person whose life is being ended. The Presbyterian Church quotes Daniel Maguire's book Death by Choice\textsuperscript{73} as an example of cases that highlight the difficulty the law has in acknowledging motive.

The Presbyterian Church discusses a second difficulty that the law has in dealing with euthanasia, namely that the law is difficult to apply in cases of euthanasia because it does not have adequate categories for dealing with this kind of killing. There are only three legal categories into which euthanasia might be placed: first degree murder, second degree murder, and manslaughter, and none of these adequately deal with euthanasia.

It is pointed out by the Presbyterian Church that because the law does not recognize the importance of motive in

euthanasia, and because, to many people, its categories of offences do not seem adequate to deal with the procedure of euthanasia, the law, with respect to euthanasia, is being challenged. Even in recent months we have seen how the law is being challenged both in Canada and in the U.S.A. In Canada, the case of "Nancy B" received a great deal of public attention, when, on 6th January 1992 the Quebec Superior Court granted the request of a twenty five year old woman in Quebec suffering from Guillain-Barre syndrome to have her respirator turned off, resulting in her death. As a result of this judgment the issue of patients rights to refuse treatment, even when this action results in death, was upheld.

In America the ongoing case of Jack Kevorkian again confirms the Presbyterian Church's assertion that the law regarding euthanasia is being challenged. In this case a pathologist in Michigan helped to bring about the deaths of patients by means of a "suicide machine", at the patient's own request. After the first use of this machine in 1991 attempts were made to prosecute Kevorkian, but the charges were dropped when a court ruled that assisted suicides are not illegal in Michigan. However, in October 1991 Kevorkian again assisted two more women to bring about their own deaths, and he was charged with murder. This case has not yet come to trial.

These, and other similar situations, serve to illustrate the point that although euthanasia is illegal at present, the law is constantly being challenged as people study and evaluate the issues involved in euthanasia.
Medical Considerations.

The Presbyterian Church raises the question of whether medicine should do all that modern medical technology enables it to do, in all situations. 74 The Church feels that from the medical perspective, the answer to this question involves several considerations, which are as follows:-

The type of treatment appropriate to the situation.
The rights of the patient and of the patient’s family.
Economic factors.
The establishment of medical criteria for determining death.
The establishment of criteria for determining how to proceed in situations involving terminal illness.

With respect to the first consideration, the Presbyterian church quotes Jerry Wilson 75 as describing five categories of treatment presently employed, namely preventative therapy, emergency therapy, remedial therapy, ameliorative therapy, and palliative therapy. The Presbyterian Church simply raises the point that it is often difficult to decide which type of therapy or treatment to use in cases of terminal or incurable illness, particularly when undue suffering is present, but no suggestions are made as to which treatments are appropriate under which circumstances.

With respect to the rights of the patient and family, the Presbyterian Church asks the question,

"If a person wishes to be relieved of pain and the procedure is available to do this, does the doctor not have the duty to use it? If the family greatly suffers at the patient's suffering, to what extent should their wish to end the suffering be taken into consideration?"  

Once again, the question is raised with a view to informing Presbyterians of the issues involved, but no answer is advocated.

With regard to economic factors, it is pointed out that medical technology is extremely expensive, and the question is asked when is such expense justified, and when is it not.

Considerable discussion is devoted by the Presbyterian Church to the question of what constitutes death. It is pointed out that there is no clear cut answer to this question, and this poses a difficulty for both the legal and medical professions, as legal and medical definitions of death do not necessarily coincide. For various definitions of death, the Presbyterian Church refers to the 1968 report of the "ad hoc" committee of the Harvard Medical School, as well as to the work of Daniel Maquire and Edward Keyserlingk.

---


77 "A Definition of Irreversible Coma: Report of the 'Ad Hoc' committee of the Harvard Medical School, to examine the definition of brain death", in Donald Cutler, ed. Updating Life and Death, pp. 55-63.


79 Keyserlingk, Edward, Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life in the Context of Ethics, Medicine and Law, pp. 50-66.
The Presbyterian Church also points out that in Canada, no legal consensus regarding which criteria for death are to be accepted, has yet emerged. The Law Reform Commission of Canada reports:

"No Canadian court has ever made an explicit declaration on the criteria that constitutes the legal meaning of death. It is therefore impossible to find a legal consensus on a shared judicial 'definition' of death, or even of a tendency to lean in the direction of one particular conception or of a specific set of criteria". 80

With regard to the problem of how to proceed in situations involving terminal illness, the Presbyterian Church observes that in addition to the wishes of the patient and the family, the wishes and opinion of the physician are also relevant and should be considered.

In the discussion of the medical factors to be considered in the dilemma of euthanasia, the Presbyterian Church seeks to raise the issues involved, but does not attempt to provide guidelines on how to resolve these dilemmas.

**Moral Considerations.**

In discussing the moral consideration of euthanasia, the Presbyterian Church relies heavily on the work of Joseph Fletcher. 81 Fletcher's summary of the objections to euthanasia, and his response to these objections, are the whole basis of the Presbyterian Church's discussion of the moral considerations of

---


euthanasia. Once again, the Presbyterian Church simply raises the issues involved in euthanasia, without drawing any conclusions. There are nine issues discussed:

1. Voluntary euthanasia - is this suicide, or is it patient self-determination?
2. Involuntary euthanasia - is this murder, or is it bringing about the relief of suffering?
3. God alone has the prerogative to decide when a life should end, so does this mean we should stop all medicine?
4. The sixth commandment says that we should not kill - however, both capital punishment and war involve killing, so one cannot morally justify the latter while condemning the former, and while basing one's argument solely on the biblical injunction not to kill. In addition, an important principle is that of justice, and justice to the patient requires the relief of suffering, while justice to the physician requires that he or she be free to fulfill the duty to relieve suffering. Sometimes this may involve active euthanasia, or killing.
5. Objection to euthanasia can be raised on the grounds that suffering could be divinely planned for the sake of one's ultimate well-being, and it therefore must be accepted. Bernard Haring is quoted by the Presbyterian

---

Church as supporting this point of view.\textsuperscript{32} The Church also points out, however, that if this position is accepted we would not be able to give moral approval to anaesthetics or to provide medical relief of human suffering.

6. Euthanasia is wrong on the grounds that medical prognosis is sometimes wrong, and that sometimes a person who is declared to be incurably ill, in fact recovers. The argument against this is that in advanced illnesses, such as cancer, it is totally clear that this is not the case, and that in these cases, euthanasia can be justified.

7. Opponents of euthanasia maintain that patients suffering from intense pain might make impulsive and ill-considered requests for euthanasia if the practice were morally or legally approved. The Presbyterian Church points out that the response to that position is that legislation can be so framed that patients are protected against any unconscious wish for destruction.

8. Moral and legal approval of euthanasia would weaken our moral fiber and encourage us to minimize the importance of life. The counter-argument is that to accept euthanasia is an act of great courage, and faith of the highest moral quality. To support this latter position the Presbyterian Church quotes the words of Charlotte

\textsuperscript{32} Haring, Bernard, \textit{Medical Ethics}, pp. 164-165.
Perkins Gilman, a nineteenth century American, who chose self-euthanasia over a degenerative death by cancer.\textsuperscript{84}

9. The ethics of a physician forbid him or her to take human life. On the other hand, the physician also has the duty to relieve suffering, and in many cases, the drugs needed to do this also hasten death, thus placing the physician in an obvious dilemma.

The Presbyterian Church quotes the work of Jerry Wilson\textsuperscript{85} in naming the five principles usually appealed to by those in favour of euthanasia. These principles are:-

1. The dignity of life is superior to the value of life as such. Consequently, a person has the right to die with dignity.

2. In the face of incurable suffering, the physician's responsibility to relieve this suffering is more important than his or her responsibility to prolong life. Therefore, a person has the right to release from incurable pain and the physician who provides the release is performing a moral act.

3. The right to be at liberty is of greater importance than the value of a severely restricted life.


4. Justice to the patient requires the relief of suffering. Justice to the physician requires that he or she be free to fulfill the duty to relieve suffering. Justice to the family and others requires that they be spared needless emotional and financial expense, which is sometimes involved in prolonged and useless therapy.

5. The principle of social utility is affirmed as a reason in some instances, to sanction the practice of euthanasia. Life is of value not as an end in itself, but in terms of its usefulness to society. The practice of euthanasia is, therefore, justified in certain circumstances, when treatment places a useless burden on society.

The Presbyterian Church presents this information as part of the study guide on euthanasia published by the Presbyterian Church, and in so doing the Church aims to educate its members on what the issues are regarding euthanasia. The Church does not attempt to comment on these principles, although it does outline the principles which the Presbyterian Church considers important when attempting to form an opinion on euthanasia, as is indicated in Chapter 1.

In this chapter, the literature as identified by the Presbyterian Church in Canada as important and relevant to the topics of capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, has been identified. The way in which this literature has been used as a basis for discussion has been outlined, indicating how the policy
statements on capital punishment and abortion were formed. As has been mentioned, the Presbyterian Church is currently studying the issue of euthanasia, and although the literature has been extensively referred to, this is done from the point of view of educating members of the Presbyterian Church about all sides of the euthanasia debate, rather than giving guidelines on what is right or wrong, or forming any policy statement.

The following chapter will present the primary research. The research methodology that was used will be described, and the interviews conducted with the research subjects will be reported in terms of their content.
CHAPTER 3.

THE PRIMARY RESEARCH.

The main focus of the previous two chapters was on the Presbyterian Church in Canada:-- the way it is structured, the procedure for policy formation; the perception and use of the Bible, policy statements on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and the literature used by the Church in the study and formulation of these statements.

This chapter focuses on the primary research. First there is a description of the research methodology used, and then the content of the interviews is presented in a thematic format.

Research Methodology.

A conscious decision to employ a research methodology which is qualitative in nature was made because it is considered that the characteristics of qualitative methodology are best suited to this kind of study in which a small number of subjects are interviewed in depth, with an unstructured interview style. As Schmitt and Klimoski\(^1\) say,

"We should ask ourselves whether we are better off to have a study with a large number of subjects, giving us superficial data on a large sample, or a study on a few subjects, giving us in-depth data on a small sample.

---

For the qualitative researcher, the answer is clear, and thus, as a rule, qualitative studies will typically involve small samples".

Following the University of Windsor's Guidelines on Research Involving Human Subjects, a consent form was drawn up that would be signed by each participant before the interview began. Two different kinds of consent forms were drawn up, one for ordained ministers (see Appendix 1) and one for lay people.(see Appendix 2). These two consent forms are very similar to each other, the only difference being that in the case of ordained ministers, there was a higher risk of identification seeing as five ministers were interviewed, and there are five Presbyterian Churches in Windsor. These consent forms were sent to the University's Ethics Committee, which gave its approval for the research to proceed.

