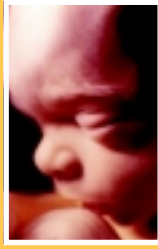
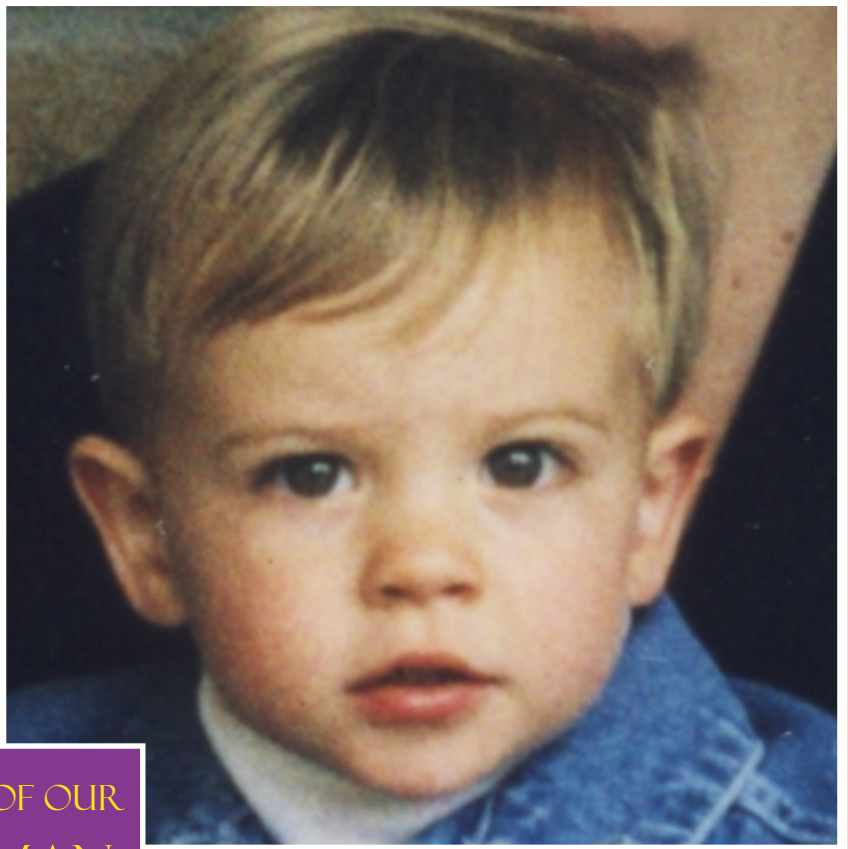


The Unborn Child



PART OF OUR
HUMAN
FAMILY



A new century, a new millennium, and we looked forward to a new time of peace. War and terrorism would be left behind, we hoped. Now we find ourselves at war all over again and living in permanent fear of terrorism. Yet times of war also provide us with new opportunities to reflect on the preciousness of human life.

A generation of Australians has grown up with near-universal contraception, abortion on demand, and ever more liberal access to reproductive technologies. The media sells sex as a recreational activity and fertility as a consumer choice. Last year Federal Parliament voted to allow scientists to destroy 'spare' IVF embryos for research. Have Australians lost all reverence for early human life?

It is easy to think that the 'culture of death' has triumphed and to give up in despair. But Christ and his Church continue to side with the weak, the downtrodden, the defenceless, the unwanted and the unloved. We may feel on the back foot sometimes, yet our generation is called to be a people of life. We are called to join the great human rights struggle of the 21st century. We are called to build a new culture of life, a new civilisation of love. We are called to love and support pregnant women and their children and to welcome and protect the unborn child. Are there any reasons to hope that we can make a difference? Yes, there are new signs of hope.

Window on the womb

We are learning more and more about which genes affect which human characteristics. What is abundantly clear is that as soon as the sperm joins the egg ('fertilisation') we have a new human organism with a unique genetic code and human ancestry. He or she matures thereafter to birth and beyond. That is how each of us began.

