

# The Being and Nature of the Unborn Child

Thomas F. Torrance

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*Helping Us Live  
With the Ache of the Beauty that is Passed,  
In the Joy of the Glory that is to Come.*

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# **The Being and Nature of the Unborn Child**

**Thomas F. Torrance**

**Presbyterians Pro-Life General Assembly Luncheon**

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## ***PRESENTED TEXT***

*"He is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being."* That statement about God endorsed by St. Paul applies to the unborn as well as to the born. Every human being has been created by God body and soul. Each is addressed by his Word. Each is made in correspondence to God himself. So we reflect him through a unique relation to himself that actually *transcends* our creatureliness. That relation is constitutive of our distinctively human being and nature. Now this applies to each one of us from the very beginning of our conception and existence in the womb, not merely as a body and a soul, but as a body-soul unity--as an *embodied soul* and a *besouled body*. So through his Spirit, God sustains his human creatures and makes us open for fellowship with him. He reveals himself to us through his Word, and makes it possible for each one in due course to respond personally to his address. God adapts his gracious presence to human beings all through their lives: from their conception in the womb, then as embryos, then as children and later as adults, in ways appropriate to the different stages of their earthly existence.

Our particular concern today is with the being and the nature of the unborn child as a besouled body or an embodied soul from the very beginning of existence in the womb of the mother. The unborn child is already a human being "in germ," as it were, even though only the size of an apple pip. That is to

say, the human being is already genetically complete in the womb from the moment of conception, when the body and the soul of the new human being grow together within the womb of the mother and in living relation with her. The human genome thus come into being is laden by the Creator with all the information that is needed for complete development.

### **Identifying the Transcendent Source**

While that information is more than would fill the largest encyclopedia, it is yet incomplete and indeterminate in itself, and is thus not explainable merely in terms of its components. However complicated it may be, this vast information cannot of itself account for the way in which the embryo is shaped and develops. There is and must be some all-important factor: a regulative power. Thus, a controlling source of information bears upon the human nature and life of the developing embryo from the beginning. This is what the physicist Paul Davies has called the *metaplan*.

Think of it: where does the information content of the genome come from? It does not and cannot be produced by accident, or through random self-organization in natural processes, for the information is of such an intelligible, complex nature that it must have an *intelligent* source. There is and must be *something* over and above our genetic composition which bears upon human life from the very beginning. This something is none else but the creative source which the Bible speaks of as the *Word of God*, the one by whom all things were made, in whom was life and the life was the light of human being.

It belongs to the very heart of the Gospel that the Word of God who was the eternal Son of God, of one being with the

Father, and through whom all things were made, chose in his love to become incarnate in Jesus Christ, was conceived through the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and became a true human being. He is the creative Word and transcendent source of the all-important information in the formation of every human being in body and soul. The Son of God is himself the incarnate *metaplan* in continual dynamic relation between the Creator and every living human person! It is surely to him who became a holy embryo in the Virgin's womb, and was born of her to be the Savior of the world, that we must go for understanding of every human being from conception. In Christ, we see that the unborn child is as an embodied human soul, a person loved by the Lord Jesus who came to be the Savior of the human race.

### **The Virgin Birth and the Unborn**

The virgin birth of Jesus is an essential part of the Gospel of salvation. For through it Jesus was made one of us and one with us in such a way that he healed and sanctified in himself what he had assumed from us—our humanity-- thereby recreating, humanizing, and personalizing it. That is why leading theologians in the early Church, followed by John Calvin at the Reformation, rightly traced the root of our redemption, not only to the death and resurrection of Christ, but to his very conception and birth of the Virgin Mary. Because in Jesus the Creator Word of God was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, Christians came to regard the unborn child in a new light. The fetus is sanctified by the Lord Jesus as an embryonic *person*. Hence already in the first century, in the *Didache*, the Church added to the sixth commandment, "You shall not commit infanticide, nor procure abortion." Those early Christians took to heart the words of the Lord Jesus about little

children: "Suffer the little children to come to me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever offends one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for him to have a millstone fastened round his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea." "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven." From the earliest days of the Church, that teaching of the Lord Jesus about our behavior toward little children has been held to apply no less to the unborn than to the born. For in his incarnation, the Lord Jesus had himself been an embryo in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of whom he was born as Jesus to be Immanuel, God with us the Savior of humankind.

