

The Sanctity of Life

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I most earnestly and humbly seek to be sustained and understood by the Spirit as I endeavor to discuss an important and sensitive subject. I approach it with all the humility and with the profound respect it commands.

I have chosen to speak on the sanctity of life. I desire also to speak with reverence about the hallowed hallmark of life, which is the ability to reproduce itself. I wish also to be an advocate for the unborn. For this reason I direct my remarks primarily to women, because only they can honor the holy calling of motherhood, which is the most exalted good that can be rendered to mankind.

In the Talmud we read that he who saves one life is as if he had saved an entire world. Since the beginning of man, God has taught of an absolute respect for human life. From the very first moment of his being until the last breath of his life, there is a veneration for life which includes those in being, but not yet born.

One wise teacher tells us, "One human life is as precious as a million lives, for each is infinite in value." (Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, *Jewish Views on Abortion*, p. 4.)

The exercise of a man or woman's sacred procreative powers makes each a partner with God in creation and brings to them in parenthood their greatest happiness. This divine partnership also brings their greatest privileges and most weighty responsibilities.

Since becoming a parent is such a transcending blessing, and since each child is so precious and brings so much happiness, a cardinal purpose of marriage and of life itself is to bring forth new life within this partnership with God. Obligations inherent in the creation of precious human life are a sacred trust, which if faithfully kept, will keep us from degenerating into moral bankrupts and from becoming mere addicts of lust.

The responsibilities involved in the divine life-giving process, and the functions of our body, are so sacrosanct that they are to be exercised only within the marriage relationship. Those who do not accept and meet those responsibilities, for any reason, as well as those who do, should never depart from the law of chastity if they wish to be truly happy. All members of this Church seeking eternal joy and peace are expected to and will wish to come to the marriage altar free from sexual transgressions—chaste and pure. Any who fail to do so may find that they have cheated themselves of their own self-respect, dignity, and much of the great joy they seek in marriage. Because of the special inner peace, strength, and happiness it brings, chastity, as the law of God, is and always has been really "in," and unchastity is and always has been really "out."

In times past we have looked upon a person who saves another human life as a great hero; yet now we have come to a time when the taking of an unborn human life for nonmedical reasons has become tolerated, made legal, and accepted in many countries of the world. But making it legal to destroy newly conceived life will never make it right. It is consummately wrong.

President Spencer W. Kimball has recently said, “This is one of the most despicable of all sins—to destroy an unborn child to save one from embarrassment or to save one’s face or comfort.” (*Ensign*, Nov. 1974, p. 7.)

Some say, as did the Supreme Court of the United States, that it is only a theory that human life is present from conception. This is contrary to insurmountable medical evidence. Dr. Bernard N. Nathanson recently revealed that he was among those who were militantly outspoken in favor of legalized abortion and joined in using every device available in political action to promote it. He helped set up and became director of the first and largest abortion clinic in the western world. After the center had performed some sixty thousand abortions, Dr. Nathanson resigned as director. He said, “I am deeply troubled by my own increasing certainty that I had in fact presided over 60,000 deaths. There is no longer serious doubt in my mind that human life exists within the womb from the very onset of pregnancy.” (*New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 291, no. 22, p. 1189.)

Way back in the sixteenth century, Arantius showed that maternal and fetal circulations were separate, thus clearly demonstrating that there are two separate lives involved. The unborn babe is certainly alive, because it possesses the token of life which is the ability to reproduce dying cells. (Dr. Eugene F. Diamond, *Illinois Medical Journal*, May 1967.)

For the unborn, only two possibilities are open: It can become a live human being or a dead unborn child.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, referring to the unborn babe in the mother’s womb, said, “The simple fact is that God certainly intended to create a human being.”

Because she feels it, every mother knows there is sacred life in the body of her unborn babe. There is also life in the spirit, and some time before birth the body and the spirit are united. When they do come together, we have a human soul. For the Lord has said, “And the spirit and the body are the soul of man.” (D&C 88:15.)

