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The Unborn Child

Willard F. Preston, M.D.

Doctor Preston from Wilmington, gave the following address to the Delaware Legislature. The doctor has a long background of clinical experience.

The objective in obstetrics is that every conception will develop as a normal pregnancy and culminate in the birth of a healthy infant to a mother and father who retain their physical and mental well-being so that, as parents, they may best serve the transitory dependency period of their child's life.

Satisfactory end results in obstetric care cannot be measured entirely by fetal and maternal mortality rates. A wide and somewhat immeasurable margin exists between good health and simple survival. Some of the physical and mental scars resulting from childbirth have a lasting influence on any and all members of a family.

Physicians have seen in recent years a strange, but not a new phenomenon in the affairs of men. The data of science have been manipulated, denied, or distorted to obtain political and sociologic sanctions for the legality of abortion.

Physicians have been seduced by a society that downgrades human relationships. This is not to give the impression that all physicians are evil. *They are victims — not villains.* Their patients have a very warm feeling toward them as human beings, because of what they try to do and deeply appreciate physicians as professionals for what they have actually achieved, but human health involves both the body and the spirit, and too many physicians have forgotten this relationship, or simply ignore it.

Too many doctors feel that they have a monopoly on medical information and do not want to share it with patients, or claim that they do not have time to discuss, adequately, their physical findings and the risks involved in treatment. Physicians who formerly consulted regularly, admittedly never were a majority, but once were more inclined than they are presently. Physicians have been swept along by events in our society; along with everyone else they have permitted themselves to be polarized to the rights of poor people and minorities and to governmental responsibility. They have lost compassion and a sense of spirit, and these attributes are not being taught to younger doctors.

During the years of obstetric practice which the writer has experienced, one of the most frequent questions asked, when confronted with tragic situations during pregnancy, is "If during childbirth, complications should arise, which would the Catholic Church direct the doctor to give the better chance to live — the mother or the child?"

The question, to begin with, is based on a false notion that many non-Catholics have regarding the Catholic Church's strict set of medical ethics which are, nevertheless, founded on sound theology. Because in some cases, Catholic hospitals permit an operation or medication that results accidentally in the death of mother or child, some outsiders say that the Church shows preference.

Sometimes an operation or treatment is advisable to save the life of the mother or child, with possible ill effect on the other. In such a case, because the preservation of a life is the direct intention, and only accidentally does the harm occur, the operation is permitted.

The choice of who shall live does not arise at all. It is often impossible to predict with certainty, in such double effect cases, that either mother or child will die. Moreover, it is not the duty or the right of man to take one life in order to save another. It is God alone Who decides in His infinite wisdom that one shall live, or both shall live or both shall die. This decision is removed from man's province altogether, and, therefore, there can be no question of choosing which shall live, since man is not the arbiter of innocent human life. All man does is work for the good of both mother and child; sometimes his work is in vain for one or both.

Value of Human Life

Pro-life physicians state, restate, and reemphasize their unswerving convictions in the value and sacredness of human life — born and unborn alike. The unborn child is a living human being, regardless of the stage of development, or of size or appearance. As early as the twenty-first day after conception, the heart is beating, one of the vital signs present in all human beings. As early as the fifty-sixth day, the heartbeat can be heard with a stethoscope, and it is after the fifty-sixth day of life that most abortions are performed. As physicians bound by the Hippocratic oath we took when we embarked on the practice of our profession, we reject any concept that the unborn child does not become a living human being until it is capable of life outside the mother's womb.

Children before birth or after birth, the aged, the infirm, the handicapped, the critically ill — all of these depend to one degree or another on others for survival, and they will die if they are cut off from their support systems.

Abortion on demand is only one short and dangerous step away from infanticide and euthanasia. Many of the reasons advanced to justify permissive abortion are equally valid in justifying killing new-

born babies in hospital nurseries. Legal abortions, whether they are done in doctors' offices or in abortion clinics, are not as safe as proponents would have us believe they are. In one state alone, 29 women, many of them teenagers undergoing legal abortions, died during or following the procedure.

If the courts decide to solve the problems of some people by stilling the lives of others unborn, that is their decision. The decision is not ours — *but the concern is ours*. In keeping with our Hippocratic oath, we will continue now and in the future, and as we have in the past, to place the highest possible premium on the value and dignity of God-given life, *all human life* — God's greatest gift.

Dr. Joseph Kerwin, the Navy physician-astronaut on Skylab II, in his opening remarks at the recent Right to Life meeting, apologized for not being able to take a specific open stand against elective abortion, because of his government job. He attacked one of the pro-abortion arguments by saying that "... with technology intelligently and compassionately used, we can feed ten times our present population. . . . If technology can preclude food shortages for a populous earth, then let's all work like hell to make every country highly developed; then the (presently underdeveloped) nations will have no more excuse for abortion than we do."