The birth of Jesus was of vicarious and redemptive significance. That means that our new birth is to be understood in relation to the birth of Jesus himself. The doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus and its redemptive significance must be recovered for a proper understanding of the redemptive life and mission of Christ. Moreover, the virgin birth is crucial to our grasp of the nature and status in Christ's eyes of the unborn child. The Son of God became a human being for us in the womb of the Virgin Mary, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He became what we are. Think of the importance of the incarnation, then, for our understanding of and regard for the unborn child. Every child in the womb has been brothered by the Lord Jesus. In becoming a human being for us, he also became an embryo for the sake of all embryos, and for our Christian understanding of the being, nature and status in God's eyes of the unborn child. So, to take no thought, or no proper thought, for the unborn child is to have no proper thought of Jesus himself as our Lord and Savior or to appreciate his

relation as the incarnate Creator to every human being.

## **Medical Research**

Because the Lord Jesus is also our incarnate Savior who has a fellow feeling with us in all our infirmities, we must not forget his healing and redemptive power when we learn from our medical scientists, gynecologists and physicians about what they tell us of the life and experience of the human fetus. With this awareness, we turn to some of the facts which research has brought to our attention.

Far from being little more than a bundle of living tissue, the unborn or preborn child early reveals evidence of a consciousness of his or her mother. The child has sufficient self-awareness to react through bodily movement to her hands and her voice in loving care, and also to that of the father along with the mother. Indeed, already within a few weeks of its life, the fetus gives evidence, discernible in movements of the brain, of recognizing and having a memory of parental behavior, in emotion and sound, and reacts in response. Thus the child in the mother's womb responds with evident delight and memory to the caressing and singing of the mother. It is now known that any tune repeatedly played to the baby in the womb is learned by the baby who recognizes it after birth. Moreover, the child has the ability even to sense the mother's withdrawal of love, and has enough self-awareness to sense abortion attempts on the part of the mother, with the will to react to them. Even at twenty weeks gestational age, the unborn child quite definitely responds to pain and suffering and reacts in distress.

## **Personhood**

This kind of interrelation discerned between the preborn



child and his or her mother indicates the development already of what must be called *personal relations*. The unborn child is a personal being. The concept of person was not known in ancient culture, in the East or in the West, but comes from Christian theology. It derives from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit one Being, three Persons. In him the divine Persons are who they are through their interrelations in being and act with one another. While that notion of "person" applied originally and strictly to the Triune nature of God, it came to be applied to creaturely human beings, in such a way that the relations between human beings constitute what they are as persons. Persons are what and who they are in the interpersonal relations of their One Being with each other.

It is surely now evident that it is through loving personalizing relation with the mother that the tiny personal being of the fetus is nourished, as seen in the embryonic response to the mother, especially in recognition of her voice. Is that not after all what we read in the Gospel account of how the embryonic being of John the Baptist leaped in the womb of his mother Elizabeth when she was greeted by the Virgin Mary? Thus theology with the medical sciences urges us toward fuller understanding of the unborn child in the unity of body and soul, and in the personal relatedness of the child to the mother particularly. So Christians can deepen and advance what we learn from medical research in our understanding of the personal life and behavior of the unborn child. In the light of such scientific and theological evidence as we have discussed, is not abortion act of murder, and a grave sin against the Lord Jesus?

## **Pain and the Unborn**

We return now to the fact that the unborn baby feels pain and reacts to it, for example when a needle is plunged into the baby's body or when undergoing an operation in the womb. There are people who question whether the unborn baby actually *feels* pain. However, as the distinguished nurse Margaret Sparshott in Britain has pointed out, it has now been found that a fetus is actually able to feel pain, and does in fact react sharply to it. It is now established that fetuses have all the necessary central nervous equipment for pain experience, and that their experience of what is called pain *is painful*. Even at twenty weeks, the unborn child definitely reacts to distress, pain and suffering. And, the unborn child has been found to have enough self-awareness to sense abortion attempts by the mother, and actually reacts to them. If the Lord Jesus who is the Creator Word of God by whom each one of us has come into being, and is indeed the source of information governing the conception and formation of each of us in the womb of our mother, then we cannot but conclude that to kill the child in the womb is a *sin against the Lord Jesus himself*.

