

ABORTION—A CONTINUING CRISIS

AN UPDATE TO
ABORTION IN PERSPECTIVE (1984)

A REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON
THEOLOGY AND CHURCH RELATIONS

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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Abbreviations

AE	Luther's Works
LC	The Large Catechism
SC	The Small Catechism



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INTRODUCTION

At its 2023 convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) adopted Resolution 3-01, “To Encourage and Support More Fervent Teaching, Proclamation, and Efforts to Promote Culture of Life among God’s People.” It referred to “the reality of legalized abortion” and then “*Resolved*, That the Synod in convention give thanks to God for His unending mercies, especially in overturning *Roe v. Wade*, thus preserving the lives of many unborn children.” Resolution 3-01 also emphasized the need to continue to promote a “culture of life” in keeping with John 10:10.¹ In addition, the convention adopted Resolution 11-04, which noted that “methods and means of elective abortion have changed dramatically since the publication of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) 1984 report *Abortion in Perspective*.” Resolution 11-04 then asked the CTCR to “address the changing nature of abortion.”²

Thanksgiving for the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* ruling is certainly appropriate in that the decision allows states to protect the lives of unborn children. Such action by government is fully consistent with the scriptural understanding that the gift of human life begins with conception in the womb (Psalm 139:13–16; Jer. 1:5; Isaiah 49:1), together with Scripture’s teaching that the most basic responsibility of government is to promote what is good and deter evil (Rom. 13:1–4).

The need for the Synod to address abortion once again has become more evident in the years since *Dobbs* and the Synod’s 2023 convention. Abortion law is now complicated by the fact that *Dobbs* returned abortion legislation to individual states. Any consideration of the morality of specific abortion rulings must now contend with the many unique twists that occur state by state.

Since *Dobbs*, we must also reckon with the fact that both public support for abortion and the actual number of abortions have increased in the United States.

1 LCMS, *2023 Convention Proceedings*, 129.

2 LCMS, *2023 Convention Proceedings*, 223–24.

Personal autonomy and sexual “freedom” seem increasingly to be preferred over the Lord’s gifts of life and love, and increasing numbers of Americans have accepted the malicious trope that “abortion is healthcare” (all the while ignoring the health of the unborn).

As of this writing, several national polls have all shown that support for elective abortion has increased since the *Dobbs* decision. The polls indicate an increase in overall support for legal abortion but with much stronger increases among women and Democrats. The Gallup organization summarizes its 2025 survey: “The net result is that the gender and partisan gaps in Americans’ views on abortion are at historical highs, and the country as a whole has moved slightly left in its abortion views. . . . The public opinion landscape remains more accepting of abortion than it was prior to *Dobbs*.”³ However, while support has seemingly increased, opinions on this volatile issue shift constantly, and the initial jump in support for abortion in virtually all cases that came immediately after *Dobbs* has now declined somewhat.⁴

Regrettably, support for abortion is also high among those claiming to be Christian. A 2022 Gallup study, published before the *Dobbs* decision, found that only 56% of Protestant Christians and 54% of Roman Catholics considered abortion morally wrong.⁵ Unsurprisingly, recent Gallup polling also noted that opposition to

3 A higher percentage of women than men support legal abortion in most or all cases. Similarly, those identified as Democrats are more supportive than Independents or Republicans, and more Independents than Republicans support legal abortion. Lydia Saad, “Gender Gaps on Abortion Reach Historic Highs,” Gallup Social and Policy Issues, June 9, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/691370/gender-gaps-abortion-reach-historic-highs.aspx#:~:text=In%20May%202025%2C%2081%25%20of,have%20followed%20the%20same%20pattern>. Gallup’s polling indicates that immediately after *Dobbs* there was an initial spike in those who identified themselves as pro-choice (55% said they were pro-choice in May 2022), but by May 2025 the percentage who said they were pro-choice had declined to 51%, while those who identified as pro-life had increased to 43% (from a low of 39% in 2022). See the similar polling by Pew Research, which also reported that about two-thirds of Americans approved of medication abortion: “Broad Public Support for Legal Abortion Persists 2 Years After *Dobbs*,” May 13, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/?p=166526>.

