

efforts at abortion? Where there is murder before the birth? For even the harlot thou dost not let continue a mere harlot, but makest her a murderer also. You see how drunkenness leads to whoredom, whoredom to adultery, adultery to murder; or rather something even worse than murder. For I have no name to give it, since it does not take off the thing born, but prevents its being born. Why then dost thou abuse the gift of God, and fight with His laws, and follow after what is a curse as if a blessing, and make the chamber of procreation a chamber for murder, and arm the woman that was given for childbearing unto slaughter? For with a view to drawing more money by being agreeable and an object of longing to her lovers, even this she is not backward to do, so heaping upon thy head a great pile of fire. For even if the daring deed be hers, yet the causing of it is thine. Hence too come idolatries, since many, with a view to become acceptable, devise incantations, and libations, and love potions, and countless other plans. Yet still after such great unseemliness, after slaughters, after idolatries, the thing [fornication] seems to belong to things indifferent, aye, and to many that have wives, too.

*-Homily 24 on Romans*

### **Augustine of Hippo (354-430)**

Sometimes, indeed, this lustful cruelty, or if you please, cruel lust, resorts to such extravagant methods as to use poisonous drugs to secure barrenness; or else, if unsuccessful in this, to destroy the conceived seed by some means previous to birth, preferring that its offspring should rather perish than receive vitality; or if it was advancing to life within the womb, should be slain before it was born.

*-De Nube et Concupiscentia 1.17 (15)*

### **St. Caesarius, Bishop of Arles (470-543)**

Sermon 44 # 2

No woman should take drugs for purposes of abortion, nor should she kill her children that have been conceived or are already born. If anyone does this, she should know that before Christ's tribunal she will have to plead her case in the presence of those she has killed. Moreover, women should not take diabolical draughts with the purpose of not being able to conceive children. A woman who does this ought to realize that she will be guilty of as many murders as the number of children she might have borne. I would like to know whether a woman of nobility who takes deadly drugs to prevent conception wants her maids or tenants to do so. Just as every woman wants slaves born for her so that they may serve her, so she herself should nurse all the children she conceives, or entrust them to others for rearing. Otherwise, she may refuse to conceive children or, what is more serious, be willing to kill souls which might have been good Christians. Now, with what kind of a conscience does she desire slaves to be born of her servants, when she herself refuses to bear children who might become Christians?

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Pamphlet 104

## **Early Church Fathers on Abortion**

Priests for Life has compiled quotes from the various Fathers of the Church and their contemporaries. The sources were either found in their original Latin and then translations were located or a translation of the Greek was found. In instances where a translation could not be found, a private translation was made. This is noted after each such text. The collection is not complete although it is extensive.

### **The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles**

*The Didache*

*(1<sup>st</sup> Century AD)*

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

1 There are two ways, one of life and one of death; and between the two ways there is a great difference.

2 Now, this is the way of life:...

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.

### Quotes from Early Councils

#### Council of Elvira (c. 305)

Canon 68: If a catechumen should conceive by an adulterer, and should procure the death of the child, she can be baptized only at the end of her life.

#### Council of Ancyra (314)

Canon 21: Women who prostitute themselves, and who kill the child thus begotten, or who try to destroy them when in their wombs, are by ancient law excommunicated to the end of their lives. We, however, have softened their punishment and condemned them to the various appointed degrees of penance for ten years.

#### The Apocalypse of Peter (ca. 135)

"I saw a gorge in which the discharge and excrement of the tortured ran down and became like a lake. There sat women, and the discharge came up to their throats; and opposite them sat many children, who were born prematurely, weeping. And from them went forth rays of fire and smote the women on the eyes. These were those who produced children outside of marriage and who procured abortions."

2:26

#### Tertullian (c. 160 - 240)

That the unborn child is alive:

How are they dead unless they were first alive? But still in the womb an infant by necessary cruelty is killed when lying twisted at the womb's mouth he prevents birth and is a

matricide unless he dies. Therefore there is among the arms of physicians an instrument by which with a rotary movement the genital parts are first opened, then with a cervical instrument the interior members are slaughtered with careful judgment by a blunt barb, so that the whole criminal deed is extracted with a violent delivery. There is also the bronze needle by which the throat - cutting is carried out by a robbery in the dark; this instrument is called and embryo knife from its function of infanticide, as it is deadly for the living infant. - *De Anima* 25.5 – 6

#### Athenagoras (d.177)

What reason would we have to commit murder when we say that women who induce abortions are murderers, and will have to give account of it to God? For the same person would not regard the fetus in the womb as a living thing and therefore an object of God's care [and then kill it]...But we are altogether consistent in our conduct. We obey reason and do not override it.

-*Legatio* 35

#### Minucius Felix (3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD)

There are some women who, by drinking medical preparations, extinguish the source of the future man in their very bowels, and thus commit a parricide before they bring forth. And these things assuredly come done from the teaching of your gods.

-*Octavius* 30

#### Basil (c. 329-379)

To Anfilochius, 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

#### Ambrose (c.340-397)

Indeed there are those women who cut off the word prematurely born/aborted, before they give birth, there are those who have Christ in the womb but they will not yet have formed (him), to whom it is said: my children, whom I desire to bring forth again and again until Christ be formed in you.

*Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*, lib. 10, line 252 [private translation]

#### Jerome (347-420)

You may see many women widows before wedded, who try to conceal their miserable fall by a lying garb. Unless they are betrayed by swelling wombs or by the crying of their infants, they walk abroad with tripping feet and heads in the air. Some go so far as to take potions, that they may insure barrenness, and thus murder human beings almost before their conception. Some, when they find themselves with child through their sin, use drugs to procure abortion, and when (as often happens) they die with their offspring, they enter the lower world laden with the guilt not only of adultery against Christ but also of suicide and child murder. *Epistula* 22

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#### John Chrysostom (347-407)

Why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? Where there are many