So, from the moment of conception every human being is infinitely precious to the Lord Jesus, and is the concern of his redeeming love. Civilized countries enact laws protecting animals from the infliction of pain. Surely they ought to enact laws protecting the fetus from pain, even if in law the fetus does not have the status of personal being. But as Christians, our regard for the pre-born and post-born alike must surely be governed by our commitment to Jesus Christ. He is the incarnate Creator and Lord of every human being, who was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born to be the brother and Redeemer of humankind.

### **The Redeemer's Tears**

Luke 19 records these words: *"And when Jesus drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But they are hid from your eyes."*

Sitting on the Mount of Olives, Jesus looked over the valley to see Jerusalem and wept over its coming desolation and the slaughter of its inhabitants, men, women and children, by the Roman army. It was, we know from historians, a fearful slaughter in which Jesus' fellow Jews were mercilessly butchered, and the Holy City was set on fire and utterly destroyed. That event belongs to the very heart of the Gospel of salvation and peace, the Lord God himself weeping over Jerusalem, shedding tears over his loved ones with whom he had become united in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and of whom he was born to save his people from their sins, God with us become one with us and one of us, the Savior of the world. Let us not forget that he who shed tears of compassion, out of the same fountain of love and mercy, shed blood too. The calamity that overtook Jerusalem was far greater in Jesus' eyes than it can be in ours, but his compassion for all those he came to save, and for whom he died, was and is infinite. Jesus was none other than God himself, God incarnate among us and one with us who shed those tears over Jerusalem, and the people of Jerusalem, the believing and the unbelieving alike. "Daughters of Jerusalem", Jesus said to those who bewailed and lamented him on his way to the Cross, "do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children".

The destruction of Jerusalem and its people was a veritable *holocaust*. Those tears, the tears of the Redeemer, were the very tears of God himself. And they have flowed and

flowed again over the fearful *holocaust* of millions and millions of Jews in our own time. But what of the abortions of unborn children that have been taking place and continue to take place throughout the world, even in "Christian" countries? Is that not the most incredible *holocaust* being perpetrated, even now, in countries where people have heard and believe the Gospel, and where millions and millions of people, as in the United States of America and in the countries of Europe, not to speak of Asia and Africa, profess to follow the Lord Jesus? Can we not allow the tears that continue to flow from the compassionate pleading eyes of the Lord Jesus, the *Redeemer's tears*, quench the flames of *holocaust*! Let us listen and listen to him: "Daughters of Jerusalem," here and everywhere, "do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children."

# **The Being and Nature of the Unborn Child**

**Thomas F. Torrance**

## ***COMPLETE TEXT***

*"He is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being"* (Acts 17: 27-8). That statement about God endorsed by St Paul applies to the unborn as well as to the born. Every human being has been created by God body and soul. Each is addressed by his Word. Each is made in correspondence to himself. So we reflect him through a unique relation to himself that transcends our creatureliness. This relation is constitutive of our distinctively human being and nature. This applies to each one of us from the very beginning of our conception and existence in the womb, not as a body and a soul, but as a body-soul unity, as an *embodied soul* and a *besouled body*.

Like all created things human being is corruptible, may disintegrate and cease to exist. Nevertheless, human being is continuously sustained in existence by the beneficent will and creative presence of God, and is thus given immortality through the grace of a relation with God who only has immortality. God alone is uncreated, perfectly self-sufficient Being, eternally existing in himself in an utterly transcendent way that surpasses our power to comprehend. He is without beginning and without end: to be immortal is the natural and intrinsic property of his Being. All other being is deficient in existence and naturally mortal with a finite beginning and a finite end, and is thus utterly dependent on the goodness of God, the Lord of all being, in the order and temporality of its existence. So far as human being is concerned, however, owing to the distinctive

integration of soul and body, a continuing personal life after death includes the body as a basic equation of existence. Hence in Christian theology immortality is inseparably bound up with the resurrection of the whole human being as a body/soul unity, and is described as a creaturely participation in the uncreated eternal Life of God.

The whole universe with its rational order to which human beings belong has been created by God out of nothing and is contingent. Far from being closed in upon itself, it is open and as such points beyond itself to the Creator. Within itself the universe comprises a hierarchy of different levels of creaturely existence and rational order. While each level is open at its boundary conditions to understanding from a higher level, all creation is open toward God in its nature and order. With all animal being, human being is a living organism or an animated body. But unlike animals, human being is a rational constituent of the creation within its contingent rational order. As such we are ultimately to be understood not from an independent center in ourselves, but only from above and beyond ourselves in a unique relation to God. Unlike other creaturely beings, human being is constituted a rational subject and agent, that is, a subject-being or person, living in inter-personal relation with others. Through his Spirit, God sustains his human creatures and makes them open for fellowship with him. He reveals himself to them through his Word, and makes it possible for each one in due course to respond personally to his address. God adapts his gracious presence to human beings all through their lives, from their conception in the womb, then as embryos, then as children and later as adults, in ways appropriate to the different stages of their earthly existence.

