

October 27, 2022

Ken Paxton, Attorney General of Texas
PO Box 12548
Austin, TX 78711-2548

Dear Attorney General Paxton:

The purpose of this letter is to petition, as Christians, for the exercise of our religious freedom to provide information, funding, transportation, and accompaniment for those seeking abortion services in other states.

The Biblical/Theological Foundation

The basis for opposition to abortion most often focuses on the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, also known as the *Tanakh*, rooted in our foundational faith, Judaism. This text is thousands of years old, existing well before the birth of Jesus. It has been reflected upon and discussed over those centuries and is best interpreted within the Jewish faith. By treating the Old Testament holistically rather than picking a verse here and there, our understanding is that the zygote, embryo, and fetus are considered part of the mother's body until first breath. Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 37 support that the basis of 'life' is 'breath' (Hebrew: *nephesh*) as opposed to verses addressing the creation of the vessel that are often cited (Psalms 139:13; Jeremiah 1:5; or Isaiah 44:24), neglecting the above.

After the passage of *Roe v. Wade*, W.A. Criswell, First Baptist Church of Dallas' pastor and Robert Jeffress' mentor, and a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said, "I have always felt that it was only after a child was born and had a life separate from its mother that it became an individual person and it has always, therefore, seemed to me that what is best for the mother and for the future should be allowed." In this quote, Rev. Criswell's view mirrors the Jewish interpretation as we understand it.

As followers of Jesus, we look to the Gospels for guidance. Nowhere does Jesus address termination of a pregnancy, even though this is a practice that has existed for centuries. This practice is not included among Jesus's more consequential mandates in Matthew 25:31-46. Among those mandates, Jesus describes actions that make individuals and nations 'accursed' to include oppression of immigrants and failure to care for the sick, but not abortion. Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus express disagreement with the Old Testament connection of life to breath.

The number of verses throughout the Bible that focus on those living in poverty (e.g., "the poor and needy") are estimated by Rev. Jim Wallis to exceed 2000, including

citations of the teachings of Jesus. These verses call upon us to pay special attention to injustices committed against those living in poverty. In addition, Jesus clearly calls upon us to 'serve' rather than 'lord over' others. (Matthew 20:24-28; Luke 22:25-27).

In summary, even as individual Christians hold a range of beliefs regarding when 'life' begins, the Bible does not provide the basis for 'life' to be defined as 'conception' or 'heartbeat.'

God's Revelation

The book of Proverbs instructs us to seek, "knowledge as gold and understanding as silver." As Christians, we believe that science is how God's creation is revealed to us and therefore believe in supplementing our theological understanding with the most accurate information regarding fetal development. Our focus will be on assisting those individuals who are in their first trimester of pregnancy, weeks before the brain has fully developed which is largely considered 24 weeks' gestation at the earliest.

Our Call

On the issue of abortion, non-Catholic Christians are guided by the Bible and sometimes their own denominations, many of which thoughtfully deal with the issue while not prohibiting the procedure. Evangelicals largely adopted an anti-abortion stance in the late 1970s as part of an emerging political movement.

No one should be forced to undergo the termination of a wanted pregnancy. We support those organizations who provide substantial resources to a anyone in such a situation. Unfortunately, we as a state have not committed to providing those resources beyond token amounts of formula and diapers and perhaps some limited and inadequate financial assistance. We strongly support adequate financial assistance.

At the same time, no one should be forced to bear a child, especially in light of our state's tragically high maternal mortality rate. As faithful followers of Christ, we must address the injustice of abortion services being available to those of means who can travel, even if unnecessarily burdensome, while being denied to those of little means. We also are concerned about those in situations in which a pregnancy heightens risk of harm due to intimate partner violence no matter their income level. We cannot stand by as more women and even their children are murdered because a pregnancy provokes a crisis.

Conclusion

As followers of Jesus the Christ, we take seriously Jesus's mandate to consider not only faith but justice and mercy, "the weightier matters of the law." (Matthew 23:23-24) As we encounter injustice and our neighbors being treated unmercifully, we as Christians must serve by acting.