4 Scott Barkley summarizes the findings of a May 2025 Gallup report: “A majority of all Americans (55 percent) feel abortion should be legal only under certain circumstances, while 30 percent say it should be legal under all circumstances. That represents a shift from last year, when 35 percent responded that it should be legal in all cases and 50 percent said only in certain circumstances” (“Church Attendance Continues to Indicate Stances on Abortion,” *The Baptist Press*, June 24, 2025, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/church-attendance-continues-to-indicate-stances-on-abortion/>).

5 Frank Newport, “Personal Religiosity and Attitudes Toward Abortion,” Gallup Polling Matters, May 13, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/392648/personal-religiosity-attitudes-toward-abortion.aspx>.

abortion rises among both Protestants and Roman Catholics who attend church most frequently in comparison to those who attend less frequently.⁶

While attitudes about abortion fluctuate, moral truth is resolute. Our Creator ultimately determines right and wrong. Thus, despite current attitudes, since the days of the early church, and long before court decisions that allowed doctors to forsake protecting fetal life and instead to kill the unborn, Christian teaching consistently opposed abortion.⁷ While the nuances of our understanding about nascent human life may vary through the ages, the matter is, and ought to remain, simple and straightforward. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it succinctly: “The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being and that this nascent human being has been deliberately deprived of his life. And that is nothing but murder.”⁸

Such stark simplicity is shocking for many, if not most, people today. Even many Christians, including a great many Lutheran Christians, have failed to recognize the implications of the confession that God is Creator of heaven and earth and so the Creator of all people through the miracle of conception, pregnancy, and birth. Sadly, too many avowed Christians do not gratefully acknowledge all children as a gracious gift of God.⁹ Therefore, as 2023 Resolution 11-04 affirms, our Synod is to teach every person to embrace once again the words of the Small Catechism “that God has made me” and that He has given me all that I am and have “out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.”¹⁰ The Commission here seeks to confess the never-ending truths of Scripture about the gracious gift of children and acknowledge the consequent responsibility to protect them throughout their lives, from conception onward, for they, too, are our neighbors (Matt. 22:39).¹¹

6 Barkley, “Church Attendance Continues to Indicate Stances on Abortion.”

7 “The language of the Christians from the very beginning was widely different [than other persons in antiquity on the practice of abortion]. With unwavering consistency and with the strongest emphasis, they denounced the practice, not simply as inhuman, but as definitely murder” (W. E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals: From Augustus to Charlemagne*, 2 vols. [Longmans, Green, & Co., 1911], 2:20, 22 [first published in 1869]).

8 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. N. H. Smith (Simon & Schuster, 1955), 174.

9 Gilbert Meilaender, “The Child as a Gift of God,” LCMS Document Library, <https://resources.lcms.org/reading-study/ctcr-paper-the-child-as-a-gift-of-god/>.

10 SC, Apostles’ Creed, First Article.

11 See also SC, Fifth Commandment.

ABORTION: PAST TRUTHS, CURRENT CHALLENGES

This report will largely reaffirm long-standing LCMS views about abortion as articulated in two CTCR reports. One report, *Abortion: Theological, Legal, and Medical Aspects*,¹² was published prior to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which made abortion legal in the entire country. The second report was published in 1984: *Abortion in Perspective*.¹³ In this section, we briefly summarize the previous reports and consider some of the significant changes in medicine and the law since their publication.

Medical Perspective

The practice of medicine is changing constantly. Medical research and techniques advance without pause. Medical practice is also increasingly affected by changes in law, insurance coverage, and culture. Consequently, the values physicians hold cannot be assumed. For example, the time-honored Hippocratic oath has undergone numerous changes in recent decades, one of which is the removal of its original rejection of the practice of abortion. Any discussion of a “medical perspective” on abortion, therefore, is destined to need revision and updates almost as soon as it is written.

The CTCR’s 1971 report was published two years prior to *Roe*. It considered abortion from three perspectives: theological, legal, and medical. While prioritizing theology, the report asserts: “All three sections are agreed on the point that non-therapeutic abortion is wrong.”¹⁴ It noted the changes in the American

12 CTCR, *Abortion: Theological, Legal, and Medical Aspects* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1971). Abbreviated as *Abortion 1971*.

13 CTCR, *Abortion in Perspective* (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1984). Abbreviated as *Abortion 1984*.

