

DEEPEST WONDER,
REMARKABLE BEAUTY:
SONNETS IN PRAISE OF LIFE
AND THE IMAGO DEI

Annie Nardone on the Miracle of Life

We have come to a time when our culture craves autonomy – to an extreme. Not only are we divided from our neighbors, but we have also severed one of the most fundamental human bonds of all: the emotional connection between mother and child. A preborn baby can be compartmentalized as a problem that can be easily solved by termination. Our apologetic effort to illuminate the fact that this child is like no other and alive from the first moments of conception needs to extend to society as a whole, changing the perspective to see life as an astounding miracle and each child created in the image of the Creator.

Author Malcolm Guite notes that in poetry “our vision is doubled; we become aware simultaneously both of the word as a thing in itself, a chosen sound,

a kind of music in the air, and also of that other reality, that mystery of truth of which the word is the gatekeeper.”¹ Poetry emotionally connects the reader to the message, and it sets aside the rhetoric of the abortion debate, pointing to the remarkable beauty of life by focusing on conception and the preborn baby.

There are several reasons why poetry is a beautiful method to help people see life in a fresh way. First, poetry can combat the loss of meaning in our words. Holly Ordway, Fellow of Faith and Culture, Word on Fire Institute, states that we must do “the difficult work of meaning-making in our Christian apologetics, we must also fight against the distortion of language.”² Poetry is written with carefully chosen words imbued with meaning and condensed into rhythm and rhyme that appeal to our imagination.

Poetry also works as a narrative to help our imaginations perceive an idea in a personal way, in contrast to reading a laundry list of scientific statements. As human beings created in the likeness of God, “we have an innate need for meaning in our

¹ Malcolm Guite, *Faith, Hope and Poetry* (London: Routledge, 2012), 160.

² Holly Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2017), 59.

lives. Because we are creatures who inhabit time and — importantly — who perceive the passing of time, we need to have this meaning expressed in a fundamentally narrative form.”³ Readers may connect meaningfully to a sonnet sequence that spans actual, human time and reads as a narrative form. In other words, these sonnets are explaining to the mother, “This is your life and the life of your baby in the next few months. You already have a relationship even before you look into each other’s eyes.” This baby is part of the mother’s story, and because we are “naturally predisposed to take in truth in the form of a narrative,” this truth naturally works as an imaginative work of literature.⁴

We can approach the pro-life issue from a different perspective and take a closer look at the development of a baby in the womb as a poetic theme. Facts are important so that we can effectively respond to pro-choice arguments like, “The fetus is literally a part of the pregnant woman,” and questions regarding the “viability” of the baby.⁵ Surprisingly, it is very difficult to get a

³ Ordway, *Apologetics.*, 102-103.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵ David Hershenov, “Ten (Bad, But Popular) Arguments for Abortion,” *Public Discourse*, August 23, 2017, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/08/19718/>.

straightforward, true, and detailed answer. Lila Rose, president of pro-life organization Live Action, directed me to websites that broke down the developmental stages into days rather than months.⁶ I am convinced that if people knew the miracles in each stage of development, hearts would be turning to cherish life. The following sonnets include many details of fetal development to leave a lasting image.

The pro-life and pro-choice debate has continued for so long that we have lost the true meaning of human life. Arguments have been reduced to repeated slogans, and we lay down words like children playing cards, always trying to trump each other with a clever play. Ordway states that “dialogue is often reduced to shouting slogans back and forth (a problem not limited to religious dialogue, to be sure).”⁷ The clichés no longer mean anything. Meanwhile, abortions continue because the culture fails to comprehend that every child in the abortion debate is a miracle. Relying on reason alone has shown itself to be a weak method to affect hearts and minds. The missing component is

⁶ “The Endowment for Human Development,” *The Endowment for Human Development*, accessed March 5, 2019, <http://www.ehd.org>.

⁷ Ordway, *Apologetics.*, 21.

imagination awakened by literature, and especially poetry.

An argument for abortion is that the baby is not actually a person until after it is born and any rights the baby is entitled to are bestowed well after birth. Before birth, and even for a time after birth, the child is merely a creature without rights according to the standards of Peter Singer, Professor of Bioethics, Princeton University and Laureate Professor of Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, University of Melbourne. In his book *Writings on an Ethical Life*, Singer writes, “If the fetus does not have the same claim to life as a person, it appears that the newborn baby does not either, and the life of a newborn baby is of less value to it than the life of a pig, a dog, or a chimpanzee is to the nonhuman animal.”⁸ Christopher Kaczor writes, “If it can be shown that personhood begins sometime after birth, it will be all the more evident that personhood does not begin prior to birth, and so abortion is not morally wrong.”⁹ We become embroiled in straw-man arguments over terms like *fetus*, *human*, and *person*. This is dangerous ground to tread because fetal

⁸ Peter Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life* (New York: Ecco Press, 2000), 160-161.

