

Conceived to Die? Abortion and ‘Medically Futile Pregnancies’

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TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2022

“I’m carrying this baby just to bury it,” said a Louisiana woman whose recently-conceived child was diagnosed with acrania, a fatal pre-natal condition that prevents a child’s skull from developing. Abortion advocates have coopted such gut-wrenching cases as emotional blackmail to keep abortion legal.

“Medically futile pregnancies” is the euphemism for children destined to die in utero or immediately after birth. It is better for mother and child, abortion advocates claim, to end the pregnancy quickly by abortion rather than prolong the physical and emotional pain that a stillbirth may bring.

The period of early pregnancy remains one of nature’s great mysteries, something that human technocratic power cannot solve. Miscarriages in the first trimester are common, and there is little we can do to change that. Deadly fetal abnormalities such as acrania, though rare, also cannot be cured through human intervention. **Pregnancy loss at any stage is traumatic, and it inevitably generates the question of why the**

Author of Life would allow expectant joy to be followed so soon by bewildering pain.

Was my child conceived to die? **Without faith, it is extraordinarily difficult to face this reality.** The unbeliever, who refuses to see God's providence acting in the world, can respond in two ways. If death is inevitable and the child's life has no purpose, he might as well hasten that death by abortion.

But he could also conclude that if a brief life has no purpose, neither has a long one. What makes life "worth it," after all? Eighty years? Financial success and a modicum of human accomplishments? What if a person falls short of these marks? Was his life "worth it?" What is "it" anyway? **And what good is worldly success if it cannot follow us into the grave?**

In a sense, yes, we have all been conceived to die, some of us much sooner than others. But Christians know that death is the path to life. "It is one thing to live as if one is about to die, another to die as if one is about to live," St. Jerome counseled his grieving friend Heliodorus. **"The former man will die out of glory; the latter always dies into glory."**

Believers, though seared by the pain of miscarriage and stillbirth, entrust themselves and their children to God's mercy, through which they hope that they will one day embrace in heaven the little ones whom they could not embrace on earth. The unrealized joy of expectant parenthood, we pray, is transformed by the glory of God into a love beyond all telling. In God's providence no pregnancy, no life, is futile.



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On the supernatural level, it is clear: we should not kill by abortion or any other means the children whom we hope to see in heaven. Better that God allow them to suffer briefly than for them to suffer a crueler fate at human hands. **We must yield to what we cannot control – the power over life and death belongs to God alone.** We can only cry out with Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (1:21)

On the natural level, the case against aborting ill-fated pregnancies is no less true. There is a stomach-churning fact that abortion advocates do not want us to consider: abortion involves entering the birth canal and

dismembering the child. Rather than descend the birth canal with dignity, as even a stillborn child would, the aborted child is pulled out in pieces. Instead of entering the world and then the grave with a proper burial, the aborted child, no longer recognizable as one, is put out with the hospital's "medial waste."

How, then, does abortion really result in less pain for the mother and the murdered child?

At the conclusion of Walter M. Miller Jr.'s 1959 sci-fi novel *A Canticle for Liebowitz*, Abbot Dom Zerchi counsels a woman against euthanizing her child, who is suffering from radiation poisoning after a nuclear disaster. The abbot spoke from his boyhood experience of euthanizing his cat, a process that was, contrary to what his parents and friends promised, anything but "quick and painless" for the cat – and for him.

With the woman still not convinced that she should let her child die naturally, the abbot raises his voice and cuts to the heart of the matter: "As a priest of Christ, I am commanding you, by the authority of almighty God, not to lay hands on your child, **not to offer her life in sacrifice to a false god of expedient mercy.**"

There's a colossal difference between letting nature take its course and thwarting nature according to the demands of our selfish egos. **Aborting babies who will die imminently is expedient mercy intended to conceal the painful reality of lost life from us.** "If we just get it over with now, we can forget this and move on."

But there is no moving on from directly causing a child's gruesome death. In Christian terms, to choose abortion is to run from the Cross rather than embrace it.

But we need not succumb to the lies of the Culture of Death. We need not believe that utility generates a good life. Rather, we can be heroes in the face of tragedy. We can accept death as a reality of our fallen world, even when doing so rips us apart inside.

"I will await death, and I will consider it a brief evil, since a great result will follow," writes St. Jerome. The Author of Life allows death to be the path to eternal life. Let us carry our confusion with us and meet Him there, on His terms – not ours.

***Image:** *Massacre of the Innocents* by Luca Giordano, c. 1663 [Museo del Prado, Madrid]