The method of selecting the ordained ministers to be interviewed was different from the method used for selecting lay members. There are five Presbyterian Churches in Windsor, and the senior minister from each of these churches was asked to participate in this study, and each agreed.

Twelve lay members of the Presbyterian Church were selected on a stratified random sampling basis from the membership lists of Presbyterian Churches in Windsor. Three names were randomly selected from each of four specified categories from the membership roles. The categories were according to age, and were broken down as follows:- over 60 years old; 30 - 60 years old; 20 - 29 year olds, and teenagers. The reason for this breakdown
according to age strata was that these categories may represent different ways of thinking about and have differing experiences of capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. By ensuring that an equal number of participants came from each of these categories, it was expected that a more accurate picture of Presbyterians as a whole was gained.

An interview time was arranged with each of the participants, at a place of their choice. At the beginning of each interview, the consent form was presented, and the participant was asked to read it, and then given an opportunity to ask any questions about the research and about the implications of their involvement. The participant was then asked to sign the consent form.

As has been mentioned, the type of research done was qualitative, in which

"The ultimate aim is to study situations from the participants' point of view".2

Because of this the interviews did not follow a structured questionnaire type of format, but instead general themes were pursued. These themes centered around the following points: understanding of the official positions of the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia; personal opinion on these issues, personal involvement, either directly or indirectly, with these issues, and perceived role of the church in these issues. Slightly different questions were put to the

---

ordained ministers because of their role of preaching, teaching and leadership, which differs from the role of lay people. For an outline of the themes followed with ordained ministers, see Appendix 3, and for an outline of the themes followed with lay people, see Appendix 4.

These questions were not presented in the same order in each interview, as each participant was encouraged to tell of his or her opinions and experiences in his or her own way. However, in each interview all of this material was covered. After the consent form had been signed the tape recorder was switched on. Some of the participants expressed concern that they would feel self-conscious and inhibited by the tape recorder, but in most cases it appeared as if the recorder was forgotten after the first few minutes. In two of the interviews the participant asked for the recorder to be switched off while they narrated a particular incident, and then asked for it to be turned on again. It was agreed that the material spoken of while the recorder was off will not be used in this research.

Each interview lasted about one hour, and after each interview I personally transcribed the tape, and then erased the original tape.

**Interviews with Ordained Ministers.**

The content of these interviews will be reported under four headings:— knowledge and understanding; personal opinion; personal involvement, and methods of communicating and teaching.
1. Knowledge and Understanding.

Each minister was asked if he or she knew what the Presbyterian Church's position is on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. Only one of the five ministers knew what the Church's position on all three of these issues is, and this is because a series of studies had recently been led by that minister for the congregation, and in order to do this she had herself studied these issues, and had the relevant written documents available. This minister was also familiar with the process that led to each policy statement, and the reasoning behind them.

Of the remaining four ministers, all of them were aware that the Presbyterian Church is against capital punishment, and all knew the basic reasoning behind this position.

On the issue of abortion, none of the remaining four ministers were familiar with the details of the Presbyterian stand on this issue, but all said they thought the Presbyterian Church was against abortion. One minister said he thought the Church was

"against abortion except for the following three reasons - life of the mother, deformed fetus and rape".

One said that the Presbyterian Church is against abortion under all circumstances, and two said that the Church is against abortion, but recognizes the fact that in some circumstances abortion is the lesser of two evils, and should be practiced.

"Abortion if necessary but not necessarily abortion. Under certain circumstances the Presbyterian church feels that abortion is permissible, but it is not recommended as a general line of action".
On the issue of euthanasia, one of the four said that she had no idea what the Presbyterian Church felt about it. Another said

"I would suspect we're against it, but I don't remember reading anything about it".

Both other ministers said they thought the Church was definitely against it, but one added that

"there is some point at which there is dignity to death and that, you know, where the family will say, yes, it's time to stop the life support - and I believe that that's the Church's position. But not active euthanasia".

In summary, one of the five ministers interviewed was very familiar with the Presbyterian stand on each of these issues, and the reasoning behind these positions. Of the other four ministers, the area they were most knowledgeable about was capital punishment, as all knew the Church is against the death penalty, and knew the reasons why. The areas the ministers were least knowledgeable about was euthanasia, and they tended to feel that the church was against euthanasia under all circumstances. All felt that the Church was generally against abortion, but were rather vague about any exceptions to this.

**Personal Opinion.**

The focus of this section was on whether the personal opinions of the ministers on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia co-incided or differed from that of the Presbyterian Church's position, and what was instrumental in helping the ministers to form a personal opinion on these issues.
All of the ministers felt free to disagree with the Presbyterian Church's position on these issues, and they did not in any way feel pressured into conforming to the Church's policy statements. One minister commented that,

"Sometimes I hide behind the church's position on these things, then I don't have to argue for myself. But I do feel free to disagree with the church's position".

On the issue of capital punishment, four of the five ministers said they fully agreed with the Church's current stand against capital punishment. One minister said that he could see arguments both for and against capital punishment, and that in his congregation this was far from a resolved issue. He commented that,

"Capital punishment is always a crisis in my congregation. If you've got police officers and fire fighters and the likes of that, well, then this is far from a dead issue. Any policeman who lays their life on the line, they want capital punishment back".

On the issue of abortion there was a variety of opinion. All of the ministers agreed that there are some circumstances in which abortion is the best solution. Three of the ministers said that they feel comfortable with the Church's position that abortion is to be avoided except when the life and health of the mother are at risk. One minister said that he likes Fletcher's situation ethics, and that he tries to approach the issue of abortion from each person's point of view or situation.

"I have to enter into a person's world. And if I'm going to bring them to any understanding it will be through discussion and their decision - it will not be "this is the perspective I'm coming from". Generally I'm opposed to abortion - life is sacred - but there are so many situations where not to have an abortion has tragic consequences".
The fifth minister said that

"I would be a bit more liberal than the Presbyterian position - I don’t think abortion is a good method of birth control, but I think I would think more along the lines of the choice of the mother - realizing of course that fathers do like to have something to say as well".

On the issue of euthanasia, I told each minister that although no official policy statement on euthanasia had as yet been established by the Presbyterian Church, the person responsible for the formation of such statements, Dr. Ray Hodgeson, has said that he feels it is likely that such a policy statement will be made in the next couple of years, and it is likely to be along the lines that the Church supports passive euthanasia, but is against active euthanasia. It was to this position that the ministers responded in the interviews.

All five of the ministers said they were in favour of the practice of euthanasia, and all of them said that under some circumstances they are in favour of active euthanasia, although some cautioned about the potential abuse of this.

"I think there are dangers with active euthanasia which everybody is worried about, but I think there are situations in which it certainly makes sense....The situation has changed from earlier days, and now we can be kept alive by modern medicine, where in a situation of nature shall we say, we would be long since dead. So what euthanasia is doing is perhaps just redressing the balance".

One minister commented that he did not think there was always a valid distinction between passive and active euthanasia.

"I think probably euthanasia is the thing that the church wrestles with the most. Sometimes I look at people in hospital, and I think those tubes should be removed, or they should not have been inserted in the first place - but there must be a point where cutting life support is the only thing to do. You know, I
don't think it's as clear cut as saying, this is active, this is passive - I have problems with this - I don't know, I just wonder if the Church has thought this through enough".

All of the ministers felt that personal involvement and experience was the most influential factor in the formation of their personal opinions on these issues. All felt that the Bible was helpful in providing principles and guidelines, but that these did not point to clear cut answers to these ethical dilemmas. As far as the material put out by the Presbyterian Church is concerned, it was felt that the information on capital punishment was clear and easy to follow. However, it was felt that the material on abortion and euthanasia was "rather woolly" and that is was difficult to know what the Presbyterian Church was saying. Comments were along the following lines:-

"The material is not written up very clearly. Perhaps we're afraid of what happens when people do find out the church's position....It would be good if statements could be written up in ways that could be understood by people without 16 years of philosophy.....I think the Presbyterian Church's positions are rather vague - I think this is typical as Presbyterians - you know, we're not awfully bold. We don't like to get into hot water. So I think we've got very well thought out positions, but I think we've opted for the prudent - we're like Canadians rather than Americans - we're not going to blaze any trails - we go for the prudent rather than the innovative".

In summary, four of the five ministers were against capital punishment, and one said he can see both sides of the issue. All of the ministers felt that abortion is wrong and should be avoided if possible, but none of the ministers were against abortion under all circumstances. One of the ministers felt it should be primarily up to the woman to decide. On the issue of euthanasia, all of the ministers were in favour of the practice
of euthanasia, and felt that at times active euthanasia was the right thing to do.

**Personal Involvement.**

The focus of the questions in this section was on whether the participants had had any personal involvement, either directly or through helping other people, with capital punishment, abortion or euthanasia. The question was also raised of whether, when in a situation of counselling people, ministers try to persuade them to their point of view, and if ministers continue to help and minister to people who choose a course of action which conflicts with the ministers own opinion.

On the issue of capital punishment, only one of the five ministers reported personal involvement. He told of working with policemen and firefighters in his congregation who had strong opinions, because of their working experiences, that capital punishment is necessary both as a just punishment and as a prevention against further violence by the same person.

With regard to abortion, two of the ministers said that they had had no experiences of counselling people either considering an abortion or having had one. The other three ministers had all been in at least one situation of counselling people who were considering abortion, or who had had an abortion. In all of these cases the reason or potential reason for the abortion was that the women did not want to have the baby.
One of the ministers recounted how a direct experience with abortion really forced her to come to terms with this issue. The minister was involved with counselling a young woman who was pregnant and wanted an abortion. The minister went through all the possible alternatives with the woman, at the end of which the woman still wanted an abortion. This left the minister in a dilemma.

"She was right on the deadline for an abortion. So I hadn’t a clue what to do. I got together with three other women from the congregation, and we talked about it, and none of us were in favour of abortion in principle....If we abandoned this girl, she had nobody else to be with her - we were in a sense her surrogate mothers. So we were caught between our Christianity as we understood it which said abortion is wrong, and our Christianity as we understood it which said love your neighbour and this girl is in a jam - don’t walk out on her. And so we decided that we would walk through the abortion with her. We saw her into hospital, and we sat with her during the process. She had the abortion, and we still continue to minister to her....The point of what I’m saying is that we had to face this question in practical terms - we did explain that there were other alternatives, but in the final event it was her choice and we decided to support her in that choice. Sometimes we have to choose between two wrongs, and we have to choose the lesser".

With regard to euthanasia, all of the ministers had had fairly extensive personal involvement, either with members of their congregations, or with their own families. All of the ministers felt that it was this personal involvement that helped them think through the issues involved in euthanasia, and that it was very influential in helping them come to some personal conclusions about this issue.

Three of the ministers had been heavily involved in decision making, and on one occasion even implementing, euthanasia. One
minister talked about the effect euthanasia can have on the family as he described a situation involving active euthanasia.

