

IS BETHANY CHRISTIAN SERVICES PRO-CHOICE?

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Author's Notes: *This article was published and disseminated throughout NW Iowa and portions of South Dakota and Minnesota, nearly 20 years ago. What I never anticipated was the flurry of the phone calls I received from a District-Associate Judge, foster parents, unwed mothers and young couples trying to adopt – all who had read it! Their common refrain was, "Finally, someone has exposed this fraud of a ministry!" Or, "What's most disgusting is that it's being done in the name of Christ!" There were plenty of tears over the phone and one indignant Judge. Nothing has been done about Bethany, to my knowledge, and they continue to enjoy the support of Reformed and evangelical churches!*

In an unrelated Federal lawsuit Dorr brought against his local Sheriff for violation of his 1st and 2nd Amendment rights (in which the Sheriff later suffered a humiliating loss in the final order from the Federal Judge), Bethany's Adri Ruisch (discussed below) notified the Sheriff's attorney that she'd be willing to be a witness against me. I was eager for Ruisch to arrive on the stand. She was never called to testify and has never responded to this article. There has been no response from their corporate office, where several copies of the original were sent.

The enemies of God and human life (Planned Parenthood, etc.) have for years hidden behind the veil that abortion is a "women's right to choose." "Choice" is everywhere around us today. The alluring language of freedom to choose is even drawing many in the church of Jesus Christ and now the pro-life movement into its seductive web. That web is constructed of spindles called "privilege," "freedom," "patriotism," "decision-making," etc. But the spider's poison is still as deadly and even bitterer when one has been destroyed by this "process of choosing."

This is not to say we shouldn't enjoy a wide selection of choices when we focus on behavior that is amoral. ("What color dress should I wear?" or "What kind of automobile do I like best?", etc.) These decisions center on personal preference. But the dilemma is when behavior, forbidden in the law-word of God, is taught in such a manner that one believes that any response is not necessarily good or bad, just that they are supposed to "choose" the decision that is "best for me." That is truly another law at work within the body of Christ, and is not of the law of God. See Romans 7:22-23

This heresy has been advanced through the Church by infiltrating the seminaries, other higher academic sources, secondary education, "Christian" psychology, and now even some in the pro-life movement are adopting this belief. And the danger is that it's internally eroded the very credibility of our message; that only God can take the life of an innocent human being.

Let's take a look at how this is affecting one ministry, Bethany Christian Services (Bethany). Bethany is a national Christian adoption agency that, for years, has helped many anxious parents adopt a child (ren). The aching empty arms of some barren parents have been filled by the work of this agency. Naturally, many of these parents and the affected families are strong supporters of Bethany.

Bethany is based in Grand Rapids, MI and was originally supported by Christians affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church. According to the organization's 1991 literature they had offices in 26 states and 55 communities, a budget of \$16 million (\$71 million in 2011..prd), 345 staff members, placed 822 children in adoptive homes and had 3,440 women visit their offices that year. This budget equates to \$19,465 spent for every baby placed during 1991. Bethany's closest offices in this region are located in Orange City, IA, Des Moines, IA and Rapid City, SD.

Bethany has enjoyed the reputation of having a long record of pro-life Christian service. In northwest Iowa the Orange City office has regularly joined with other pro-life groups to sponsor a Spring pro-life rally, which usually draws a large crowd. But interestingly, a review of their literature, provided to women in a crisis pregnancy, revealed little use of the identifying 'pro-life' label.

Before discussing the detrimental effect of Bethany's use of the "choice" language we would do good to understand the larger picture of abortion and adoption. In 1986 (the most recent year published numbers are available) approximately 104,000 babies were placed for adoption in America. In the year prior, approximately 1,589,000 babies lost their lives by abortion, according to the "Statistical Abstract of the US, 1989." In other words, approximately 15 babies lost their lives for every one that was adopted.