Even IVF and other questionable reproductive technologies draw attention to the humanity of the embryo. No human embryos ever turn into rose bushes or kangaroos. Even in the laboratory, they only develop as human beings develop. We can see this under the microscope.

Recent advances in ultrasound technology allow us to see the developing unborn child with ever-greater clarity. The latest technology offers vastly improved images, a 'window on the womb'. What emerges from these scans is a living, moving being, with a body and facial features, a being that is beyond question human. There can no longer be serious dispute about the humanity of the unborn. This child is one of us, part of our human family.

RESPECT
LIFE
SUNDAY

Bonding with the unborn

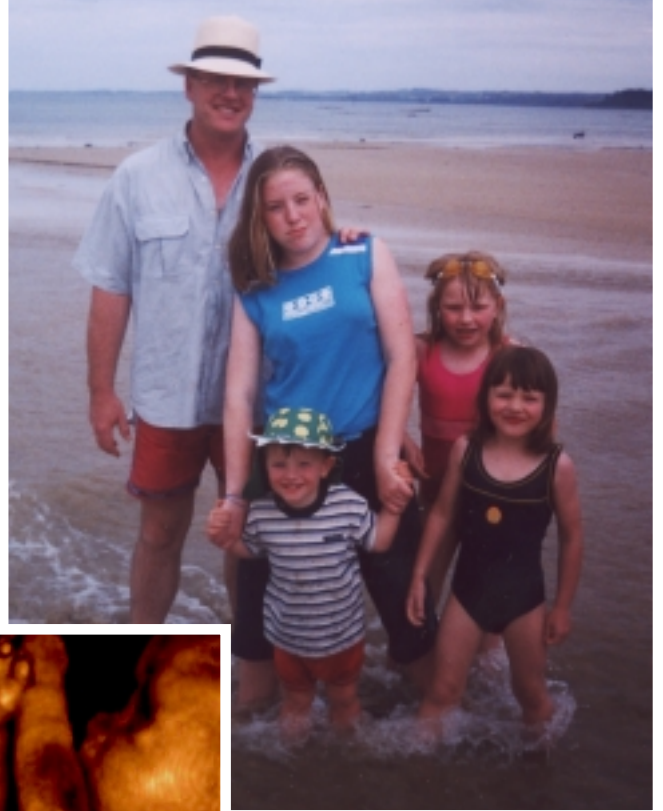
These dramatic new images of the unborn child are transforming more than the scientific community. Hilda Manzo, 33, stares wide-eyed watching the video as Dr Jacques Abramowicz scans her belly. Hilda 'can make out a head with a mouth and two eyes. She can see pairs of arms and legs that end in tiny hands and feet. She can see the curve of a backbone, the bridge of a nose. And best of all she can see movement. The mouth of her child-to-be yawns. Her feet kick. Her hands wave.' Yet her 'little one' is only 17 weeks old and would be no bigger than a newborn kitten.¹

These 3-D and 4-D images are allowing women to bond much earlier with their developing child, as 17-year old Ebony Smith discovered. 'I did not realise that's something inside of you,' she says excitedly. 'That's when I decided I was not going to have an abortion. I could see the hands and feet, and I could hear the heartbeat. It sounds like horses galloping da-dum, da-dum,' she laughs.²

Mothers are not the only ones affected by images of their unborn babies. We all know new fathers who have found seeing their child on ultrasound made it 'real' for them for the first time. A recent study found that fathers' emotions also begin to stir in the first trimester. Craig Dowling vividly recalls the moment he felt the first intense stirrings of fatherhood. It was the day he and partner Julie Clayton saw the image of their baby at the ultrasound clinic. Looking at the images of his nine week old foetus (latin for 'little one') Craig said, 'There were clearly recognisable features... I felt fatherly.'³ In time many more fathers like Craig may be encouraged to play a vital role for both mother and child.