"After she had had the shot I felt very cheated, because I would have liked to have had her for another few weeks. But it was what she wanted - she didn't want to go through the pain and indignity of those last few weeks, and now I think she had every right to die....basically it was just medicine keeping her alive. So....I've felt the pain of euthanasia, and I thought I was cheated, but I wasn't really. That's selfishness. To want her for those few weeks. And once I got over that, I felt it was O.K."

Two of the ministers felt that their personal involvement has led them to the position of being in favour of active euthanasia, although both were ready to admit to the dangers and possible abuses of this.

"I think its O.K. for cancer patients who only have a few weeks left, and are in pain, to request death. I don't deal well with pain, and when I see people suffering, and there's no hope of them getting better, I can't stand that. That's one of my biggest theological questions. Sometimes I think I get glimpses of answers, but then not really. Often when death comes it's such a huge relief. I can understand suffering in order to make you into a stronger better person, but suffering and then you die - that I can't understand".

Another minister commented that he often sees his role in counselling the family towards a position of allowing their loved one to die, if they have expressed this wish.

"I work quite hard so that at the appropriate time, the family will give the person permission to die, even as a result of euthanasia".

In answer to the question of whether ministers try to persuade people to conform to their own position on these issues, all of the ministers replied that they do not.

"I try to explain all the ramifications of all decisions. But then I support the person in their
decision, and I still try to minister to them. And if things don't go right, I don't say "I told you so", but I try to help the person come to terms with whatever the situation is".

Another minister commented,

"I talk to people quite a lot about various options, and even about what I personally think, and perhaps make them aware that what they are considering doing might not be happily received by their friends and family, and society in general, but then I respect their conscience, in whatever decision they finally make, and I try to support them through the consequences".

In summary, all of the ministers have had extensive personal experience in euthanasia, less experiences with abortion, and very little regarding capital punishment. In all cases, the ministers felt that their personal experiences have been the single most influential factor in helping them come to personal opinions on these issues.

**Methods of Communicating and Teaching.**

The material on which this section focussed was the role ministers play in communicating the official positions of the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and what role the church should play in educating and teaching people about these issues.

In response to the question "Do you ever preach on any of these ethical issues?" none of the ministers said they had, and only one said she would be comfortable with doing so.

"I think the pulpit is the place where one should speak about these things. We should certainly speak about these things. We should be able to say we don't know definite answers, but we should say how we feel about these issues".
The other four ministers said they thought small group studies were a better way of dealing with ethical issues, as there could be teaching as well as two-way discussion.

"If I preached, it would not be from a right or wrong perspective, it would be from compassion for people who are going through that dilemma. I had a classmate who preached on abortion, and he said how wrong it was for anyone to have an abortion, and he could just see women out there squirming - eyes filling up with tears - and he felt he had set them straight, but that kind of thing just makes me shiver - I think that's wrong."

Another minister commented that he had a problem about ethical issues because they are so complex that it always results in mis-understanding, or in somebody getting hurt. Somebody else pointed out that preaching about these issues almost invariably comes across as condemning, and this is not helpful.

"No, I don't preach on these issues. We have to go out and find hurting people rather. If somebody is pregnant, or somebody is dealing with capital punishment, or somebody is dying and wanting out, Christ loves them all. That's the theology I'd really like to see. We don't appear wishy washy - we say that life is very precious, and we value it, but try to understand people in their circumstances. We're a condemning church, and that's why usually people only come after the fact. Christians are known to be amongst the most critical people. The church is the last place to go if you're in trouble. We urgently need to change this situation, and I don't think preaching from the pulpit on things like this will help at all."

When asked the question of whether local churches should offer workshops and seminars on these ethical issues, there was a variety of responses. One minister said that he felt that people were not that interested in discussing ethical issues. Another commented that he felt the church should not offer these kinds of workshops, as there is already enough of that offered by schools
and secular agencies. The other three ministers all felt that the church should be involved in holding seminars and workshops on topics such as abortion and euthanasia.

"As far as euthanasia goes, people don't know what to think because our culture hasn't dealt with it. It's the same as cremation. Sometimes I think we make God too small, and we try to reduce Him to our level. Certainly I think the Church must always uphold life as precious, of value, as life from God the creator. But I think too that we have to understand when life is not precious any more. I know that opens up a whole can of worms, but maybe that's just what we need to do".

One minister commented that although she thinks the Church should offer workshops on these topics, you have to be a brave minister to do it!

"I think the Church should take a lead in educating people about different perspectives on these issues. This should be done through small group activities. But I've avoided doing this because it polarizes people. There are always a few people who have really strong views, and they will always be the ones who will get involved, and there will be things said that will cause splits. So I run away, and I basically avoid it, because I don't want to have to do all the patching up".

When asked how members of local congregations were informed about the Presbyterian positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, all of the ministers agreed that it is difficult to do this. The most effective method of communication is through the Presbyterian Record, which is a monthly magazine published by the Presbyterian Church, and mailed to all members of the Presbyterian Church. There are frequently articles in this magazine about ethical issues, including capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. It was agreed that the study material provided by the Presbyterian Church is rather complicated to
understand, and it would be difficult for a lay person to find out from this material what the Presbyterian thinking is on these issues. While all of the ministers felt it would be a good idea to have study groups on these issues, only one of the five Churches has in fact done this, with considerable interest shown in these studies.

All of the ministers agreed that it was appropriate for the Presbyterian Church to attempt to have some influence in shaping political and community opinions on these issues, but it was felt that this should be done by the staff at the head office in Toronto, and should take the form of acting on recommendations made at the annual General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church.

In summary, all of the ministers felt that the best way of dealing with ethical issues is by having small group studies, where two-way communication is possible. Only one of the five ministers felt it was appropriate to preach on issues like capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. There was varied opinion on the most effective way to communicate the Presbyterian positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia to the local members of congregations, but it was agreed that this was not an easy or simple thing to do.

**Interviews with Lay Members of the Presbyterian Church.**

The content of these interviews will be reported under the following four headings:— knowledge and understanding of the Presbyterian positions; personal opinion; personal involvement,
and perceived role of the church in dealing with capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia.

1. Knowledge and Understanding.

Each participant was asked what his or her understanding was of the Presbyterian position on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia.

Two of the participants knew that the Presbyterian Church is against capital punishment. Two knew the position of the church on abortion as a result of a small group study they had attended at their church. Apart from this, none of the participants knew what the Presbyterian position is on any of the three ethical issues under discussion. Responses took the form of "I have no idea" or "I havn't the faintest clue".

In view of this response, all the participants were asked to guess what they thought the official Church positions would be. All of the participants said that they guessed the Presbyterian Church was against capital punishment, against abortion, and against euthanasia. They all felt the church was against capital punishment and euthanasia under all circumstances, and eight people guessed the church is against abortion under all circumstances, while four said they thought the church would allow abortion in cases of rape and the health of the mother.

In response to this section, there were no differences in the replies according to age.
2. Personal Opinion.

The questions that were asked in this section were, "What is your personal opinion on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia?" "What has influenced your thinking on these issues?" and "Do you feel free to disagree with the Church’s position on these issues, and still remain active in the Church?"

On the issue of capital punishment, four of the participants said that they were personally against capital punishment.

"I don’t believe in capital punishment because - like the person might be young, and maybe they had a really bad life, but there’s always the possibility they might improve. But if they’re killed, there’s no chance".

"I don’t think capital punishment does any good - certainly not to the person it’s punishing! And I think it hardens the person that is doing the punishing, as well as society as a whole".

Two people felt that they were against capital punishment, but they were equally against long term imprisonment, so they felt if these were the only two options, possibly for some people capital punishment is better.

"I don’t think capital punishment is right, but I think its pretty sick that somebody gets put in prison for years and years".

Three people thought that the law should provide for the possibility of using the death penalty, but that each case should be taken individually, and that while some murderers should be punished by the death penalty, others should not.

"I think we should take each situation individually. There are too many people caught in the cracks, often with extenuating circumstances. So for some people who
murder, capital punishment is not appropriate, but for others it is".

Three people said that they were in favour of capital punishment. The major reason given for this opinion is that life imprisonment, or long term imprisonment, is inhumane and cruel, far more so than is capital punishment. They said that the procedure for appeal is also cruel, as it takes so long, and that we should have a system whereby once somebody has been convicted of murder, they should be put to death immediately.

"I think that a finding of guilt for premeditated murder at the highest level of court should lead to the person being put to death, right there and then. They should be taken out and shot, or whatever, immediately. I know this sounds harsh and cruel, but it's more humane than making them wait around".

Other reasons given for a pro-capital punishment position were it costs less than long-term imprisonment, and it serves as a deterrent to society. The problem of possibly putting to death an innocent person was acknowledged, but it was felt that no system is perfect, and this is a risk we have to take.

"I realise that when I say I’m in favour of capital punishment, other people will say what about the time when the person is actually innocent, and there are documented cases of people being put to death and later found to be innocent, but to me I have to say the legal system is not perfect, nobody said it was, but then I think it’s just a matter of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. It’s like being in an aeroplane when it goes down and you meet your death that way. Sometimes it happens, it’s unfortunate, and it’s not fair, but it happens".

On the issue of abortion, all of the participants had strong personal opinions. All of them indicated that they felt abortion is a very complex issue, and most of the participants said that
this is something that arouses strong emotional feelings, often leaving people feeling confused and "torn".

All of the participants were against abortion in principle, but all said they felt that abortion was the best course of action in some circumstances, mainly when the health of the mother was at risk, and in the case of rape. The participants in the two youngest age categories, namely 13 - 20 year olds, and 20 - 30 year olds, had the strongest feelings and opinions against abortion. The following comments were made by people in these two age categories.

"I think abortion is wrong, because I don't think people have the right to kill people, whether they're born or unborn. That is really not fair....When the life of the mother is in danger, I guess abortion is still wrong, actually I think it's the same as premeditated murder, but it's more wrong to let the mother die, so in that case you have to choose between two wrong things, and it would be more wrong to let the mother die, so you would have to choose abortion".

"I don't believe abortion should ever be used as a form of contraception, and I think abortion is wrong. The only time I think abortion is justified is in the situation where the health of the mother is in danger. But I do not think abortion is right in the case of rape - rape is wrong, but to respond to that wrong by killing an unborn baby is really terrible".

"I think abortion is wrong, and should be illegal, but not because it's taking a life. I don't see how something can die if it's not born yet. The reason I think abortion should be illegal is that I think it would make people behave more responsibly about sex".

Participants in the two older age categories, 30 - 60, and over 60, all felt abortion was wrong in most circumstances, but they expressed how difficult they found this issue. They all felt abortion is justified in the case of risk of health of the mother, and they had mixed feelings about abortion in cases of
rape, or in situations where something is wrong with the fetus. All of the participants said that they themselves would not have an abortion if something was wrong with the fetus, but that they could understand how, for some people, abortion would be the best response in this situation.