## Identifying the Transcendent Source

Our particular concern here is with the being and nature of the unborn child as a besouled body or an embodied soul from the very beginning of existence in the womb of the mother. The unborn child is already a human being "in germ," as it were, even though only the size of an apple pip. That is to say, the human being is already genetically complete in the womb from the moment of conception, when the body and soul of the new human being grow together within the womb of the mother and in living relation with her. The human genome thus come into being is laden by the Creator with all the information that is needed for complete development.

While that information is more than would fill the largest encyclopedia, it is yet incomplete and indeterminate in itself, and is thus not explainable in terms of its components. However complicated it may be, it cannot of itself account for the way in which the embryo is shaped and develops. There is and must be some all-important factor, a regulative power, a controlling source of information which bears upon the human nature and life of the developing embryo from the beginning. This controlling factor may be spoken of as a kind of *metaplan*, a term which may be borrowed from the physicist Paul Davies in his book *The Cosmic Blueprint*.

Where does the information content of the human genome come from? That must surely be related to the transcendent source and ultimate ground of the rational order with which we are concerned in the formation of all physical laws, for which physical laws themselves cannot account. Einstein once spoke of this as the supreme *Why*, or the ultimate justification of physical law. There is an ultimate rational

ground to what happens in the universe, which we cannot formulate in our physical laws. In all our scientific formulation of the laws of nature, we have to presuppose a transcendent *order* for which we cannot give any account, but which we have to assume in all attempts at proof or disproof. That is why we cannot but take into account a controlling source of information in the conception and orderly development of each cell in a human embryo, that is of some "metaplan" or "metaorder," an organizing principle.

Let me repeat here what I have written elsewhere in *The Soul and Person of the Unborn Child*. However wonderful and complicated the DNA may be, it cannot of itself account for the enormously greater complexity of the many parts of one's physical body. Where does the information content of the genome come from? It does not and cannot be produced by accident or through random self-organization in natural processes, for the information is of such an intelligible complex nature that it must have an intelligent source. There is and must be a regulative force, and indeed a controlling source of information, something over and above our genetic composition which bears upon the human nature and life of the developing embryo from the moment of conception, from the very beginning of its existence in the womb. This is the creative source which the Bible speaks of as the *Word of God* by whom all things were made, in whom was life and the life was the light of human being.

It belongs to the very heart of the Gospel that the Word of God who was the eternal Son of God, of one being with the Father, and through whom all things were made, chose in his love to become incarnate in Jesus Christ, was conceived through the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and



became a true human being. It is surely to him who became a holy embryo in the Virgin's womb, and was born of her to be the Savior of the world, that we must go, in order as Christians to understand what the unborn child is as an embodied human soul, and as one loved by the Lord Jesus who came to be the Savior of the human race. The eternal Word of God become incarnate *was and is himself the metaplan*, the creative and regulative force in the birth of each human being, come among us as one of us to be Lord and Savior of the human race!

## Christ's Virgin Birth and the Unborn

The virgin birth of Jesus is an essential part of the Gospel of salvation. For through it, Jesus was made one of us and one with us in such a way that he healed and sanctified in himself what he had assumed from us—our humanity-- thereby recreating, humanizing, and personalizing it. That is why leading theologians in the early Church, followed by John Calvin at the Reformation, rightly traced the root of our redemption, not only to the death and resurrection of Christ, but to his very conception and birth of the Virgin Mary. It was because in Jesus the Creator Word of God was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, that Christians came to regard the unborn fetus in a new light, sanctified by the Lord Jesus as an embryonic *person*.

Hence already in the first century the Church added to the sixth commandment, "You shall not commit infanticide, nor procure abortion" (*Didache* 2.2). Those early Christians took to heart the words of the Lord Jesus about little children: "Suffer the little children to come to me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 19: 14). "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever offends one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for to have a millstone fastened round his neck and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Mt. 18: 5-6). "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 18: 10). That teaching of the Lord Jesus about our behavior toward little children were held to apply no less to the unborn than to the born, for in his incarnation the Lord Jesus had himself been an embryo in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of whom he was born as Jesus to be Immanuel, God with us the Savior of humankind.