Also, according to the Abstract teen-age girls had 290,000 births in 1986 and 427,000 abortions in 1983. A fact commonly agreed on by adoption agencies is that only 3% of all teen girls who let their baby live, place the baby for adoption. The other 97% keep their babies, alone or married. In 1986 this would equal 8,700 babies (290,000 x

3%) adopted out by teen mothers. To summarize, in 1983-86 approximately 49 babies conceived by teen-age mothers, died by abortion for every one baby that was placed for adoption (427,000 divided by 8,700).

Regardless if it's 15 to 1 in the overall population or 49 to 1 in the teen population, babies conceived and not raised by the birth mother or birth parents, have a high likelihood of dying in the abortion chambers of America. This is important to remember when reviewing the programs promoted by Bethany.

One Bethany office provides a 27 page brochure entitled, "**A Loving Choice**" to women in crisis pregnancies who seek their counseling. This brochure was published in 1990 by their Grand Rapids, MI home office. In Orange City, IA it is supplemented by other materials, but appears to be their primary counseling document. It merits our review.

At first glance one notices it is laced with Planned Parenthood style language, i.e. "Explore your options," "examine all your choices," "explore your feelings," "sexually active" (as opposed to the Christian term "fornication"), etc. And except for some occasional generic uses of the word 'God' and 'Christian,' there is little of Christ found in the text. No mention of His name, no use of the Word of God, etc. It only teaches the young reader how to battle sin in the flesh and nothing to equip them spiritually. (Eph. 6:12)

Nowhere is abortion identified as sin or as an offense to God in the brochure. In fact, the brochure makes no case as to why the woman in a crisis pregnancy should not have one. The very word 'abortion' is only found once – on page 11. It says,

"Allowing your child to be born, rather than choosing abortion, is a loving decision."

When compared to death by abortion why is life referred to as "a" loving decision? Why isn't it "the" loving obligation? Why is the young reader provided an option to "choose" when it comes to the child's life?

Several times the text also intrudes between the young woman and her parents, similar to the method used by Planned Parenthood and many of our government's social services and education agencies. On page 6 it says,

"You have plenty of time to thoroughly examine all of your choices. [Ed note: Never does it say abortion is not a choice.] With the help of a social worker or other adult whom you trust you will be gradually able to..."

Why does Bethany steer the girls first to a government worker and away from her parents? Surely not every teen pregnancy involves an abusive father. As well, most county social workers are very familiar with their area Planned Parenthood staff. Why can't Bethany "Christian" Services establish a network of Christian pastors or Christ-centered counselors who could bring the Gospel into the center of the family's problems? If churches won't do this, then why doesn't Bethany publicly call them to account for not their called task of "sharing the burdens"?

Page 22 of the brochure discusses the merits of family counseling by stating that it "may" be wise to include other family members in this counseling if the girl is thinking about placing her baby up for adoption. And then it says,

"Although your parents have no legal rights to your child, they are concerned about you."

In light of the silence regarding abortion in this brochure, why does Bethany share this knowledge (sic. Parents having no rights) with young women in a crisis pregnancy? Couldn't this give her an additional opening to "choose" abortion? Is this information vitally important for her to hear during her counseling?

In a strange argumentation, the brochure attempts to convince young women why they shouldn't feel obligated to raise the child as an act of punishment for past 'sexual activity.' It concludes on page 14 with the following,

"God does not sentence you to a life of parenting when you are not ready."

Why is the joy of raising a child presented to these girls as a "sentence", a punishment? How does this make her view her child? As an instrument of some meted out punishment from God? What if she truly is contrite and repentant and wants to raise her child in the fear of the Lord? This remarkable statement is an offense to all mothers who turned their lives around after an unwed pregnancy, bore their child, and faithfully nurtured him/her in the faith to adulthood, married or unmarried.

Page 6 and 7 place considerable emphasis on the "you have choices" theme. Never are Biblical boundaries placed by Bethany on the choices set before the reader. Then, in a hazardous discussion, they portray the seemingly impossible task of single parenting and/or teen-age marriage through a frightening set of undocumented statistics implying that teen parenthood will surely leave her/them poor and uneducated. This message, while pandering to materialism, conveys the identical message that our government social services conveys and is in conflict with Matt. 6:25-33. This is done to share their "concerns" with the young woman about her keeping the child.