Feminists and the unborn

In time, the truth which the new technologies are confirming will affect more than pregnant women and new fathers. It will have an effect on our culture. We are beginning to see signs of this already. Some abortion advocates, flying in the face of all the evidence of the humanity of the unborn, still try to say 'it is not alive', 'it is not human', 'it is not one of us'. But even abortionists are finding that make-believe hard to sustain. Many woman who have had abortions, like women who have suffered miscarriages, quietly grieve the loss not of 'a blob of cells' but a child. Even many of those who promote abortion are now admitting it is killing an unborn child. Naomi Wolf, for instance, has urged the pro-abortion movement 'to be more honest in its rhetoric by acknowledging' the foetus 'in its full humanity'.⁴ Germaine Greer has made similar remarks.⁵ A new, more inclusive feminism is emerging which focuses upon the needs of all women, even unborn ones.



3-D Ultrasound Image

The unborn patient

The medical profession increasingly recognises the unborn child as a second patient with his or her mother. Doctors are now working to save the lives of these tiny patients when they are at risk, and cure them when they are sick. A team at Vanderbilt Medical Centre operated on a 21-week-old unborn patient to correct spina bifida. Veteran photojournalist, Michael Clancy, was covering the procedure for *USA Today*. He describes what happened just as the team were finishing: 'Suddenly, an entire arm thrust out of the opening, then pulled back until just the hand was showing. The doctor reached over and lifted the hand, which reacted and squeezed the doctor's finger. As if testing for strength, the doctor shook the tiny fist. Samuel held firm. I took the picture! Wow! It happened so fast.'⁶

Likewise, surgeons in Boston have operated on baby Loren to remove a tumour growing in the baby's lung.⁷ MRI and advanced ultrasound imaging are now allowing doctors to detect and treat conditions that would probably have been fatal a decade ago.

Sadly not all the medical profession sees the unborn as worthy of such care. A particularly tragic case was that of 'Baby Jessica', a Melbourne child diagnosed with a non-lethal form of dwarfism. The termination was reported to have taken place at 8 months (32 weeks) – well after the stage at which a child can easily be born and live outside the womb – at the Royal Women's Hospital in February 2000.⁸ Instead of helping this woman overcome her fears of disability and cultural isolation and supporting her through the pregnancy and in the care of her child in the years ahead, a doctor in this leading hospital 'terminated' her ready-to-be-born child. Could we not offer better options to mothers and children?

1 'Inside the Womb' *Time* 11/11/03

2 Mark Stricherz 'Bonding with Baby' *Crisis* 12/02

3 Farah Farouque 'Fathers bond with their unborn babies, study finds' *The Age* 12/02/03

4 Cathleen Cleaver 'Moving toward a culture of life' *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc Washington DC*. (Pamphlet RLS 2001)

5 Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman*, (London: Transworld, 1999) pp107-118

6 www.michaelclancy.com/story.html

7 'Surgical options save unborn children in the womb' *Harford Courant* 17/11/02

8 Tom Noble, 'Hospital welcomes abortion decision' *The Age* 24/01/02

9 Kelley & Evans, 'When human life begins: public perception' *Australian Social Monitor* 5(1) 02/02, 15-20.

10 Cathleen Cleaver, 'Moving toward a culture of life' *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc Washington DC*. (Pamphlet RLS 2001)

Attitudes are changing

Recent studies suggest there is a change in the wind. Kelley and Evans of the University of Melbourne reported in 2002 'over time, opinion is shifting slowly but gradually toward the view that even very early embryos are human. If this trend continues for a generation, there will eventually be overwhelming support for the view that embryos are human from the moment of conception.'⁹