Unfortunately more attention throughout the history of Churches in the East and the West has often been given to the Virgin Mary herself than to the One conceived in her womb and begotten as our Lord and Savior. That has contributed, like the neglect of the Virgin birth of Jesus to a widespread failure to have due concern for the unborn child brothered by the Lord Jesus.

The Virgin Birth cannot be understood apart from the whole mystery of Christ, from the union of divine and human nature in his one Person already complete in the womb of Mary. The nature of the Jesus' unborn Person was not different from the nature of his divine-human Person born of his mother at Bethlehem. His birth of the Virgin Mary may well be regarded as the outward sign, the historical form in humanity which the creative and saving entry of the Son of God took, when he assumed our human nature in union with his divine nature, but it was much more than a sign. The sign points to the mystery of Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, incarnate in the world of space and time, and bears witness to it, but the reality of the Virgin birth is more than the sign. The reality is the union of true God and true man in Christ the creative Word of God and redemptive activity of God. But if the Virgin birth is a true and appropriate sign, the outward sign of the inward reality belong together as the form and content of the Incarnation. Thus the Virgin Birth attests and corresponds to the nature of what it signifies, and to the nature of his healing and redemptive work of the Savior throughout all his life, from conception and birth to his death and resurrection.

It is highly significant that the earliest text of John 1: 13 referred to the Virgin birth of Jesus was not in the plural but in

the singular: "Who was born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." And it is in that light that the third chapter of St John's Gospel about the need for us to be born from above or again through the Spirit is to be understood. The birth of Jesus was of vicarious and redemptive significance. That means that our new birth is to be understood in relation to the birth of Jesus himself.

I believe that the doctrine of the Virgin birth of Jesus and its redemptive significance must be recovered for a proper understanding of the redemptive life and mission of Christ, and also for our grasp of its import for us about the nature and status in his eyes of the unborn child. As he became a human being for us, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, lived and died on the Cross and rose again for our redemption, so, I believe, we must think of its importance for our understanding of and regard for the unborn child, everyone of whom has been brothered by the Lord Jesus. In becoming a human being for us, he also became an embryo for the sake of all embryos, and for our Christian understanding of the being, nature and status in God's eyes of the unborn child in his/her body and soul. To take no thought or proper thought for the unborn child is to have no proper thought of Jesus himself as our Lord and Savior or to appreciate his relation as the incarnate Creator to every human being.

### **What Science Tells Us of the Unborn**

Let us consider the being and life of unborn child as we now know of him/her in relation to some of the things we have been learning in recent years about the human fetus. This is particularly significant for us today, for our relation with the Lord Jesus in his conception began with our own conception. And our relationship with him in his birth began with our own

birth, not only with our new birth, although that is to be understood, as we have noted, in its ultimate root in the birth of Jesus himself "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." He is himself the transcendent source of information become flesh as one of us, the creative Word of God become man, in accordance with whom each of us was conceived and formed in the womb of our mother. In accordance with him, each of us is given birth and life through our mothers and fathers. As such the Lord Jesus is also our incarnate Savior who has a fellow feeling with us in all our infirmities. His healing and redemptive power we must not forget when we learn from our medical scientists, gynecologists and physicians about what they tell us of the life and experience of the unborn child.

It is significant that the term "compassion," so often ascribed to the Lord Jesus in the Gospels (and echoed by St Paul), is a rendering in Greek of the Hebrew expression (*rahamim*) for womb. As Savior, the Lord Jesus bears toward all those in weakness, pain, and need, but in a divinely intensified degree, something like the visceral feeling which a mother has toward the babe in her womb. He the creative Word and transcendent source of the all-important information in the formation of every human being in body and soul, the Lord and Savior of humankind, who was born flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, is himself the incarnate *metaplan* in continual dynamic relation between the Creator and every living human person!

Here are some of the facts which research has brought to our attention by gynecologists, pediatricians, and other medical scientists, which must affect our attitude to the human fetus. In the advance of our science, as we have become aware, for

example, through Albert Einstein, the damaging dualist fallacy which has affected so much modern thought, especially in the psychological and sociological sciences, is being steadily rejected for a more holistic approach. Thus a non-dualist unitary conception of human being is being reached, supporting the Jewish/Christian understanding of human being as embodied soul and ensouled body.