But noticeably absent is any discussion of the joys of motherhood or any encouraging talk to stop sinning and begin working at rebuilding her life, in Christ. Some may think, "Well they are an adoption agency, isn't this expected of them?" Well, maybe. But remember the statistics cited earlier. Once the young woman is convinced not to keep her baby, the probability of the baby living is very low. This anti-parenting counseling (motivated to generate an adoption, and the resulting cash this creates for Bethany) can easily be a death warrant for the child. When the absolutes of God's law-word are ignored and is replaced with "choice," everything begins to unravel.

Bethany's choice-based teaching as also showed up in a chastity video they produced for young viewers entitled "Second Thoughts." The problems with this video haven't escaped the attention of another pro-life group, Human Life International (HLI) of Gaithersburg, MD. HLI has earned world-wide respect (at that time...editor's note) for its resolute defense of the unborn. In a recently published critique of "Second Thoughts" HLI said,

"The video does talk about abstinence from sex until marriage, but it fails to give a strong Christian message and it follows the Planned Parenthood (PP) for teaching about sex. The first scene of "Second Thoughts" opens during Julie's wedding day preparations. Her mother comes in acting silly and forgetful, and asking stupid questions. This is typical of PP materials; parents are never portrayed as competent and in control...No matter how small and insignificant this may appear, it leaves the child wide open to powerful influences from outsiders.

The next scene is a flashback to the day the kids played hooky and went to the beach. Julie is wearing a one-piece bathing suit cut high over the hips—a very immodest cut. The girls are discussing fornication. Julie says she is not "ready for sex," but Rosie, who is smoking a cigarette, already fornicates, and talks about it. Boys appear on the scene. Todd gives Rosie a hug, then grabs her buttocks and pulls her toward his groin."

Later in their critique HLI reviews the discussion guide that comes with Bethany's "**Second Thoughts**" video, produced for the Sex Respect "abstinence" curriculum. On pages 16-17 of the Christian version of the discussion guide HLI found the following,

"Many options exist other than marriage in the case of teen-age pregnancy. Abortion, single parenting, and adoption represent some other options and each carries profound ramifications. However, the best option might be something other than marriage."

HLI's critique concludes,

"How can calling abortion an option be in harmony with the prolife philosophy? Abortion is diametrically opposed to life. It is the most "extreme" choice." It is legalized murder."

From what HLI has reported, Bethany is consistent in their "choices" teaching. Bethany's, Orange City, IA director, Adri Ruisch, responded to an inquiry by Rescue the Perishing's (RTP) director, Paul Dorr, regarding HLI's charges in the critique. In a note dated January 14, 1992, Ruisch wrote Dorr and said, "I will review brochure (sic. HLI's critique) and be happy to discuss it with you. I will also forward to our corporate office." After several months of silence, Dorr inquired again in a letter dated June 2, 1992. To date, RTP has not heard of a rebuttal to the charges made in HLI's critique. HLI officials also report that they have heard nothing from Bethany, as well.

Further, Adri Ruisch made a presentation to several hundred adolescents at a Northwest Iowa Peer Helper Referral Fair in Sioux City, IA on February 26, 1992. This peer referral event was sponsored by the Sioux City East High School peer-referral group and school counselors were in charge. Ruisch was there, as she has done several times before, sharing the podium with Planned Parenthood of Greater Iowa's Sioux City director. (For more information on Planned Parenthood's peer referral strategy read page 110-111 of George Grant's book, **Grand Illusions.**)

Also in attendance during Ruisch's talk were two Sioux City, IA pro-life mothers. Neither had prior knowledge of Bethany or of Ruisch. One of them, Dana Black, took short careful notes during her presentation. Black reports that Ruisch painted the same dismal picture of teen parenting that their counseling brochure does. In a meeting held with Black and Dorr on June 11, 1992, Ruisch confirmed this portion of her presentation. But worse, both women also accuse Ruisch of saying,

"Now if the pregnancy test comes out positive, we offer four options. There's abortion, marriage, single parenting and adoption. Although we don't do abortions, we will make referrals. If you decide to get married, you need to realize how hard it's going to be. A lot of people think, 'we'll get married and have the baby and everything will be all right.' But that's not how it is."