"I don't think abortion is justified just because the woman does not want to go through with the pregnancy. I think methods of contraception are very effective these days, or if there is an unwanted pregnancy, adoption is always possible. People know how to protect themselves, and if they get carried away with the passion of the moment, they have to take the consequences, just like in any other aspect of life".

"I find abortion a very difficult issue. I hate thinking about it, because I think the act of abortion is a terrible cruelty and outrage, and is murdering a baby. But I think that the number of children who come into the world and who have abominable circumstances, and are trapped there... is unspeakable. And the number of young, young people who have children, and just don't know how to look after them -- the child always is the one who suffers - so this is why abortion is such a difficult question".

"I have thought about abortion a lot, and it's such a divisive issue. I don't think abortion should be allowed. And I take that stand not only because I believe it's a violent crime in itself, but there is a way to care for an unwanted child without being a burden on society. I really believe an unborn child has rights, not only legal rights, but the right to live. I think there should be some sort of registry system set up whereby people who are unable to have children can register. And then when somebody is pregnant and does not want the child, they check into the system, and the person who wants the child assumes the rights of the child. This involves paying for everything the mother needed, and if necessary taking care of the mother. And then when the child is born, adopting that child. I think it goes beyond the surrogate parent situation, there are rights there, and if somebody wants to represent the rights of that unborn child, even against the will of the mother, I think she should have to bear that child to full term, even when the pregnancy is as a result of rape. I know that it's a woman's body, and the feeling that we can do what we want with it, but I think the child is a
separate entity, dependent for its life on the mother’s body for a while, but still a separate life. I think that as a human being, as a woman, you have a responsibility to give birth to a child that is in you”.

In summary, all of the participants were against abortion in principle, although all acknowledged that this is a very complex and difficult issue. All felt that the one time abortion is justifiable is when the health of the mother is at risk, and in this situation one has to choose the lesser of two wrongs. Most participants felt that in some circumstances abortion is justifiable in the case of rape or damaged fetus, but that there are better alternatives to abortion, even in these situations. Two participants felt that although they personally are against abortion, there are a large number of situations where the child is in a no-win situation – if they are aborted they have no chance at all, and if they are born their lives are a misery. In considering the rights and wrongs of abortion, all of the participants focussed on the rights of the unborn child, and very little emphasis was placed on the rights of the mother. Considerable emphasis was placed on the responsibility of the mother.

On the issue of euthanasia, all of the lay participants said that they are in favour of some forms of euthanasia. Four people said they are in favour of passive euthanasia, but not active.

"I think it’s all right to switch off a machine and then let the person die naturally. But I don’t think I could sanction any action that actively or directly brings about the person’s death. It goes against everything I think is right. God gives life, and death also. That’s why it’s so traumatic when somebody takes
their own life, because they’re shortening the time God gave them”.

"I think people should be allowed to die with dignity, but I think life is very precious, and even when somebody is terminal, you never know, sometimes miracles do happen. So I think it’s fine to stop all treatment, and let what happens happen, ’cos then there is always a chance the person may live on, but I don’t think it’s right to actively kill somebody, even if they do want death, because then you cut off all chance of recovery".

Eight people said they are in favour of both active and passive euthanasia, as long as both the patient and the family are in agreement.

"I think we are carrying this medical technology thing too far, and that people should be able to choose whether or not they want to continue to live. If they choose to die, they should be helped to die as quickly and painlessly as possible. I applaud the recent decision of Nancy B - I think this is a stepping stone in the right direction".

"I am in favour of both active and passive euthanasia, although to be honest I don’t really think there’s too much difference between them. I think that given the proper legal forms and procedures, ethically there is no difference between the two".

Two of these participants said that they feel that active euthanasia is preferable to passive, because once it has been decided that a person’s life should not be continued, it is better to bring about death as quickly and painlessly as possible.

"I think that euthanasia is a good thing, but I think that active euthanasia is better than passive, because once you’ve decided you want to die, it should be as painless as possible. But I only agree with euthanasia in the case of terminal illness, not for other situations".

In summary, all of the participants were in favour of some form of euthanasia, and eight of the twelve were in favour of
both active and passive euthanasia, provided both the patient and
the family wanted this.

All of the participants said that they felt free to disagree
with the Church’s position on any of these issues and still
remain active in the Church, particularly as most people had no
idea what the Church’s position was!

In response to the question of what has been most
influential in forming personal opinion on these issues, ten of
the twelve participants said that their faith was very
influential. Six of the twelve said that personal experience also
played a big part in helping them form opinions. Six of the
twelve also said that their family upbringing was influential.

3. Personal Involvement.

Personal involvement was defined as either having a direct
experience or an experience through a family member of close
friend with capital punishment, abortion or euthanasia.

None of the participants had had any personal involvement
with capital punishment.

Five of the twelve related personal experiences involving
abortion, and all said that these experiences had caused them to
re-think the issue of abortion. In all cases the participants
said that personal experience made them realise there are no easy
answers to this question, and that when an abortion is being
considered, all courses of action involve some pain and
suffering.
Eleven of the twelve participants related personal experiences involving the issue of euthanasia, and in all cases except for two, these experiences resulted in the participants feeling in favour of euthanasia.

"Before my mother died of cancer, she and I had lengthy discussions, and she wanted to be able to ask the doctor to give her a shot which would kill her, when she decided the time for that had come. She wasn’t sure she was going to be able to get that, so she made sure she had the medication that she needed to end her life when she wanted to. She had to get this medication illegally, but it made things so much easier for her".

"My wife and I talked it all through in the early stages of her cancer, and we decided that the most loving thing we could do for each other is to allow each other to die when life becomes unbearable. So when that time came for my wife, and she was so terribly ill, and we had had all the good times we were going to have, well then... one night she told me she had had enough..... and so I gave her the shot, and I held her, and she died. I don’t talk about it to anyone, but inside of myself I feel this is probably the one truly loving and selfless thing I have ever done".

Two of the participants felt that their involvement with euthanasia left them thinking that a better way of dealing with terminal illness is through pain control, and the use of as many support services as possible, like hospice, counselling services and family support. It was felt that if the patient dies a natural death this is much easier on the family, and that despite pain and suffering, both patient and family can have some good experiences together right to the end.

None of the participants felt that their personal positions on any of these issues is absolute, and all felt that in certain circumstances, alternative viewpoints were justifiable.
4. Perceived Role of the Church.

This section focussed on how the lay participants felt the Church should handle the issues of capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. The questions that were asked were how should the Church communicate with lay people on these issues, what interaction should the Church have with the community at large on these issues, and how could the Presbyterian Church improve on communication between the head office in Toronto and members of local Presbyterian churches.

In response to the question of whether or not the topics of capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia should be preached from the pulpit, eight participants felt these issues should be addressed, and four felt they should not be.

Those who said yes said they felt that it was important for the church to give some clear guidelines on what the Bible said about these issues, and on what the Church felt about them, and that the pulpit was a good place to do this. It was felt that it would be important for ministers not to abuse this situation by espousing their own personal opinions, but they should put forward the official church position, as well as the alternative points of view.

"I'd have to say yes, I think these issues should be preached on from the pulpit, as long as both sides were presented, objectively. The church's view and other views. I see the pulpit as a place where it could definitely impact on the nerve of society."

"I think that the pulpit is a very powerful place, and that it would be very helpful for society in general if the Church had clearly stated and stronger guidelines
about these things. The pulpit is a good place to communicate these kinds of things. A lot of times the Church is where people look for guidance on moral issues."

Those who felt these issues should not be preached about from the pulpit gave as their reasons that these issues are better dealt with in small discussion groups, where there is an opportunity for two-way communication, and the fact that these ethical issues cause division.

"No, I don’t think these issues should be preached on, because I think that they are so divisive that they would split the church. But I do think they should be studied in small groups".

"I don’t think these things should be preached on because that scares away a lot of kids. They think that if the church says not to do it, they’ll do it anyway".

These were a wide variety of responses to the question of how could the church best help people who are facing these issues in their lives, but all of the responses revolved around two things:- the Church needs to get away from the image of being judgmental and unsympathetic to people in a difficult situation, and the Church should hold discussion groups and workshops on these kinds of topics.

"It would be very helpful if the church was more supportive of people who are considering something like abortion or euthanasia. We don’t need to be preached at about it, we need to be understood and supported, emotionally supported, I mean. We wouldn’t feel rejected then".

"I think it’s important that the church have some sort of small group thing on these issues. All ages need it, just to get people thinking about it, and to have an opportunity to discuss it with other people. See how the Church feels about these issues, and have a place to talk about it - that would be great".
"I think workshops open to the public would be very good. Most people need help in thinking these things through, and to have an opportunity to exchange ideas. This is something the Church could do for people".

"I think one of the best things the Church could do would be to hold workshops, open to anybody who wants to come, on a regular basis, on these things. This would also help the public a lot. Then if you were in one of these situations, and you were really confused, then you could go to one of these groups, and it would help".

None of the participants had strong views on whether or not the Church should try to influence Federal legislation on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. Most felt that the Church should express its views to the appropriate politicians, but that it was unlikely that this would have any significant impact.

None of the participants had concrete ideas about how the official positions of the Presbyterian Church could be more effectively communicated to the members of local churches, other than through small group studies, preaching, or the Presbyterian Record.

In summary, the strongest thoughts expressed in this section were that the church should offer small group seminars and workshops on these issues. It was also clearly stated by the lay participants that the Church has an image of being judgmental, with little understanding for people caught in situations where there are no clear cut right or wrong answers.

This chapter has focussed on the primary research. The research methodology was described in terms of the qualitative nature of the study. The content of the interviews with the five ordained ministers was then presented under the following
headings:— knowledge and understanding of the Presbyterian positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia; personal opinion; personal involvement and methods of communicating and teaching. The content of the interviews with the twelve lay members of the Presbyterian Church was then presented under the following headings:— knowledge and understanding of the Presbyterian positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia; personal opinion; personal involvement and perceived role of the Church.

In the following chapter the content of the interviews will be analysed in terms of differences and similarities between perceptions and experiences of ordained and lay people, and in terms of comparison between the official positions of the Presbyterian Church and the experiences of ordained and lay people. The effectiveness of internal communication within the Presbyterian Church, and the interaction between the Church and the community, will be commented on.
CHAPTER 4.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE PRIMARY RESEARCH.

The previous chapter focussed on the primary research, in which the research methodology was presented, and the content of the interviews with five ordained Presbyterian ministers and twelve lay members of the Presbyterian Church was given.

In this chapter the content of these interviews will be discussed and analyzed. This discussion will be under four headings:- effectiveness of internal communication of the official positions of the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia; personal opinion on these issues; causes of personal opinion, and the perceived role of the Church in dealing with capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. The interviews with both ordained ministers and lay people will be discussed under these headings.

