

Abortion and Contraception in the Early Church

The Didache (1st Century A.D.)

The Lord's Teaching to the Heathen by the Twelve Apostles:

"The second commandment of the Teaching: "Do not murder; do not commit adultery"; do not corrupt boys; do not fornicate; "do not steal"; do not practice magic; do not go in for sorcery; do not murder a child by abortion or kill a newborn infant. "Do not covet your neighbor's property; do not commit perjury; do not bear false witness"; do not slander; do not bear grudges. Do not be double-minded or double-tongued, for a double tongue is "a deadly snare." Your words shall not be dishonest or hollow, but substantiated by action. Do not be greedy or extortionate or hypocritical or malicious or arrogant. Do not plot against your neighbor. Do not hate anybody; but reprove some, pray for others, and still others love more than your own life."

St. Hippolytus - 228 A.D.

"Women who were reputed to be believers began to take drugs to render themselves sterile, and to bind themselves tightly so as to expel what was being conceived, since they would not, on account of relatives and excess wealth, want to have a child by a slave or by any insignificant person. See, then, into what great impiety that lawless one has proceeded, by teaching adultery and murder at the same time!" (Refutation of All Heresies).

St. Basil - (4th Century A.D.)

To Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconia:

"She who has intentionally destroyed [the fetus] is subject to the penalty corresponding to a homicide. For us, there is no scrutinizing between the formed and unformed [fetus]; here truly justice is made not only for the unborn but also with reference to the person who is attentive only to himself/herself since so many women generally die for this very reason." (First Letter 2).

"Let her that procures abortion undergo ten years' penance, whether the embryo were perfectly formed, or not." (The First Canonical Epistle of Our Holy Father Basil, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia to Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium: Canon 11)

"those who give the abortifacients and those who take the poisons are guilty of homicide." (First Letter 8).