

# life matters

## Blurring the Lines, Shortening the Playing Field

Vol. 11, No. 3

a publication of

**Life Matters**  
WORLDWIDE

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When does life begin? When does it end? These important questions are at the heart of debates about abortion, embryonic stem cell research, fertility technology, organ donation, and death with dignity.

Pro-life people push for the earliest possible demarcation of life's beginning, and the latest for its end. Life begins when there is a new, distinct individual – at sperm-egg fusion. Death is unmistakable when breathing and circulation have ceased and systemic decay has set in.

Science and technology constantly push the boundaries, but also teach us more about life. Contrary to what opponents say, the pro-life view is scientifically accurate.

Pro-choice advocates tend to move the lines to points they believe will grant more freedom. Theirs is a constantly shifting line in the sand. Is abortion okay in the first trimester, but not the second or third? For only certain reasons, or any reason at all? Should experiments on embryos be limited to the 8-cell stage, or until day 14? Should assisted suicide only be allowed for the terminally ill, or also for the elderly, depressed, and dissatisfied? Can we declare death when only partial brain function is lost?

Every deviation from a previously agreed upon standard must be justified. And that seems to become easier with the passage of time. Two recent news stories illustrate this blurring of the lines.

On September 9, 2011, a Canadian judge suspended the three-year sentence of a woman convicted of infanti-

cide. Nineteen-year-old Katrina Effert had secretly given birth to a baby boy in 2005, in her parents' home. When he cried, she strangled him to death and threw his body over a fence into a neighbor's yard. Two juries had convicted her of second-degree murder, but those verdicts were overturned as being "unreasonable."

Explaining the light sentence, Justice Joanne Viet called upon the compassion of her countrymen and referred to the fact Canada has no law outlawing abortion. Katrina was "troubled," and her "choice" excused. This was merely a very late, "fourth-trimester" abortion.

Four days after the above story aired, television personality Pat Robertson fielded a question on his 700 Club broadcast. A man's wife has Alzheimer's disease and no longer recognizes him. Their marriage has "gotten rough" and "his wife, as he knows her, is gone." Can he start dating other women?

Robertson agreed, "That person is gone." He went on to advise, "I know it sounds cruel, but he – if he is going to do something, he should divorce her and start all over again, but to make sure she has custodial care and somebody looking after her."

Reminded about the marriage vow, "for better or worse . . . 'til death do us part," he dug in, saying, "[Alzheimer's] is kind of a death." And it got worse: "If he says, in a sense she is gone, he is right. It is like a walking death." Ironically, his advice in favor of divorce is an admission she's alive!

**W**E'RE NO LONGER SURPRISED when secular leaders nudge the goalposts, but ought to be outraged when a leader of a Christian organization redefines death. The net effect of

cases like these is to shorten the span of life's protection and cheapen its value. Science, technology, and circumstances do not, however, change the basic facts of life and death.



The limitations and dangers of human freedom have been obvious since Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve asserted their "right" to freedom from God's boundary. At Sinai He said, "Thou shalt not kill." Period. Not, "You may kill before or after a certain point."

Are there hard cases? Of course, but the Bible doesn't allow us to shorten the playing field when the game of life gets too hard. God wants us to endure hardship and respond to people with compassion. True compassion "suffers alongside" the severely disabled newborn or elderly dementia patient and will never violate God's commands.

God is love, and His law is good. It's never outdated: "Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever." (Psalm 119:160)

**Resources:** Science for Unborn Human Life, [sfuhl.org](http://sfuhl.org); "When Does Human Life Begin? A Scientific Perspective," The Westchester Institute for Ethics and the Human Person, [www.westchesterinstitute.net/resources/white-papers/351-white-paper](http://www.westchesterinstitute.net/resources/white-papers/351-white-paper); Maureen L. Condic, "Life: Defining the Beginning by the End," *First Things*, May 2003 (133:50-54), [www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/life-defining-the-beginning-by-the-end-24](http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/life-defining-the-beginning-by-the-end-24); Dennis Sullivan, "Bad Ethics in the Name of Compassion," CedarEthics blog, Cedarville University Center for Bioethics, [www.cedarethics.org/2011/09/19/bad-ethics-in-the-name-of-compassion](http://www.cedarethics.org/2011/09/19/bad-ethics-in-the-name-of-compassion); "Controversies in the Determination of Death," The President's Council on Bioethics, Washington, DC, December 2008, [bioethics.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/death/index.html](http://bioethics.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/death/index.html); Nehemiah 9:13, Psalm 119:68, Matthew 12:12, Romans 7:12, 1 Corinthians 13:7, 1 Timothy 1:8.

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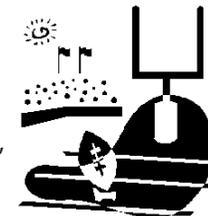
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