1. Effectiveness of Internal Communication Within the Presbyterian Church.

It is the task of the Church and Society Committee, a sub-committee of the Board of Congregational Life of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, to research and formulate policy statements on ethical issues. The staff who do this research and writing work at the head office of the Presbyterian Church, situated in Toronto, and the head office is responsible for presenting its research and proposed policy statements to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, which meets once a year. It is at
the General Assembly that proposed policy statements are adopted, amended or rejected. The Board of Congregational Life then publishes study booklets as well as papers on their research and the resulting policy statements, and this material is then sent to all local Presbyterian Churches. It is up to each individual local Church what to do with this information once they receive it.

It is clear from the interviews, particularly with the lay people, that the internal communication within the Presbyterian Church is extremely ineffective. This miscommunication occurs somewhere in the process of transferring information on ethical issues from the head office of the Presbyterian Church to local members of the Church.

The ineffectiveness of communicating the work done by the head office to local churches was shown by the responses of the participants to the question of what their understanding is of the Presbyterian positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. Of the twelve lay members interviewed, the vast majority simply said that they had no idea what the Church's view on these issues is. None of the lay participants had any idea of what the Church felt about euthanasia, and only two knew the Church's position on capital punishment and abortion.

When the five ordained ministers were asked what they knew of the Presbyterian Church's position on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, only one of the five knew the Church's position on all three of these issues. As indicated in Chapter 3, of the three issues being investigated, the ministers were most
knowledgeable about capital punishment, only one of the five knew with any accuracy what the Church's position is on abortion, and knowledge of the Church's research and guidelines about euthanasia was very vague. Given this situation, it is easy to see that lay people would not be too familiar with the Church's stand on these ethical issues, particularly if they rely on the ministers for their information.

It is noteworthy that when the participants were asked to guess what the Presbyterian position was, the overwhelming feeling was that the Church would be very narrow in its thinking on abortion and euthanasia. This was particularly true on the issue of euthanasia, where all the lay participants and most of the ordained clergy guessed that the Church was totally against all forms of euthanasia. This was in marked contrast to the personal opinions of the participants.

When thinking about the causes of this lack of communication between the head office and local churches, one can immediately reject lack of interest in these topics as a reason for lack of knowledge of the Church's research and positions. From the interviews it became increasingly clear that the lay participants in particular were both interested in and felt emotionally involved in these issues, particularly abortion and euthanasia. This is not surprising in view of the fact that five of the twelve lay people reported personal experiences involving abortion, and eleven of the twelve reported personal experiences involving euthanasia.
One of the causes of the breakdown in communication between the head office and the local churches may be found in the attitude of the ordained ministers to these issues. The ministers certainly indicated that these areas were of interest and relevance to their personal lives, but for various reasons tended to feel that teaching or preaching on these issues was either not a good idea, or was simply not a priority in their ministry. Most of the ministers indicated that they were reluctant to preach on these issues, either because they felt they were too controversial and would cause division within the congregation, or because they felt that preaching was not an appropriate way of dealing with these issues, as it is a one-way method of communication, with no opportunity for discussion. Four of the five ministers felt that it would be a good idea to have small group studies on these topics; however, only one of the five ministers had in fact done this. One of the ministers felt that people were not that interested in these topics, and so would not come to small group studies. This was not borne out at all by the lay participants, all of whom indicated intense interest in abortion and euthanasia, particularly euthanasia. Some of the ministers said that due to the pressure of having to keep up with the day to day running of the Church, it is very difficult to find the time to deal with these issues. This was particularly true of churches with only one minister.

Another possible cause of ineffectiveness of communication within the Presbyterian Church has to do with the way in which the head office writes and presents their research and policy
statements. The format in which this is done is academic and scholarly in many ways, and it is written in a complicated style which is difficult to understand. Some of the ministers certainly alluded to this, remarksing that it would be helpful if the material was written up in a style easily understood by non-academic types! This seems to be particularly true of the material provided by the Presbyterian Church on euthanasia, much of which is written in a style of double negatives, making comprehension slow and difficult. In addition, the material does not give a clear concise summary of what the Presbyterian Church thinks - it rather presents numerous principles which the Church upholds, but does not clearly stipulate what these principles lead to. All of this means that anybody wanting to find out what the Presbyterian Church thinks on these issues, based on the written material provided by the Church, needs to devote a fair amount of time and thought to this process.

2. **Personal Opinion.**

All of the ministers said that they feel free to form their own personal opinions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and do not feel constrained in any way to abide by the Church's official positions.

This became most clear when talking about euthanasia. All of the ministers said they thought the Church would be against euthanasia, and yet all of them said that they personally were in favour of the practice of euthanasia in cases of terminal
illness, where the patient did not wish to live any longer. Several of the ministers were in favour of active euthanasia, although they were also aware of the possible abuses of this.

As far as the lay people were concerned, the question of whether or not they felt free to disagree with the Church's official position was irrelevant, as none of them were familiar with these positions. However, despite the fact that all of the lay people guessed that the Church would be strongly against euthanasia, all of the lay participants said that they personally were in favour of some forms of euthanasia, and eight of the twelve said that they were in favour of both active and passive euthanasia.

Several of the lay participants felt strongly that morally or ethically there is no difference between active and passive euthanasia, but that in practice active euthanasia is preferable over passive. Once it has been decided that a life should be ended, it should be done as quickly and painlessly as possible. The arguments of these participants echo the ideas of James Rachels, who argues strongly in favour of active euthanasia.

"One reason why so many people think that there is an important moral difference between active and passive euthanasia is that they think killing someone is morally worse than letting someone die. But is it? Is killing, in itself, worse than letting die?"\(^1\)

Rachels goes on to argue that if the point of euthanasia is the relief of suffering and the enhancement of human dignity, then in many cases active euthanasia is preferable.

---

A concern about the ever-rising costs of medical care and the lack of funds to pay for it was mentioned by a few of the participants. While nobody felt that this alone was grounds for euthanasia, it was felt that in cases where the patient wishes to die, and where the cost of keeping them alive is high, euthanasia makes sense. This issue is eloquently addressed by Daniel Callahan in his book which addressed the problem of the scarcity of medical resources, but Callahan cautions that as yet there is no evidence that the practice of euthanasia does in fact save any money.

"I am not claiming here that giving people more choice about the manner of their dying could not and will not save money. I am only claiming that there is as yet no good evidence that it will...".\(^2\)

The fact that all of the participants were in favour of some form of euthanasia is in keeping with the findings of a Gallup poll mentioned in Chapter 2, in which it was found that 75% of Canadians favour legalized euthanasia, and only 17% of Canadians are opposed to euthanasia.\(^3\)

None of the participants in the interviews seemed to feel that euthanasia was as difficult an issue as is abortion. All of the participants seemed to feel comfortable with their personal views on euthanasia, and in some cases to act on them when the opportunity called for it, despite the fact that at times this was done with some personal risk.


This was not the case with abortion. All of the participants seemed to find abortion far more of a difficult issue with which to come to grips, and about which to form a personal opinion. This would affirm what Kathleen McDonnell says when she remarks that,

"Abortion is inescapably an emotional issue because it is a "flash point", a meeting place of some of our most basic and contentious views of sexuality and reproduction".4

Interestingly, there was no polarization in the personal views on abortion amongst the participants in this study, as they all felt that they were against abortion. The turmoil arose from the fact that although they were against abortion in principle, many participants said that they could think of numerous circumstances where it was understandable if people choose to have abortions. Many participants spoke with considerable anguish about how difficult they find it is to even talk about this issue, let alone to think rationally about it.

All of the participants, both ordained and lay, said that they were against abortion in principle, and only one of all the participants said that he thought the woman had the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion. All of the other participants felt it was the woman's duty to carry the baby to term, except where her health was at risk. However, despite strong anti-abortion feelings, most of the participants acknowledged that sometimes in life one has to choose between two

evils, and there are situations where abortion is the lesser of the two evils. This seemed to provoke feelings of hopelessness about coming to grips with this issue, because even though participants held strong convictions about why they thought abortion was wrong, they felt morally forced in some situations to support abortion. This, it appears, is an uncomfortable and painful position to be in, but one which the Presbyterian Church acknowledges in its policy statement about abortion, as is discussed in chapter 2.

In view of the fact that society is supposed to be evenly divided over the issue of abortion, it seemed surprising that not a single participant said that he or she is in favour of abortion, at least in principle. This is interesting in view of the work done by sociologists Scott and Schuman,\(^5\) who have done some research on the views of the majority of the American public, who do not take "hard core" positions on abortion. Scott and Schuman found that the majority of the American public are pro-abortion, but support this position, not because they feel strongly about the woman's right to choose, but rather because they hold mixed views about the issue of abortion and do not want to prohibit legal abortion entirely. However, research on attitude strength and social action in the abortion debate has shown that opponents of abortion are far more likely than

proponents to regard the issues as important.\textsuperscript{6} The interviews done in this study with both the ordained and lay people support this finding, as, although none of the participants would consider themselves abortion advocates, in the sense of actively campaigning either for or against abortion, yet all felt the issues surrounding abortion are important, and all had strong thoughts and emotions on this issue.

It is noteworthy that, based on the interviews done in this study, it would seem that although people may have strong anti-abortion thoughts and feelings, these same people are forced, at times, into taking a position in support of abortion, not because they think abortion is right, but because other alternatives present a worse wrong. Possibly if attention was focussed on providing alternative financial and emotional support systems for parents and families with unplanned pregnancies, the issue of abortion would not be such an unresolvable issue for many people.

This dilemma of believing that abortion is in fact killing a life, and yet there are times when this is the best course of action, is well illustrated by Carol Gilligan when she quotes a young abortion counsellor as saying,

"I just couldn't kid myself anymore and say there was nothing in the uterus, just a tiny speck...I struggled with it a whole lot. Finally I had to reconcile myself - I really do believe this, but it is not an easy thing that you can say without emotions and maybe regret - that, yes, life is sacred, but the quality of life is also important, and it has to be the determining thing in this particular case.....I had to be able to say,

"Yes, this is killing, there is no way around it, but I am willing to accept that".7

All of the participants except for one lay person said that they considered the fetus to be a person, and that this is a major factor to be considered when thinking of abortion. All of these people would disagree with the "clump of tissue" argument proposed by Henry Morgentaler and endorsed by Michele Landsberg, who said,

"Let’s get something straight. If a clump of living tissue is a human being, then an acorn is an oak tree and an egg is a chicken and the church would be giving names and funerals to every miscarried fetus".8

Instead, the participants in this study all felt that the fetus is a person with both moral and legal rights, which view is affirmed by Gilligan’s9 remark that we must take responsibility that abortion is terminating life.