Far from being little more than a bundle of living tissue, the unborn or preborn child early reveals evidence of a consciousness of his/her mother, with sufficient self-awareness to react through bodily movement to her hands and her voice in loving care, and also to that of the father along with the mother. Indeed, already within a few weeks of its life, the fetus gives evidence, discernible in movements of the brain, of recognizing and having a memory of parental behavior, in emotion and sound, and reacts in response. Thus the child in the mother's womb responds with evident delight and memory to the caressing and singing of the mother. Moreover it is now known that any tune repeatedly played to the baby in the womb is learned by the baby who recognizes it after birth. It is particularly interesting to find that the unborn child reacts especially to the mathematical music of Mozart rather than to loud cacophonous sounds, as it does also to discord between the mother and father! Moreover, the fetus has the ability even to sense the mother's withdrawal of love, and has enough self-awareness to sense abortion attempts on the part of the mother, with the will to react to them. Even at twenty weeks gestational age the unborn child quite definitely responds to pain and suffering and reacts in distress.

What I have written here is only a very little of the greatly increased knowledge we now have of the life and behavior of

the unborn child, but it is enough to prompt us to consider two very important points.

## **Personal Being**

First, the kind of interrelation discerned between the preborn child and his/her mother indicates the development already of what must be called *personal relations*. The unborn child is *in parvo* a personal being. The concept of person was not known in ancient culture, in the East or in the West, but comes from Christian theology. It derives from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit one Being, three Persons. In him the divine Persons are who they are through their interrelations in being and act with one another. While that notion of "person" applied originally and strictly to the Triune nature of God, it came to be applied to creaturely human beings, in such a way that the relations between human beings constitute what they are as persons. Persons are what and who they are in the interpersonal relations of their One Being with each another. Unfortunately that concept of the person and of the personal within dualist patterns of thought, ancient and modern, came to be defined in individualist and rationalist patterns of thought, and then in legal and psychological ways when its profound ontological significance became submerged. That is particularly evident in the romantic and subjectivist notion of "personality." As a result, the personal became excluded from scientific thinking, so that even the personal participation of the scientist's mind, as Schrödinger and Polanyi lamented, was excluded from scientific thought, although it is actually through the mind of the scientist as person that all scientific research takes place and scientific knowledge is achieved.

There is another side, however, to the history of the person and the personal evident in the scientific work of James Clerk Maxwell. When faced with the problem of explaining the behavior of the electromagnetic field he found that he could not do that in a mechanistic way. Then he took over the idea from Trinitarian theology that relations between persons belong to what persons actually are, and applied that dynamic ontorelation to explain how particles of light are what they actually and dynamically are. And in so doing he advanced the epoch-making concept of the continuous electrodynamic field, which Einstein claimed brought about the greatest change in the rational structure of science, and on which his own and all subsequent science rests. Why, then, should we not think of the personal being of the unborn child in that kind of dynamic and ontological way, in interrelation with his/her mother? If that kind of interrelational way of thinking was so effective in the scientific account of the behavior of inanimate light particles with one another in a continuous dynamic field, why should we not think of it as applying effectively to a deeper understanding of the interrelation of the body and soul and personal life of the fetus in relation to the mother?

It is surely now evident that it is through loving personalizing relation with the mother that the tiny personal being of the fetus is nourished, and its embryonic response to the mother, especially in recognition of her voice. Is that not after all what we read in the Gospel account of how the embryonic being of John the Baptist leaped in the womb of his mother Elizabeth when she was greeted by the Virgin Mary? I believe that through fuller understanding of the unborn child in the unity of body and soul, and in the personal relatedness of the child to the mother particularly, we can deepen and advance what we learn from the researches of medical scientists in our



understanding of the personal life and behavior of the unborn child. In that event, is not abortion an act of murder, and a grave sin against the Lord Jesus?

### **Pain and the Unborn**

Second, we return now to the fact that the unborn baby feels pain and reacts to it, for example when a needle is plunged into the baby's body or when undergoing an operation in the womb. There are people who question whether the unborn baby actually *feels* pain. However, that seems to be an equivocal question governed by conceptions of what the self and self-consciousness are in their own psychological perception of child or adult experience. As the distinguished nurse Margaret Sparshott, in Britain has pointed out, it has now been found that a fetus is actually able to feel pain, and does in fact react sharply to it. It is now established that fetuses have all the necessary central nervous equipment for pain experience, and that their experience of what is called pain is *painful*. Even at twenty weeks gestational age, the unborn child definitely reacts to distress, pain and suffering. And, as I have already pointed out, the unborn child has been found to have enough self-awareness to sense abortion attempts by the mother, and actually reacts to them. If the Lord Jesus who is the Creator Word of God by whom each one of us has come into being, and is indeed the source of information governing the conception and formation of each of us in the womb of our mother, then we cannot but conclude that to kill the child in the womb is a *sin against the Lord Jesus himself*.