At this same meeting, the Rev. Robert Holbrook, of the Baptists for Life movement in Hallettsville, Tex., emphasized that the Right to Life movement is non-denominational, and said that Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other historic religious figures had made statements condemning abortion. Reverend Holbrook said that the movement, though a religious action in the Judeo-Christian vein, is not a violation of the laws of separation of Church and State. "In the days before the Civil War, there was a group of men who rose up and said 'In the name of God, slavery is wrong' . . . and they did not accept the argument that they were violating the religious freedom of Southern slave holders. . . . We will not accept the accusation and charge that we're violating the separation of Church and State. We will work together; we will not be divided. We are going to win. We are going to be victorious. We may not see it this year . . . next year. . . . I don't know when . . . but we shall . . . overcome."

It took eleven years — when the people of the United States (1868) voted into effect the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in the landmark Dred Scott decision.

In an excellent article on "The Morality of Crisis Pregnancy Counseling," a Chicago pediatrician, Eugene F. Diamond, M.D., a professor of pediatrics at Stritch School of Medicine, Loyola University, writes that abortion as a medical option must take cognizance of the following principles:

1. Abortion never saves anyone's life or cures anyone's disease.
2. Where pregnancy and disease co-exist, pregnancy exerts no un-

controllable effect on disease.

3. The risk of doing an abortion is at least as great as carrying the pregnancy to term in every instance.
4. Pregnancy does not cause psychosis or psychoneurosis.
5. The termination of pregnancy, either by abortion or delivery, does not cure psychosis or psychoneurosis.
6. When disturbed women become pregnant, the mental condition of most remains materially unchanged.
7. Pregnancy is more likely to decrease rather than to increase the risk of suicide.

Dr. Diamond states that the issue of contraceptive counseling is really a non-issue for most organizations involved in crisis pregnancy counseling. He says the notion that a significant number of women become pregnant as a result of contraceptive ignorance or contraceptive failure is completely without foundation. Even high school girls, in this day and age, know fully well where to buy contraceptives and how to use them. The only "contraceptive failure" relative to unwanted pregnancy is the failure to use contraceptives at all. Any experienced Birthright volunteer soon becomes aware that many so-called unwanted pregnancies were really wanted, either subconsciously or consciously. In three years of operation, only two women ever claimed to be pregnant as a result of contraceptive failure.

Positive Values of Chastity

Birthright rejects the allegation that one must accept the "sexually active" teenager in the context of her adopted life style. Most sexually promiscuous adolescents have never had the benefit of an indoctrination in the positive values of chastity. Dr. Diamond stated that this is as true of those educated in parochial schools as those educated in secular schools. Most teenage girls who are pregnant out of wedlock are characterized by social isolation and alienation from parents. They frequently look forward to the birth of their child as a compensation for their loneliness. If aborted, they will be pregnant again in a short time, in all likelihood.

Dr. Diamond further discusses the conspiracy of silence — which, he states, is a seldom discussed, but all-pervading moral issue. Related to abortion counseling is the non-participation of numerous individuals upon whom the obligation to participate in anti-abortion counseling clearly falls. Included in this immoral non-feasance category are the numerous curates and pastors who confine their pro-life activities to the reading of an occasional episcopal letter on the subject; the principals and teachers who steadfastly exclude pro-life issues from religious curricula in Catholic schools; the physicians who shirk their responsibility to teach the humanity of the unborn child to patients; the theologians who apologize for the abortion issue as contrasted

with larger issues such as peace or racial justice, or consign abortion to the peculiar isolation of “pelvic morality”; the advocate journalists of the press and media who systematically exclude all mention of the issue. The conspiracies of silence on the abortion issue have increased since the infamous decision of the Supreme Court and have the effect of implicating the conspirators in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of unborn children.

Life itself is the first and most basic right guaranteed by our American Declaration of Independence. Protection of each and every innocent life has always been the concern of our legislators. To legislate the direct and deliberate death of the innocent runs counter to everything we stand for as Americans and as human beings.

Pro-abortionists pose the question: “How can we oppose abortion because it is a direct killing and yet approve a legal execution, which is also a killing?” I believe that this question has been satisfactorily answered by Edwin A. Roberts, Jr., a staff writer for the *National Observer*. Mr. Roberts replies: “The difference is obvious. When we sanction abortion, we sanction the destruction of the most innocent of all forms of human life, the unborn child. On the other hand, the individual condemned for committing an unspeakably foul murder, who has been found guilty in a court of law . . . has been guilty of a crime so horrendous that the felon has, by the nature of the act, forfeited his right to live among other humans — to which his continued existence is an unacceptable threat. . . . Rather than brutalizing the public, capital punishment can satisfy the innocent that their lives are held by society to be of the highest value and that the ultimate penalty for the worst of felons is a proper and civilized reflection of that appraisal.”

It is my confident hope that all conscientious people will give serious thought and study to this issue — destruction of the unborn child — and will contact those who represent us in government, both state and national, to recognize the consequent moral duty of civil authority to protect the innocent unborn child who is unable to defend himself, and guard against the elimination of those whose life is judged defective or worthless because of physical, mental, economic, racial, political or religious condition. Where can life be defended if not at the boundary of innocence?

Let us pray that God in His infinite wisdom will grant our legislative representatives the graces to recognize the sanctity of innocent human life from conception to natural death — and help us lift the scourge of abortion from our land.