All of the participants felt that abortion not only affects the fetus, but also has serious implications for the woman, as abortion is far more than just a simple medical procedure, as is sometimes implied. The work of Kathleen McDonnell is relevant when she comments,

"The abortion issue needs to be re-examined by feminists because society is already doing that....Women's experience of abortion is not being addressed and integrated into the way we talk about the


issue. Many feminists have long acknowledged privately that having an abortion is not the straightforward exercise it sometimes appears to be in our leaflets and slogans. Many women feel alienated from the women's movement because they do not see these feelings discussed or validated".10

The question of capital punishment appeared to be much more of an issue for the lay participants than for the ordained clergy. Only four of the twelve lay people felt that capital punishment was a cut and dried issue, and that it is wrong. Some participants were outrightly in favour of capital punishment, and others felt that although they were not in favour of the death penalty, they were even less in favour of long-term imprisonment. It would appear from these interviews that although people do not get as worked up about capital punishment as they do about abortion and euthanasia, nevertheless capital punishment is far from a dead issue, in the sense that a number of participants felt that it is a good idea as a punishment for murderers. The reasons for this included the concept of deterrence - despite the fact that many much publicised studies have shown that abolishing the death penalty does not cause the murder rate to rise,11,12 as


11 In Canada, the death penalty has not been inflicted since 1962. In 1963 and 1964 the murder rate stayed at 1.4 per 100,000, that is, at the same level as in 1962. After 1963, the murder rate remained almost stationary, even showing a slight tendency to decline. Similar evidence comes from studies done in Holland, Great Britain and the United States. Britain's Royal Commission on Capital Punishment in 1953 stated that they have reached the conclusion that there is no clear evidence in any of the figures which they have examined that the abolition of capital punishment has led to an increase in the homicide rate or that its introduction has led to a fall.
well as the idea of retribution and cost reduction. The fact that a number of people felt that the death penalty acts as a deterrent is in keeping with the study done by Vidmar and Ellsworth,\textsuperscript{13} which is mentioned in chapter 2. This study found that an increase in factual knowledge about the deterrence factor of capital punishment does not bring about a change of opinion on this issue.

While those against capital punishment use the argument that the death penalty is cruel and promotes the very violence we are trying to reduce, those in favour of the death penalty felt that punishment by quick death is the most humane way of treating offenders.

3. \textbf{Influential Factors in Forming Personal Opinion.}

All of the participants, both ordained and lay people, said that without doubt the most influential factor in helping them to form a personal opinion on these three ethical issues was personal experience. This was particularly the case with regard to abortion and euthanasia, where many of the participants described the experience of having thought about these issues in abstract terms and come to some conclusion, and then subsequently

\textsuperscript{12} Sellin, Thorsten. \textit{Capital Punishment.} (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). This study compared States in the United States of America that enforce the death penalty with States that have abolished the death penalty, and found that there was no difference in the murder rates.

being faced with a "real life" situation which caused them to re-
think their opinions, often resulting in a shift in thinking.

Another major influence in forming personal opinion was
faith or belief in God. Interestingly, while people described
their faith as having an integral part in their thinking and
actions, few people, including the ministers, felt that the Bible
was particularly helpful in coming to any conclusions about the
rights or wrongs of a particular issue. It was felt that the
Bible revealed the nature of God, and it pointed to principles
like the sanctity of life, to the value of all people, to God as
the giver and sustainer of life, but that it is often difficult
to know how to apply these principles to specific situations.

When talking about the role of faith in their lives, most of
the participants said that they felt their experience of God has
taught them that God is not bound by rigid rules, as is evidenced
by the life of Jesus. Jesus was able to meet people at their
point of need, for example, in John 4:4-26, when Jesus talked
with the Samaritan woman, and Mark 7:24-30, when Jesus healed
the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman. This means that as
Christians, we are called to love and respect one another, and to
do what is in the best interests of each other. It is this line
of thinking that led some of the participants to support people
going through an abortion, despite the fact that the participants
themselves were against abortion. It is also this way of
thinking that has led all of the participants to feel comfortable
with the practice of euthanasia, without this in any way being
contrary to their Christian faith. A number of people mentioned
that they like Fletcher's situation ethics, because this enables people to act with compassion and understanding, rather than trying to apply an abstract idea to all situations.

All of the lay participants said that they had not found the Church helpful in coming to grips with these issues. They all said that they wished the Church would provide more information, more opportunity for discussion and exchange of ideas, and more teaching on these issues, particularly abortion and euthanasia. Many participants expressed their desire for the Church to be more direct in stating what stand it takes on abortion and euthanasia, as this would be helpful in providing some guidelines for the members of the Church. Most of the lay participants did not feel that the Church has been at all influential on their thinking on these issues, despite the fact that all of them are active and involved in their local church.

4. **Perceived Role of the Church in Dealing With Capital Punishment, Abortion and Euthanasia.**

It became clear from the interviews that the lay participants equated the minister with the church, and when they discussed how "the church" would react to certain situations, what they generally meant was how they thought the minister would react. Given this perception, it is apparent from the interviews that there is a wide discrepancy between how the lay people imagine the Church thinks and reacts to situations involving abortion and euthanasia, and how the ministers in fact do think and react. The lay people tended to feel the Church would be
judgmental, unsympathetic, and rigid in its views, and that the Church would be against abortion and against euthanasia.

In fact, what emerged from the interviews with the ministers was that their views about abortion and euthanasia closely coincided with those of the lay people, and that the ministers all said that what they try to do is to understand the situation from the person's perspective, to give their own personal views when asked to do so, and then to support the person in whatever course of action they choose to take. This approach is reflective of what James Gustafson calls occasionalism, which is an element of existentialism. Occasionalism leads to a view of moral action which emphasises

"the uniqueness of each moment of serious moral choice, in contrast to a view that emphasises the persistent, perduring order of moral life and the continuities of human experience".  

This philosophy is grounded in the conviction that even if there is a moral order of the universe, it is not knowable by human reason. This latter point may explain the frustration experienced by the participants over the issue of abortion, as however much they thought about and struggled with this issue, it seemed impossible to come up with a set of rules which were right in every situation.

All of the ministers strongly indicated that they do not perceive their role as trying to impose their opinions on other people, but that instead they see their role as ministering to

---

people in whatever situation they find themselves. The style of ministry appropriated by all of the ministers was akin to Gilligan's\textsuperscript{15} ethic of care, rather than an ethic of rights. Gilligan stresses that we need to develop a moral ethic that acknowledges that no rights exist in isolation. One of the inherent limitations of an ethics based solely on rights - whether those of the fetus or the mother - is that it is one-dimensional.

"It assumes that we are all, in some sense, atomized individuals with competing rights, rather than beings whose very existence is rooted in profound interconnections with each other".\textsuperscript{16}

Gilligan goes on to say that when considering abortion we need to be brave enough to consider the rights of both the fetus and the mother, as interconnected, and this is what many of the participants seemed to be trying to do.

A number of the ministers were concerned about the way lay people see the Church as judgmental, and expressed with some urgency the need for the Church to dispel this negative image.

The lay people made it clear that they do in fact see the Church as judgmental, and many of them said that they are reluctant to discuss any situations involving abortion or euthanasia with their ministers, because they assume the minister will be "shocked". Despite these feelings on the part of the lay


people, it was equally clear from the interviews with the ministers that whenever they do minister to people in these situations, they are far from judgmental, and instead act with compassion, offering not only emotional and spiritual support, but also practical help.

A story reported in the Toronto Star was very much in keeping with the experiences of some of the ordained ministers. The Toronto Star reported that an evangelical Christian minister and his wife were against abortion, but because of their personal experience with abortion they saw as their role to support people in whatever decision they take. The Toronto Star quoted this Christian minister as saying,

"We still do not favour abortion, but we will never pressure any girl or woman not to have an abortion if that is her decision... We've been there ourselves and now feel that it's too easy for churches simply to add to the guilt of those who have abortions". 17

One reason for the discrepancy between how lay people imagine their ministers will react and how they do in fact react, may stem from the fact that circumstances involving abortion and euthanasia within a congregation are seldom openly talked about, and each case is treated as if it were a unique and isolated incident. This is especially the case with euthanasia, which is increasingly an issue many families have to make some decisions about. All of the ministers reported fairly extensive personal involvement with this issue, and in fact it would seem that it is not an uncommon experience for both ministers and lay people to

be involved in situations where active euthanasia is practiced, usually in the home situation. However, these are not experiences that people talk about, and usually there is an attitude of secrecy about them, even though invariably the people involved feel that they followed the right course of action. This situation makes people feel isolated and alone in their situation, and often people imagine that their circumstances are unique, and that if the fact that some form of euthanasia had been practiced became public knowledge within a congregation, people would be critical and shocked.

The method by which many of the participants make their moral judgments seems to be similar to what Maurice Mandelbaum calls perceptual intuitionism.¹⁸ This procedure for making practical moral judgments stresses that the person making the moral decision, or the moral agent, is responsive to the events in which he or she is participating, and must act accountably in them. From the Christian perspective, God is acting on the agent through the actions of others, and knowing how to act involves an interpretation of events and actions in the light of religious beliefs and theological principles. This approach differs somewhat from a purely situational approach, in that it is not only the consequences of the action that make the action right, but the person also needs to determine what is the most "fitting" response. An example of the use of this approach to practical moral reasoning is the report given in Chapter 3 by the minister

who helped a member of the congregation obtain an abortion, even though the minister was personally against abortion. In this particular situation, the minister interpreted the situation and events in the light of theological principles, and came to the conclusion that in that specific situation, the most fitting response was to help the congregational member to obtain an abortion.

Another reason that people often feel reluctant to talk about their thoughts and feelings about euthanasia within a church context, is that Christians who are in favour of euthanasia seem to have a vague and often unformulated idea that this is against the Christian faith. This was expressed in statements referring to the fact that God is the giver and sustainer of life, and because life is a gift from God it is up to God when to take it away. The thoughts of David Cook were prevalent in the thinking of a number of participants:

"The notion of life as a gift from God brings certain responsibilities. When man is given life, it is in the form of a loan. Our lives do not belong to us. We cannot do what we like with our lives. The created man is a steward of God. He is answerable for the whole of creation and for the way in which he uses and cares for that created order. This must also mean that we are stewards of God with respect to our lives. We are answerable and accountable to God for life itself and how we use that life. We are not free to return the loan whenever we feel like it". 19

When the participants who voiced these thoughts were asked if they thought that life-saving surgery, or anti-biotic medicine, also interfered with God’s plan because they

artificially prolonged life, the most frequent answer was that this was different because we know from the behaviour of Jesus that God approves and encourages healing.

Another Biblical principle that was raised by some of the participants was the concept of redemptive suffering. As Roger Vaughan says,

"There has been a long tradition amongst Christians that pain can be offered to God, and through some mystery contribute to the process of healing in individuals and society. Some may be called to this mysterious ministry...."20

The suffering of Jesus was redemptive in that a positive purpose was fulfilled through it. Some participants expressed the thoughts that they hesitate about active euthanasia because possibly a person's suffering may bring benefit either to themselves or to others.