A similar trend is evident throughout the Western world. A 1995 Gallup poll found that 33% of Americans identified themselves as 'pro-life'. By October 2000 it had risen to 45%. Support for abortion on demand is falling.¹⁰ A UCLA poll taken in 2000 also found 50% of freshers (first year students at college and university) were opposed to abortion. Others have also noticed this 'generational shift' in opinions on abortion.¹¹ And this change in opinion may be translating into changes in behaviour. The Alan-Gutmacher Institute, a pro-abortion research organisation associated with the world's largest abortion-provider, Planned Parenthood, reported in January 2003 that the number of abortions was continuing to fall in America – from over 1.6 million in 1990 to 1.3 million a decade later in 2000.¹² Most political commentators thought an avowed pro-life position was a major factor in the election of many pro-life candidates.

In the last year the US moved to stop 'partial birth' abortion, a particularly gruesome procedure performed on very late term children. For a decade or so, despite being repudiated by the American Medical Association and almost all churches, ethicists and the general public, President Clinton repeatedly vetoed any ban. Very soon it will be outlawed. Slowly but surely there are signs that America – like much of the Western world – is turning pro-life.

Abortion hurts women

One reason for these gradual changes in attitudes and behaviour is that it is slowly dawning on people that abortion kills a human being. But there is another reason too. Few women actively want an abortion. Most know abortion doesn't help women. Those who 'choose' abortion often report that they felt they really had no choice. They felt abandoned physically and emotionally by the very people who should have supported them. They felt society gave them no other option. Frederica Mathewes-Green says 'no one wants an abortion as she wants an ice-cream or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap, wants to gnaw off its own leg'.¹³

Some women are now describing how they have been shattered by abortion. Groundbreaking books such as *Giving Sorrow Words*¹⁴ tell the bleak and compelling stories of some of these women. No woman should have to suffer this alone. Groups are springing up to help women heal the wounds of abortion.¹⁵ More women are seeking post-abortion counselling. They are overcoming grief and despair, finding healing for deep spiritual wounds and are again able

to live in the sure hope of God's forgiveness and of reunion one day with their child. They are becoming powerful ambassadors for life.

'Woman dies after termination', 'Post abortion syndrome', 'Abortion-breast cancer link', 'Higher rates of infertility among aborted women' – week after week there are new reports suggesting that abortion hurts women. There has to be a better way.

Giving women real choices

No woman should ever be pressured into abortion by spouses, partners, parents or other relatives, employers, co-workers or friends. Not by genetic counsellors or doctors. Not by economic circumstances, lack of practical resources or social stigma. Not by fear, loneliness or shame. We must not leave new mothers alone and isolated.

Christ's Gospel of Life demands that we offer women real choices, real alternatives, real solutions. Not a wagging finger but real support. Not the lie of the quick-fix at the abortion clinic. Love calls us to use our creative energies to support both mother and child, so that no woman is ever asked or compelled to make such a choice. As Pope John Paul II has put it, we must be 'radically pro-woman' and 'radically pro-child'.¹⁶



Two of a kind: Twins Grant and Gregory Dittman share a bed

A Rescuing Cuddle

Grant Dittman was born a tiny 2.3kgs. He was not eating well and was struggling to survive. Doctors were concerned about both boys' health, and worried about losing Grant. So concerned, that they decided what the twins most needed was each others company.

The hospital staff hoped a bit of bonding might help and placed Grant in the same crib as big brother Gregory. The two boys recognised each other instantly and cuddled up. They calmed each other and little Grants health improved out of sight. (Herald-Sun 6/5/96)

11 Alicia Montgomery 'Has choice lost support?' 29/01/2001 www.salon.com

12 Jeff Johnson 'As abortion drops, polls show Americans turning Pro-Life' CNN 16/01/03

13 Frederica Mathewes-Green, *Real Choices: Listening to Women; Looking for alternatives to abortion*. (Ben Lomond: Conciliar Press, 1997)

14 Melinda Tankard Reist, *Giving Sorrow Words: Women's stories of grief after abortion* (Sydney: Duffy & Snellgrove, 2002)