Experts tell us that the necessity of terminating unborn life is rarely justified for purely medical or psychiatric reasons. (Dr. James H. Ford, M.D., *California Medical Journal*, Nov. 1972, pp. 80–84.) Some justify abortions because the unborn may have been exposed to drugs or disease and may have birth defects. Where in all the world is the physically or mentally perfect man or woman? Is life not worth living unless it is free of handicaps? Experience in working with handicapped children would suggest that human nature frequently rises above its impediments and that in Shakespeare’s words, “They say best men are molded out of faults, And, for the most, become much more the better For being a little bad” (*Measure for Measure*, 5, i, 445) in the physical sense.

Many parents who have known the heartache and concern of caring for a handicapped child would agree with Pearl Buck, Nobel prize-winning author who said, “A retarded child, a handicapped person, brings its own gift to life, even to

the life of normal human beings.” (*Death Before Birth*, the Constitutional Right to Life Committee, Providence, Rhode Island.) What a great gift to mankind the life of Helen Keller brought.

It is the belief of those who are members of this Church that human life is so hallowed and precious that there is an accountability to God on the part of those who invoke the sacred fountains of life.

The destruction of such a treasure is so abhorrent that the First Presidency of the Church has clearly and repeatedly counseled the world—as did President Kimball this morning—against the taking of unborn life. I quote, “Abortion must be considered one of the most revolting and sinful practices in this day. ... Members of the Church guilty of being parties to the sin of abortion must be subjected to the disciplinary action of the councils of the Church as circumstances warrant.” Members are counseled neither “to submit to or perform an abortion except in the rare cases where” it is medically necessary, and, as the First Presidency has further counseled, “even then it should be done only after counseling with the local presiding priesthood authority and after receiving divine confirmation through prayer.” The First Presidency has advised that it will be amenable to the laws of repentance and forgiveness. (*Ensign*, March 1973, p. 64.)

It is my feeling that we grossly underestimate the sacred nature of motherhood. Psychiatric experts remind us that there are certain fundamental, biological facts which influence the psyche of those who bring new life into the world. One says, “The ability of mothers to accept infants after they are born is underrated and underestimated.” (Dr. S. Bolter, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Oct. 1962, pp. 312–16.) Childbearing is a basic biological and psychological, privileged function of womankind.

One of the most evil myths of our day is that a woman who has joined hands with God in creation can destroy that creation because she claims the right to control her own body. Since the life within her is not her own, how can she justify its termination and deflect that life from an earth which it may never inherit?

The great medical profession, for which I have such great respect, that for centuries has been committed to the preservation of life under the cardinal principles of treatment—“do no harm” and “protect life”—now finds itself destroying almost a million unborn children a year in the United States alone. Each of these, because of tiny chromosomal differences, would have been different from any other person born in the world. How many with special gifts like unto Moses, Leonardo da Vinci, and Abraham Lincoln might have been among them?

These and all others are entitled to a defense in their unborn, natural state of existence. One great physician says, “We do that much for seagulls, flamingos and whooping cranes.” This same physician, Dr. Henry G. Armitage, Jr., states, “Not without comment shall it come to pass that a state (so fretful for the preservation of the praying mantis but holding an unborn baby to be of no account) can send a spark of immortality swinging out into limbo and conspire with citizen and physician to turn a fragile, living object of simple innocence and complex wonder into a pathetic pulp and consign it by rude and peremptory passage to the furnace or sewer—unknown, unwanted [and] undefended.” He further questions how a woman as “the fertile adornment of our race can be deluded into the notion that

she is a mere portress of unwanted luggage or be by blandishment seduced into believing that she has dominion over life not her own.” He says, “An abortion is never commonplace, for the world holds no heartbreak like the death of innocence. Whenever and wherever it occurs, we all suffer another loss from that little which sustains us and holds us together. It is the degradation of humanity. It is fulness emptied, innocence defiled, song unfinished, beauty discarded, hope unsprung. In our absence, housebreakers are robbing us of everything that we own: of virtue, honor, integrity, trust, innocence, truth, beauty, justice and liberty.” (Dr. Henry G. Armitage, Jr., *The Death of Innocence*.)

I urge all who may have dipped into the fountains of life to respect the divinity inherent in that life and to protect this sacred treasure and its transcending blessings. For the Savior of the world said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these ... ye have done it unto me.” (Matt. 25:40.)

I leave my testimony that the most precious of all of God’s creations is eternal life itself, in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.