Interestingly, Ruisch's alleged "four options" statement is consistent with Bethany's "Second Thoughts" video discussion guide, examined earlier.

After this presentation a third Sioux City woman who heard Ruisch that day, Virginia Van Lent (who had not had any previous acquaintance with Black and her colleague) wrote a letter-to-the-editor to the Sioux City *Globe* (Catholic Diocese) newspaper on March 19, 1992, alerting readers that Bethany "...do(es) referrals for abortions." Since hearing these three accusations, Ruisch has denied making the statement about referrals for abortion, when she faced two of her accusers in a private meeting held in Sioux City, IA on June 11, 1992. But seven months after hearing this Ruisch has not brought forth yet one witness that affirms her version of that day's events. If these accusations are true, why would Bethany's Ruisch make such statements if they, in fact, aren't making referrals? What purpose did it serve to say it then? Did she want to sound like Planned Parenthood? If so, why?

Again, remember the low number of babies adopted out relative to the high number of babies aborted. Could it be that Ruisch needs to lie to these young people to have them believing Bethany provides the full range of services (including abortion referrals) so any future pregnant teen will not prematurely rule them out as a possible agency to seek, if they wouldn't offer the full range of services? Only later during a counseling session when the girl decides she is not going to adopt and wants to abort and asks them for a referral, they can say, "Oh, we're sorry, but we don't offer abortion referrals." When the teen girl protests saying that she heard Ruisch say otherwise, they can reply, "Oh, you must have misunderstood her, we've never offered abortion referrals."

Does Bethany lie to young girls so as to insure the high volume of pregnant girls coming through their turnstiles so that they can harvest their 3% off of, which generates the cash flow for the organization?

Further, Bethany's corporate Mission Goals statement says,

"We will...be allied only with organizations and advocacy groups that are consistent with our mission and promote the goals of our agency."

If this is so, then why did Bethany ally themselves with Planned Parenthood at this teen peer referral event? Is Planned Parenthood, as an organization, consistent with the goals of Bethany?

An answer we might expect is, "We are making inroads into these public schools and getting to these kids to offset the effects of Planned Parenthood." Well, let's step back and objectively think about this. George Grant says, in *Grand Illusions* (p. 126), that "Planned Parenthood...is so deeply entrenched in the public school machinery that reform can only mean more of the same: more debauchery, more brazenness, more humanism, and more wickedness." Also, government educators are persecuting Christian children for even trying to silently pray in public school cafeterias.

In this environment, are we to believe that Bethany is maintaining its' distinctively Christian moral perspective at these teen referral events? If a truly Christian moral view was offered by Bethany, do you believe they would be invited back into this public school another time? Yet Bethany gets invited back. Does Bethany believe they are helping bring about 'reform' in the public schools? Maybe we need to ask, who is reforming whom?

During the Sioux City, IA meeting held last summer Bethany's Orange City, IA director Ruisch, admitted to RTP's Dorr that if an unwed pregnant Christian girl does not agree to adopt through Bethany, they will not necessarily notify her parents, even if they know she has scheduled an abortion. Her reason was that they have to maintain confidentiality as they never know how many of the girl's fathers are the actual abusers. Theologian and Pastor Jay Adams in his book *Handbook of Church Discipline* (p. 33) addresses this very situation. He says,

"The matter of confidentiality has arisen in some pro-life centers for unwed mothers. Certain centers have opted for giving prospective mothers assurance of absolute confidentiality. But this means that when a Christian plans to have an abortion in spite of their counsel to the contrary, the center pledges not to tell her parents or her church. That leads not only to making an unacceptable vow, but possibly also to having complicity in the death of the child."