14 CTCR, *Abortion 1971*, 4.

Medical Association's position on abortion and the prohibition of abortion in the Hippocratic oath. In the report's discussion of the challenges presented by abortion for the Christian physician, we note that the counsel offered is rightly focused on the pregnant woman, but somewhat less concerned with her unborn child. Regrettably, the brief report is also overly permissive toward the possibility of "therapeutic abortion." It wrongly accepts the American Medical Association's definition of therapeutic abortion from 1968, which included an abortion "to prevent the birth of a severely crippled, deformed, or abnormal infant."¹⁵ The report rightly questions "abortion as a response to *suspicions* that an abnormal child may be born," but fails clearly to assert the immorality of such abortions—which are nothing less than eugenics.¹⁶

After *Roe*, the CTCR engaged the subject of abortion much more thoroughly in *Abortion 1984*, again considering the same three aspects but in different order, moving from the medical perspective to the legal to the theological. In the first section, significant attention is given to the beginning of human life, unfolding God's "fearful and wonderful" (Psalm 139) work from a medical perspective, describing the astonishing process of fertilization and human development from the cellular level onward. "Given time and the proper environment this new cell will undergo constantly changing yet continuous development marked by the terms embryo, fetus, infant, child, adolescent, adult."¹⁷ The report continues from there to distinguish between "spontaneous" abortions (that is, miscarriages) and intentional, induced abortions designed explicitly to end the pregnancy. It describes the procedures (such as dilatation and curettage or D&C, saline abortion, hysterotomy) that are utilized to end the unborn child's life and remove her body from her mother's womb.¹⁸ It also describes consequent risks to the life of the mother both during and after an abortion.¹⁹ Further discussion in this medical section considers amniocentesis, the intrauterine device as an abortive device,

15 CTCR, *Abortion 1971*, 2 n. 1.

16 CTCR, *Abortion 1971*, 5 (*italics in original*).

17 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 7.

18 Hysterotomy, which is an incision into the womb, may also be used for legitimate medical care in a C-section.

19 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 8–9.

advances in fetal therapy, and the ethical dilemmas for physicians that have resulted from liberalized abortion law.²⁰

The cascade of challenges wrought by *Roe* has not diminished after the *Dobbs* decision's ruling that abortion law should be returned to the states. As a result, *Abortion 1984*'s consideration of abortion is outdated. In the sphere of medicine, abortion procedures have changed markedly. Earlier, as the 1984 report indicates, abortions were an in-clinic surgical procedure. Today well over half of all abortions are medication abortions. The prevalence of the latter is due in large measure to the practice of online health exams and consultations (telehealth). And subsequent to the *Dobbs* ruling there has been an increase in medication abortion.²¹ Even in a state without abortion clinics, women can access physicians online who prescribe medication abortions. These matters will be further addressed below in "God Has Made Me: A Lutheran Theology of Life."

Legal Perspective

In 1971, the CTCR said: "Lutherans committed to taking Scripture seriously regret the hastening drift toward drastic relaxation of legal restraints on the practice of abortion."²² The Commission did not foresee that there would be no "hastening drift" but a sweeping approval of abortion only two years later in 1973's *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions.²³

In 1984, the CTCR addressed abortion once more after a decade of legal decisions, beginning with *Roe*. While acknowledging that Christians often legitimately vary in their opinions about legal matters, the report emphasized the "great moral significance" of abortion.²⁴ The report carefully noted that the Supreme Court's decisions in *Roe* and then *Doe* did not explicitly approve of abortion on demand, but that was

20 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 9–17. Of course, several of the procedures listed can be used for other medical care and not simply for abortion.

21 Rachel K. Jones and Amy Friedrich-Karnik, "Medication Abortion Accounted for 63% of All US Abortions in 2023—An Increase from 53% in 2020," Guttmacher Institute, March 2024, www.guttmacher.org.

22 CTCR, *Abortion 1971*, 3.

23 The texts of both decisions, from January 22, 1973, are available at the Library of Congress. *Roe* is at <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l/usrep/usrep410/usrep410113/usrep410113.pdf>. *Doe* is at <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/l/usrep/usrep410/usrep410179/usrep410179.pdf>.

24 CTCR, *Abortion 1984*, 19.