So, from the moment of conception every human being is infinitely precious to the Lord Jesus, and is the concern of his redeeming love. Civilized countries enact laws protecting

animals from the infliction of pain. Surely they ought to enact laws protecting the fetus from pain, even if in law the fetus does not have the status of personal being. But as Christians our regard for the unborn and born alike must surely be governed by our commitment to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Creator and Lord of every human being, who was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born to be the brother and Redeemer of humankind.

### **The Redeemer's Tears**

*"And when Jesus drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But they are hid from your eyes" (Lk. 19:41,42).*

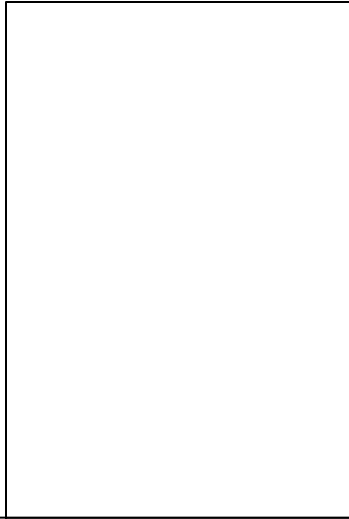
Sitting on the Mount of Olives, Jesus looked over the valley to see Jerusalem and wept over its coming desolation and the slaughter of its inhabitants, men, women and children, by the Roman army. It was, we know from historians, a fearful slaughter in which Jesus' fellow Jews were mercilessly butchered, and the Holy City was set on fire and utterly destroyed. That event belongs to the very heart of the Gospel of salvation and peace, the Lord God himself weeping over Jerusalem, shedding tears over his loved ones with whom he had become united in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and of whom he was born to save his people from their sins, God with us become one with us and one of us, the Savior of the world. Let us not forget that he who shed tears of compassion, out of the same fountain of love and mercy, shed blood too. The calamity that overtook Jerusalem was far greater in Jesus' eyes than it can be in ours, but his compassion for all those he came to save, and for whom he died, was and is infinite. Jesus was none other than God himself, God incarnate among us and one

with us who shed those tears over Jerusalem, and the people of Jerusalem, the believing and the unbelieving alike. "Daughters of Jerusalem," Jesus said to those who bewailed and lamented him on his way to the Cross, "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children" (Lk. 23: 28).

The destruction of Jerusalem and its people was a veritable *holocaust*. Those tears, the tears of the Redeemer, were the very tears of God himself. And they have flowed and flowed again over the fearful *holocaust* of millions and millions of Jews in our own time. But what of the abortions of unborn children that have been taking place and continue to take place throughout the world, even in "Christian" countries? Is that not the most incredible *holocaust* being perpetrated, even now, in countries where people have heard and believe the Gospel, and where millions and millions of people, as in the United States of America and in the countries of Europe, not to speak of Asia and Africa, profess to follow the Lord Jesus? Can we not allow the tears that continue to flow from the compassionate pleading eyes of the Lord Jesus, the *Redeemer's tears*, quench the flames of *holocaust*! Let us listen and listen to him: "Daughters of Jerusalem," here and everywhere, "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children."

**Thomas F. Torrance** is the premier British theologian of the past 50 years. Professor of Christian Dogmatics at the University of Edinburgh for nearly three decades. Torrance is a past Moderator of the Church of Scotland and a recipient of the prestigious Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Since “retirement,” Professor Torrance has lectured and published prolifically, producing some of his finest work. *The Trinitarian Faith* and *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* are foundational to any contemporary discussions of the Trinity.

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*The Being and Nature of the Unborn Child* was prepared for the 2000 General Assembly Luncheon of Presbyterians Pro-Life. In this essay, Professor Torrance clearly and passionately shows the inextricable connection between the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the sanctity of every unborn child.

Both the text presented at the PPL luncheon and the complete essay are included.

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Lenoir, North Carolina