Bethany could also enter into agreements with local church boards, where a teen girl wants to repent, wants help and accuses her father of being the molester, where the church could step in between her and her father and offer her a home to stay in, and call her parents to repentance and notify civil authorities where appropriate.

On August 14, 1992, Tammy Dvorak went through a crisis pregnancy counseling session in Bethany's Orange City, IA office. With mounting concern regarding Bethany's 'pro-life' ethics, Dvorak agreed to pretend she was pregnant so as to obtain an accurate appraisal of their counseling. Dvorak knew it would be the only way she could get a true-to-life counseling experience. She has now reported her experience back to us saying,

“The Lord’s name was never invoked, nor was the truth of Holy Scriptures ever employed. Also my counselor hardly mentioned the baby. When I appeared to lose interest in the baby’s welfare, she dropped it and I never heard about the baby again. Everything focused on what was best for me. Finally, when I mentioned that I wanted an abortion, my counselor said nothing to dissuade me, nothing to fight for the child’s life. A few days later I called back and talked to Adri Ruisch. I told her I was desperate and had to have the abortion. Again, nothing was said to try and stop me from getting it. And though I mentioned where my family lived no effort was made to contact them after I said I was going to get the abortion.”

If Miss Dvoark had truly been pregnant, a child’s life would have been at risk. How many other young women have been through this Bethany office and have received the same silence when she said she wanted to have an abortion? Remember, they are known as a “pro-life Christian” adoption agency. This could be the only Christian counselor that a scared, vulnerable, young girl talks to before she heads to the abortion mill to kill her child and to be scarred for life. And this counselor from Bethany could be the baby’s one and only [earthly] hope. This outrage of silence is going on under the banner of Jesus Christ. This very situation is addressed in James 4:17,

“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”

Under a Hillary Clinton view of what makes for a “fit” parent, government social service agencies around the nation are now determining that certain “overweight” parents, in and of itself, now present an “at risk” situation for their children. In fact, Missouri’s Parents as Teachers family ‘disruption’ program has already included a category for ‘overweight parents’ that a social worker must check when conducting a home visit. Apparently, overweight is subjectively left up to the government employee. In Iowa and other states several reports have come out that large numbers of women employed in social service agencies are often crusading against the Biblical prescriptions for the family, are supports of the feminist agenda, and have few children of their own and experience abnormally high divorce rates.

Reliable reports have come out that certain overweight parents who meet all other standards of eligibility are having a more difficult time being placed on Bethany’s adoptive parents list. We also need to understand the manipulative power that an adoption agency can wield over a couple who is longing to adopt. It is doubtful that such rejected parents will complain about Bethany’s policy if they ever wish to adopt through them in the future. They will endure much before they will walk away from a potential child and such an investment of time and money.

Clearly “choice” has now triumphed at this 48 year old agency. Like many other previously good organizations and churches, subtle error takes a small seed and begins to grow, and finally overcomes their original good goals and purpose. Today, Bethany’s corporate State of Purpose, says they want “to...be a quality social service agency...” Maybe that is the most we can say of them. They are another government-style social service agency. Granted, they do make some couples very happy when they adopt a baby. But then, so do secular adoption agencies.

So what do you think? Should Bethany be called “pro-life”? Should they have “Christian” in their name? Would you send a girl in a crisis pregnancy to one of their centers for counseling? Would you send them any financial support?

Revelation 3:1b-3 says,

“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. ² Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. ³ Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.”

Maybe the hour is later than we think for Bethany. Pray that they repent and obey soon. The good news is that not every Christian adoption organization has compromised with the spirit of death stalking our land.

John Upton of Vallecito, CA is operating a Christian adoption ministry for hard-to-place babies. He come highly recommended and can be reached at Chalcedon, PO Box 158, Vallecito, CA 95251 Ph 209/736-4365. Also, Operation Rescue National has launched a national adoption ministry. They can be reached at PO Box 127, Summerville, SC 29484 Ph 803/821-8441. If you know of other ethical Christian adoption agencies, please let us know at RTP.