15 Contact us for details.

16 Pope John Paul II. 'The Defense of every life' *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1994)

17 Contact us for details.

Prayer for a New Civilisation of Life

*Our Father in heaven, creator of all life,
we thank you for the gift of our lives.*

*Send your Holy Spirit to awaken in us a new reverence for all
human life, especially for the unborn.*

*Help us to see that you have a plan for every human life
from its beginning.*

*Help us build good relationships that respect and value others,
Teach us never to take others for granted or to use them,
So that we might not to be tempted to refuse your
precious gift of life.*

*Forgive us for the times we have failed to support pregnant
women, for the times we have turned from your gift of life.*

*Teach us not to judge or condemn others as we are all in need of
your mercy, fill us instead with
your love and compassion.
Heal our wounds with your
love and restore us to the
fullness of life.*

*Make us Ambassadors of
life, witnesses to the power of
your redeeming love,
so that we might bring your
light to a world in darkness,*

*And fill humanity with hope
at the dawn of a new
civilisation.*



A network of pregnancy support services around Australia offers disadvantaged women and their children practical help.¹⁷ These Church or community-based organisations provide a range of services to pregnant women ranging from counselling and emotional support to accommodation, baby supplies, clothing, – all that friendship and motherhood demands. This is love in action.

Some schools are working with teenage mums. Instead of asking these pregnant teenagers to choose between life for their child and education for themselves, they are trying to make

both possible. Plumpton High in Sydney has set up a program to keep pregnant teenagers and young mothers at school, and more than a hundred teenagers have benefited so far.¹⁸ Other schools have been slower to wake up to the need. There were 11,704 babies born to teen mothers in 2001; but similar numbers of young women had abortions. What do our local schools do? Are our social welfare policies, government assistance programs, employers and businesses helping to give women the choice to keep their children? Or are all the pressures the other way?

Building a culture of life

Some people think Australians have lost all reverence for early life; that ‘the culture of death’ has triumphed; that there is no hope for the unborn. But the battle for hearts and minds isn’t over yet. Indeed it has hardly begun.

We don’t know how many more mothers and babies, fathers and families, will be hurt before things improve. But something is stirring. More people are questioning the status quo. If pro-lifers have sometimes seemed concerned only about unborn babies and not their mothers, or too self-righteous or confrontational, or lacking in compassion, we are sorry. We all make mistakes. But the pro-life movement, remains deeply concerned about all people and all life. And it is a movement very much alive today. A new generation, with new enthusiasm and new ideas, is joining it. There is much work to do, before we can turn our culture around and make it a real culture of life. But hope springs eternal and with God’s grace and our gifts so much more is possible.

Pope John Paul II has called for “a great mobilisation of consciences, a united ethical effort to activate a great campaign in support of life.”¹⁹ Dare we dream of a civilisation in which every human person is welcomed, honoured and revered – whatever their stage of life and their condition, female or male, handicapped or healthy, rich or poor? Dare we dream of a world where no woman is driven by desperation or ideology to seek abortion?

We can begin to build such a civilisation, such a world, right now, by pledging ourselves always to be at the service of life. Always to treat people with respect. Always to value people over things. Always to recognise the dignity of every human being.

¹⁸ Elisabeth Wynhausen & Nick Cubbin ‘Maternity High’ *Weekend Australian* 15-16/02/03

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II *The Gospel of Life* (1995). # 95

Additional Information is available from:

Respect Life Office www.health.thechurch.com.au

GE Medical Systems- *Ultrasound: Then and Now*

www.gemedicalsystems.com/rad/us/4d/thennow.html

A moment from a child www.michaelclancy.com..au

The Second Look Project www.secondlookproject.org

Project Rachel Australia www.d7design.com.au/rachel/

Hope After Abortion, www.hopeafterabortion.com/

Open Doors www.opendoors.com.au/

The Gospel of Life www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jpii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html

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