As far as the role of the Church goes in communicating and teaching about capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, it was clear from the interviews that preaching on these issues is an unsatisfactory method of communication from the ordained ministers point of view; however, eight of the twelve lay participants said they would like it if ministers preached about these issues. These lay people clarified that by preaching on these issues they did not mean that ministers should use this as an opportunity to talk about their own personal opinion on these issues, but that rather they should explain what the Church was thinking and doing about these topics, and why. It was felt that

the pulpit is an appropriate place to do this because many people in the congregation are then exposed to the information, and because these issues are very relevant to people's lives, and to receive some clear teaching about them within the context of Christian faith would be beneficial.

Many of the lay participants felt that the Church should be offering workshops and seminars on these topics, not only for members of the congregation, but also for the public at large. It was felt that this would be something that the Church could do which would be of value to the community. Again, it was stressed that these workshops should in no way be judgmental and "preachy", but rather they should have the role of disseminating information, and providing an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and experiences.

None of the participants seemed to feel particularly strongly about whether or not the Church had a role to play in shaping legislation on these issues or not. The general feeling was that it was probably a good idea for the Church to try to do this, but that it should not be done at the local church level, but rather at the head office level.
Summary of the Information Gained From the Interviews.

1. The internal communication system within the Presbyterian Church is poor, as is evidenced by the fact that the information published by the head office on the issues of capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia is not reaching the lay people of local congregations.

2. The perception of the Church from the lay people’s point of view in connection with capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, is one of being judgmental, narrow and unsympathetic.

3. The ordained ministers saw their role as ministering to and being supportive of people at their point of need, rather than trying to force the Church’s position on to anyone. The ministers felt it was important to deal with each situation as it came along, rather than trying to impose a pre-thought out set of principles on to people.

The advantage of this situationalist approach is that it leads to compassion and understanding of each individual, and to flexibility. One of the disadvantages is that it is difficult for the ministers to articulate what their approach is to these ethical issues, because how they act on any specific issue is largely determined by the specifics of the situation. This is a contributing factor to the poor communication on these topics.
4. All of the participants, both ordained and lay, were in favour of at least passive euthanasia, and a large number were in favour of active euthanasia when it was the desire of the patient and the family. It was clear that euthanasia in one form or another touches the lives of a large number of people, and yet people feel hesitant to talk about it with reference to specific situations.

5. Abortion is the ethical issue that the majority of the participants found the most disturbing and difficult with which to come to terms. Although all of the participants were personally against abortion, it was acknowledged that there are many situations where abortion is the best of a number of bad alternatives.

6. The lay participants expressed the desire for the Church to play a more active role in teaching about capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia. It was felt that the most effective way of doing this is through workshops and seminars which are offered to the public at large.

7. Communication within the Presbyterian Church is set up in such a way that it is difficult for local churches to give regular feedback to the head office about what is happening in the life of the local congregation regarding any of these ethical issues. Although the head office invites such feedback from time to time when it is going through the process of trying to formulate
an official policy position, there is no mechanism whereby local churches can communicate on a regular basis with the head office. The lines of communication are set up from the top down, rather than the other way around, and one result of this is that it is difficult for the head office to reflect the thinking and practice of local congregations.

In the following chapter a summary of the findings of the primary research will be given. Some recommendations on internal communication within the Presbyterian Church will then be offered, followed by some recommendations on pastoral care, counselling and teaching on abortion and euthanasia.
CHAPTER 5.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: first, to examine the position of the Presbyterian Church in Canada on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia and to study how the church arrived at these positions; and second, to ascertain how these positions are communicated to the individual members who make up local Presbyterian churches. In connection with the latter point, the research also included a study of how ordained and lay Presbyterians perceive and experience these three ethical issues, and what Presbyterians perceive the role of the Church to be in dealing with these issues.

The reason that this topic was chosen was because, as a staff member of a local Presbyterian Church, it had become obvious to me that there was a serious problem with the internal communication within the Presbyterian Church, in that it seemed that the information put out by the head office, supposedly for the benefit of members of local Presbyterian Churches, was in fact not getting through to these lay people. As a result, much of the information and research generated by the head office is overlooked or ignored, because many individual members of the Church are unaware of its existence.

A further reason for interest in this topic was that, based on my counselling experience, it was clear that the issues of abortion and euthanasia, particularly euthanasia, are of interest
and relevance to the lives of many members of the Presbyterian Church. However, for various reasons, these people are receiving little help from the Church in dealing with these issues. It was one of the aims of this study to find out why the Church is not providing more help with these topics, and to ascertain what role lay people would like the Church to play.

**Anticipated Results of this Study.**

The results of this study confirm that there is indeed a problem with transferring information from the head office in Toronto to both ministers and lay people of local churches. This was indicated by the fact that only one of five ministers interviewed was familiar with the Presbyterian Church's positions on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and none of the lay people interviewed were familiar with the official positions.

The results of the interviews also confirmed that the topics of abortion and euthanasia are of interest and relevance to lay Presbyterians, but that these lay people do not find the Church helpful in trying to deal with these issues.

**Reasons for these findings:**

A. **For poor communication between the head office and local churches.**

1. The research done by the head office of the Presbyterian Church in Canada on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia is well done in the sense that much time and effort is put into it, and a wide range of authors on these topics are consulted.
However, the material is written up in a style that reads more like an academic textbook than a document meant for information for lay people. Even the ministers, despite their high level of academic training, commented how difficult it is to understand the material published by the Presbyterian Church on these ethical issues. This discourages the use of this material.

2. The way in which the Presbyterian Church is structured lends itself to communication flowing from the top down rather than the other way around. This means that the head office generates research and publishes material which is largely based on the work done by the staff employed at the head office. This information is sent out to local congregations. On some occasions local congregations have been asked to study an issue and send in their response to the head office, but this is infrequently done. As a result, the head office formulates policy statements on ethical issues based on the research done by its own staff members, with very little information gathering from members of local Presbyterian Churches. As a result, lay Presbyterians as well as ordained ministers of local Churches tend to feel far removed from the head office, and often seem to feel mildly hostile to the head office. One effect of this is that when information arrives through the mail from the head office, it either lies around until it gets thrown away, or it gets filed away and never read.

One way in which this problem might be addressed is for the Presbyterian Church to consider some of the theological changes brought about in the Roman Catholic Church by Vatican Council II.
Charles Curran, in an article entitled *The Teaching Function of the Church in Morality*,\(^1\) explains that before Vatican II, the teaching function of the Catholic Church was based on a hierarchical model, which separated the teaching and learning functions, with consequent heavy emphasis on the right to teach with little attention to the responsibility on the teacher to learn. Vatican II changed this hierarchical model by providing an understanding of the Church as a communion and as the people of God, and along with this way of thinking came the concept of the decentralization of authority, with emphasis on dialogue and participation. As Curran says,

"We must be more willing to be open to learning from other Christians and all human beings. Clergy and laity are now much better educated and informed. The laity have their own areas of competence".\(^2\)

Curran goes on to explain that as a result of this kind of approach a new understanding of teaching has emerged in the Catholic Church, and that this renewed approach has three characteristics: the learning process forms an integral part of the teaching process; teaching must be a multidimensional function with the judgmental being only one aspect; the teaching function involves the participation of many people, not just that of the hierarchy.

If the Presbyterian Church were to adopt a model similar to the one described by Curran, this would have a number of positive

---


effects. It would encourage dialogue between the head office and local congregations, and in this way the knowledge and experience of lay people could be utilized and reflected in the information published by the head office. In addition, this would promote a feeling of responsibility and participation amongst lay people, which would discourage the current perception of the head office as a body trying to impose its thinking on local congregations. It would also encourage lay people to consider the information from head office as relevant to their lives, as they would have had an opportunity to contribute to the ideas in the material.

B. For the perception of the Church as unhelpful in dealing with capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia.

1. Lay people perceive the Church as judgmental and narrow in its thinking. This was indicated by the fact that when the lay participants were asked to guess what they thought the Church's position was on abortion and euthanasia, they all guessed that the Church would be against euthanasia, and most guessed that the Church would be against abortion. Most lay people equated the Church with the minister, and they felt that the minister would be unsympathetic and inflexible in his or her views on these moral issues, and would be judgmental and critical of anybody who might be considering an abortion or euthanasia. Given this perception of the Church, it is unlikely that lay people would even turn to the Church as a source of help in dealing with these kinds of problems, and this would naturally lead to the feeling that the Church is unhelpful.
2. Based on the interviews of the ordained ministers, this perception of the Church as judgmental and unsympathetic is a mis-perception. Both the personal opinions and the practical experience of the ministers indicated that they are compassionate and flexible when dealing with these issues, particularly abortion and euthanasia. However, ironic as it might be, it is a possibility that this compassion and effort to try and understand each situation from the other person's point of view, is one of the key reasons for the way lay people perceive the Church. Many of the ministers said that they adopt a situation ethics approach when counselling people about abortion and euthanasia, and all the ministers were very reluctant to come across as trying to force their own views onto anybody else. This approach, while good in many ways, has the disadvantage that ministers are reluctant to articulate their own views and opinions on these issues, or to talk about any general principles concerning abortion or euthanasia, instead always stressing the uniqueness of each situation. A number of ministers expressed their hesitation in addressing these issues because it so easily results in misunderstanding, or in divisiveness amongst the congregation. Because of this, ministers tend to work with each individual as an isolated case, seldom expressing in public their thoughts and feelings about moral issues.

In contrast with this silence on abortion and euthanasia, ministers are outspoken on concepts like the sanctity of life, a sovereign God as the giver and sustainer of life, it is wrong to kill, sex outside of marriage is wrong, and that babies are gifts
from God to be loved and nurtured. All of these concepts, coupled with general silence on the issues of abortion and euthanasia, lead to the widespread assumption amongst lay people that the Church would be unsympathetic to any thoughts in favour of abortion or euthanasia, irrespective of the circumstances. Hence the perception of the Church as judgmental.

**Unanticipated Results of the Study.**

1. Perhaps the single most startling finding from the interviews which was not anticipated at the beginning of the study, is the participants’ opinions and experiences of euthanasia. All of the ministers and all of the lay people were in favour of some form of euthanasia, and eight of the twelve lay people were in favour of active euthanasia. All of the ministers reported some personal involvement in euthanasia, and eleven of the twelve lay participants related personal involvement with euthanasia. Given this high degree of involvement with this issue, it is interesting to note that all of the lay people and a number of ministers guessed that the Church would be against all forms of euthanasia. Because the Church is viewed in this way, almost all of the participants expressed that they are very reluctant to talk about their experiences of euthanasia, and each of them seemed to feel that their experiences were isolated incidents which only occurred very infrequently, at least amongst Christians.
2. Personal involvement in the issue of abortion was less pervasive than with euthanasia; however, the participants expressed more emotional turmoil and anxiety over the issue of abortion. While the majority of participants seemed to have come to a well-formed personal opinion about euthanasia which they felt comfortable with, most participants, while indicating that they are personally against abortion, at the same time acknowledged what a painful and difficult issue this is, and that there are no easy answers. Of the three issues covered in the interviews, abortion was the one about which the participants most felt the need for some teaching and guidance from the Church.