⁹ Christopher Kaczor, *The Ethics of Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 13.

development is left to interpretation of terms. Science proves that life starts with two cells combining to form a unique set of DNA markers. These markers are the guiding plan in forming a new, unique human being, regardless of the label we would attach to him or her. Labels can dehumanize and keep us comfortably alienated from the truth.

Because we dislike inconvenience and emotional pain, a baby with a limited life span is viewed by society to have little worth. In fact, it is easy to consider them a burden to society and to the family. The solution to the ‘problem’ has been abortion for a variety of reasons — we wonder what kind of life will this child have? Many believe that since the baby will die anyhow, let’s just put it out of its misery now. ‘Quality of life’ is a phrase that factors into the decision of abortion and we think that any child who is not born normal (but what is normal and by whose standards?) could not possibly be happy and successful. This attitude comes frightfully close to Darwin’s atheistic view of natural selection. He believed in the “idea of impersonal, random chance guiding the development of species” and survival of the fittest with the “death of the ‘unfit’ resulting in the overall

population becoming 'better'.¹⁰ Therefore, the unfit are not worthy of life or deserving of a chance. In a dystopian twist, society is advanced by the elimination of the imperfect, but by what standard do we conclude that someone has worth?

My family has personal experience with our baby who had "life-limiting" circumstances, and I have always felt God's call to use that difficult pregnancy to encourage other families. Dr. Elvira Parravicini, neonatologist at Morgan Stanley's Children's Hospital, wrote an inspiring article about caring for babies who were not expected to survive. Rather than seeing these babies as a hopeless medical situation, she treated each one as a patient in need of "comfort care." She believes that doctors should be "creative, using all our medical knowledge and our humanity."¹¹ This respect for life recognizes the humanity of the child in a way the false solution of abortion cannot do.

I carried our daughter until she died at seven months gestation as a result of her "life-limiting" condition. She has always been a beloved and valued

¹⁰ Holly Ordway, "Lecture Notes, Unit 1B" (Lecture, Houston Baptist University, Houston, TX, January 14, 2019).

¹¹ Elvira Parravicini, M.D., "Aspects of Beauty: The Medical Care of Terminally Ill Newborns," *Humanum* 1, no. 1 (2014), accessed March 5, 2019, <http://humanumreview.com/articles/aspects-of-beauty-the-medical-care-of-terminally-ill-newborns>.

member of our family, and our relationship with her wasn't cut short by abortion. The impact of her brief life on our family started a ripple effect of blessing on hundreds of people and continues thirteen years after her death. She had a tiny 'narrative': conception, life, and death in a little over seven months, but her earthly story is complete, and we loved her through her life, bringing closure to our grief.

Poetic language can beautifully speak meaning into a sensitive issue. I wrote the following sonnets to resonate the abiding and purposeful love which God created both the universe's expanse and each tiny human life, declaring all of His creation good. The sonnet "Creation" uses a macrocosm and microcosm comparing the universe to a tiny child to symbolize this idea. The three-sonnet sequence was written in Spenserian stanza form, which Edmund Spenser created for his epic poem *The Faerie Queene*. Imagining the preborn baby as a tiny fairy guides the reader away from the medical term 'fetus' to the story of a developing child enveloped in mystical, magical wonder. Some of the most remarkable and latest discoveries we have made in the field of fetal development are integrated into the poem set, using reason and imagination to bridge the gap between medical knowledge and truth.

Each baby is created with a purpose. That purpose may be a mystery and a difficult calling to bear for the parents, but there is still a reason for that tiny life. I wrote these sonnets to inspire people to see the miracle of each child, unique from conception and created for a purpose.

Created

All is Darkness, but creation will come.
Infinite cosmos eternally planned.
Now void of substance, an infinite womb.
Then the Word brings light and life to the land.

A finite womb is purposed from the start,
To hold a life to touch the world anew.
With two, then one, to make new life apart.
A tiny hope, with destiny in view.

The universe from beginning shall be
Home to each spark of life in time's expanse.
Reach for the magic, seize the stars' glory.
The tiniest as priceless as the vast.

Imagined before time, conceived He knew.
Before the infinite dark, there was you.

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