

A Love for Life: Christianity's Consistent Protection of the Unborn,
by Dennis Di Mauro, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009,
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Reviewed by Shannon Kim

Throughout history, abortions have occurred in every culture regardless of their legality. Yet it remains one of the most sensitive and controversial issues today. This divisiveness is peculiar considering the predominance of a religion-free public educational ethos in western culture. *A Love For Life* helps explain why debates revolving around abortion continue. It is in large part due to the compelling Christian argument for the pro-life position.

Di Mauro observes that while science informs the process of human development from conception to death, it does not answer fundamental and philosophical questions about life itself. Di Mauro shows how theological reflections concerning life fills this gap left open by scientific inquiry (xii). The author argues that the Christian perspective on the theological and spiritual dimensions of human life has been undermined by the separation of politics and religion and because of today's social climate that fosters independent decision-making over and against adherence to the consensus of one's religious affiliations. Thus Di Mauro seeks to show the socio-political contributions that religious traditions can make on this complex issue by informing people of the historical and theological perspectives of the pro-life position.

Di Mauro takes an example from the Old Testament for a historical exploration arguing for the importance of life of the unborn. Citing Exodus 21: 22-25, the author shows that any practices that resulted in the death of the unborn child were subject to punishment in Jewish law (2). From chapter two to five, he describes the pro-life tradition in the early Christian church to the Reformation era of categorizing abortion along with other sins like sexual immorality and murder. Abortions induced by drugs or the use of the aborted fetuses for money was equated with the destruction of the marital commitment and even labeled as a form of prostitution (15, 18). Di Mauro quotes notable Christians like Martin Luther who described abortion as the "destruction of God's plan of creation" (25).

Interestingly Di Mauro also describes a pro-choice strain in the Christian tradition which can be traced back to the early church up to the medieval

period. However, the author presents this strain in order to underscore it as a deviation from the largely pro-life tradition in Christian history (24). He describes those Christians who have positive perceptions of abortion as having an “unorthodox” biblical hermeneutic (41). Except in circumstances whereby the unborn baby may cause death to the mother, there is no other exception made for the abortion of the unborn in the Christian tradition. While acknowledging the pro-choice premise that women have the final choice on abortion, Di Mauro sees this fact as highlighting the unique responsibility for women to uphold the pro-life position (43).

Di Mauro examines various denominational positions on abortion, and notes that overwhelming majority (72 percent) adhere to some pro-life stance (100). He takes the pro-life position of the church as indicative of their calling and response to the gospel (105).

While Di Mauro persuasively draws evidence from many ancient sources supporting the pro-life tradition in the church, he seems to minimize the exceptions. For example, in Numbers 5:11- 31, if the husband suspected the wife as being pregnant from another man, the priest was allowed to initiate an abortion with “the bitter water that brings a curse” (verse 18 in NIV). If the wife or fetus was not strong enough to endure the bitter cursed water, the baby was miscarried and the woman’s health deteriorated as the result of the curse (verses 27, 31). Ironically, these verses show that the Christian tradition affirmed a pro-choice stance on abortion to the extent that men were allowed to make the final choices on whether a fetus could live or not. In other words, women were not the only ones who made the final decision on whether to practice abortion or not. Moreover, the Numbers passage implicitly allows for a pro-choice position, particularly in the cases of women being raped and becoming pregnant outside lawful marriage.

Di Mauro’s conscientious pro-life attitude provides important insights from the Christian tradition for believers living in a secular world. Many Christians will be encouraged to have a stronger pro-life identity rooted in this strong and largely unknown tradition within church history.