3. None of the participants, either ordained or lay, felt under any pressure whatsoever to conform to the Church's official positions on any of these topics. This then raises the question of what purpose is served by the Church formulating policy statements on ethical issues. Based on the interviews in this study, none of the participants would want to be in a position where they felt pressured into conforming to the Church's position. However, they would value knowing what position the Church holds, how it came to this stand, and why. This would be helpful, especially to the lay people, in sorting through these complex issues and coming to some conclusions which are compatible with their Christian faith.

4. The majority of lay participants felt it would be very helpful if the Church were to hold workshops and discussion
groups on ethical issues, at which the position of the Church was explained, as well as alternative points of view, and where discussion and exchange of ideas and experience was encouraged.

**Recommendations.**

1. The research done by the head office on ethical issues should include more direct feedback from local Presbyterian congregations across Canada. This research should try to reflect how lay Presbyterians think about and experience these issues. This would not only be in line with the thinking put forward by Curran\(^3\) as described earlier in this chapter, but would also be in keeping with theological principles which are very familiar to Presbyterians, such as the Church as the body of Christ,\(^4\) the teaching that all Christians have spiritual gifts,\(^5\) and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.\(^6\)

2. The head office of the Presbyterian Church should write up the results of its research, as well as the policy statements of the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, in a format that

---


\(^4\) 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.

\(^5\) Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and Ephesians 4:11-13.

\(^6\) 1 Peter 2:9.
clearly states what the Presbyterian position is, with the main reasons why, listed in point form. This should be done in language that is easy to read, without direct quotes from academic sources. This material should be made readily available on a regular basis to all members of the Presbyterian Church, for example, kept in local Church libraries, displayed on book tables after the worship service, handed out to new members, taught as part of the Sunday School curriculum.

3. In addition to the above, the head office of the Presbyterian Church should continue to publish its research and policy statements in a detailed and scholarly format, so that those people who are interested in a more in-depth study would have this material available.

4. Presbyterian ministers of local congregations need to find a way of overcoming the perception of the Church as judgmental and inflexible. One way of doing this is by ministers communicating to their congregations both the official positions of the Presbyterian Church on the issues of capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, as well as their own thoughts, feelings and experiences of these issues.

5. Hospital visitors and pastoral care teams, which are comprised of lay people, should be given an opportunity to explore these ethical issues as part of their training sessions. This training should include
teaching on the official Church positions, information from the minister about his or her thoughts and experiences, particularly on abortion and euthanasia, and opportunity for discussion and sharing on the part of the lay participants.

6. Local Presbyterian Churches should offer workshops and seminars on the issues of abortion and euthanasia which are advertised in the community and open to the public. This could be done on a Presbytery level rather than a local congregation level.

7. The Presbyterian Church needs to acknowledge that euthanasia is an issue which is relevant to the lives of the majority of its members, and that a large proportion of Presbyterians are not only in favour of euthanasia, but are involved in situations where euthanasia is practiced. This situation needs to be brought into the open so that, instead of people going through these situations in isolation, with an attitude of secrecy, the Church can give teaching and provide support.
APPENDIX # 1.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR ORDAINED MINISTERS.


Investigator:  Mary Templer, Graduate Student, Department of Religious Studies, University of Windsor.

Institution:  University of Windsor, Department of Religious Studies.

This consent form is meant to give you the basic idea of what the research project is about, and what your participation will involve.  If you would like to know more about the project, or would like more information about the subject material, you are welcome to ask.

The purpose of this research is to explore the position taken by the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and also to see how both ministers and lay people perceive these topics.  This interview is in no way a test of your knowledge of these subjects, but rather it is a time to express your thoughts, experiences and feelings about these ethical issues.  The findings may suggest some changes that could be made in the way the Presbyterian Church communicates this kind of information, and in teaching and counselling procedures used by the Church.

The procedure for research will be an interview through informal questions and discussion.  A tape recorder will be used to record the interviews.  Confidentiality of the subject will be maintained by erasing the tapes after they have been transcribed by the investigator.  The names of the subjects will not be used.

Despite these precautions, there is a possible risk of identification of the ordained ministers participating in this study.  As five ministers will be interviewed, there is a one in five chance of identification.

Participation will involve a single time commitment of about one hour.  The interview will be conducted in a place and at a time convenient to the subject.  Should the subject desire a second meeting, or some kind of follow-up as a result of material raised in the initial interview, the investigator will be
available, and the subject should feel free to request this if desired.

The participant may find that talking about experiences with abortion or euthanasia is beneficial. The results of this study may lead to more effective ways for the Presbyterian Church in Canada to address these issues.

The investigator was trained as a social worker, and is presently a staff member of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Windsor.

The thesis will be directed by Dr. Maureen Muldoon, Department of Religious Studies, University of Windsor. The results will be made available to the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and to the participant upon request.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and/or to refrain from answering any questions.

Any complaints regarding any procedure used that you feel violates your welfare should be reported to the Office of Research Services (253-4232 x 3916) for referral to the Ethics Committee, University of Windsor.

My signature on this form indicates that I have understood to my satisfaction the information regarding my participation in the research project and that I agree to participate as a subject.

-----------------------------
Name of Participant.

-----------------------------
Signature
APPENDIX # 2.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR LAY PARTICIPANTS..


Investigator: Mary Templer, Graduate Student, Department of Religious Studies, University of Windsor.

Institution: University of Windsor, Department of Religious Studies.

This consent form is meant to give you the basic idea of what the research project is about, and what your participation will involve. If you would like to know more about the project, or would like more information about the subject material, you are welcome to ask.

The purpose of this research is to explore the position taken by the Presbyterian Church on capital punishment, abortion and euthanasia, and also to see how both ministers and lay people perceive these topics. This interview is in no way a test of your knowledge of these subjects, but rather it is a time to express your thoughts, experiences and feelings about these ethical issues. The findings may suggest some changes that could be made in the way the Presbyterian Church communicates this kind of information, and in teaching and counselling procedures used by the Church.

The procedure for research will be an interview through informal questions and discussion. A tape recorder will be used to record the interviews. Confidentiality of the subject will be maintained by erasing the tapes after they have been transcribed by the investigator. The names of the subjects will not be used.

Participation will involve a single time commitment of about one hour. The interview will be conducted in a place and at a time convenient to the subject. Should the subject desire a second meeting, or some kind of follow-up as a result of material raised in the initial interview, the investigator will be available, and the subject should feel free to request this if desired.

The participant may find that talking about experiences with abortion or euthanasia is beneficial. The results of this study may lead to more effective ways for the Presbyterian Church in Canada to address these issues.
The investigator was trained as a social worker, and is presently a staff member of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Windsor.

The thesis will be directed by Dr. Maureen Muldoon, Department of Religious Studies, University of Windsor. The results will be made available to the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and to the participant upon request.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and/or to refrain from answering any questions.

Any complaints regarding any procedure used that you feel violates your welfare should be reported to the Office of Research Services (253-4232 x 3916) for referral to the Ethics Committee, University of Windsor.

My signature on this form indicates that I have understood to my satisfaction the information regarding my participation in the research project and that I agree to participate as a subject.

----------------------------------
Name of Participant.

----------------------------------
Signature.
APPENDIX # 3.

INTERVIEW WITH ORDAINED MINISTERS.

The interviews will be unstructured and discussion oriented, and the following questions serve as a framework upon which to base the interviews.

1. Knowledge and Understanding.

   What is your understanding of the Presbyterian position on:-
   a. Capital punishment.
   b. Abortion.
   c. Euthanasia.

2. Personal opinion.

   a. What is your personal opinion on:-
      i. Capital punishment.
      ii. Abortion.
      iii. Euthanasia.

   b. Do you see any connection between these three issues?

   c. Do you feel free to disagree with the Church’s position on these issues?

   d. What has been instrumental in helping you form your opinion on these issues? the Bible? Your colleagues? Media and literature? Personal experience?
3. Personal involvement.
   a. Have you had any personal involvement with any of these
      issues, either directly or through experiences of close
      family or friends?
   b. Do you discuss the question of euthanasia or advance
      directives with members of your church?
   c. When counselling people who are considering either
      abortion or euthanasia, do you try to persuade them to
      your point of view, or in the end do you support them in
      whatever decision they come to?

4. Methods of communication and teaching.
   a. Do you sometimes preach on abortion or euthanasia?
   b. What part do you play in communicating the official
      position held by the church on these issues to the
      members of your church?
   c. Do you think local churches should offer workshops and
      seminars on these topics?
   d. What role do you think the church should play in shaping
      political and community opinions on these issues?
APPENDIX # 4.

INTERVIEW WITH LAY PEOPLE.

The following areas will be explored in the interview, although the material will not necessarily be covered in the same order in all interviews. Questions will not be put in a formal way to the subjects, but will serve as a framework for the interviews.

1. Knowledge and understanding.
   What is your understanding of the Presbyterian position on:-
   a. Capital punishment.
   b. Abortion.
   c. Euthanasia.

2. Personal opinion.
   a. What is your personal opinion on:-
      i.  Capital punishment.
      ii. Abortion.
      iii. Euthanasia.

   b. What has influenced your thinking on these issues? The Bible? Church teaching? Media and literature? Community opinion? Family influence? Personal experience?
c. Do you feel free to disagree with the Church's position on any of these issues, and still remain active in the Church?

3. Personal involvement.
   a. Have you had any personal involvement with any of these issues, either directly or through experiences of close family or friends?
   b. Does or would personal involvement affect your stand or opinion on these issues?
   c. Is your position on these issues "absolute", or do you think exceptions should be made according to circumstances?

4. Perceived role of the church.
   a. Should these issues be preached on from the pulpit?
   b. Should the church try to influence legislation and community thinking on these issues?
   c. Should the church offer workshops and seminars on ethical issues?
   d. How could the church best help people facing these issues in their lives?
   e. How could the church improve on communication between the head office in Toronto and members of local Presbyterian Churches?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Gustafson, James. "Basic Ethical Issues in the Biomedical Fields", in *Theology and Christian Ethics*.

Gustafson, James. "God’s Transcendence and the Value of Human Life", in *Christian Ethics and the Community*.


Keyserlingk, Edvard. *Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life in the Context of Ethics, Medicine and Law*. 


VITA AUCTORIS


1977 – Postgraduate Diploma in Marriage Counselling – University of South Africa.