

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

“Pregnancy Reductions”: The New Frontier of Death

New York Times writer, Ruth Padawer, recently published one of the most chilling and shocking articles I have read in some time. Entitled, “Unnatural Selection,” the article uses a phrase new to me, “pregnancy reductions.” A seemingly neutral term, it actually refers to a frequently used procedure of eliminating one of the twins growing in a woman’s womb.

- First, a few points of historical development that have led to this procedure. Reproductive medicine has empowered women (and their husbands, or partners if lesbians) to make major decisions about the life growing in their womb. With fertility drugs, multiple fetuses are often created. To seemingly lower the risks to both mothers and their babies they took home, doctors began terminating all but two or three fetuses. Listen to this instructive sentence from Padawer’s article: “With that, pregnancy reduction shifted from a medical decision to an ethical dilemma. As science allows us to intervene more than ever at the beginning and the end of life, it outruns our ability to reach a new moral equilibrium. We still have to work out just how far we’re willing to go to construct the lives we want.”

“To construct the lives we want!” The focus is on what the autonomous person wants not the value or worth of the child’s life! Such a perspective is both shocking and truly astonishing! The chilling nature of the decision women face with “twin reduction” is that it involves selecting one fetus to live over another. It is also instructive to note the language Padawer uses in her article: “Twin reduction” and “singleton,” the name given to the surviving fetus after the other fetus is killed. How actually does this “twin reduction” occur? Costing about \$6,500, the procedure, Padawer reports, is usually performed around Week 12 of a pregnancy, involving a fatal injection of potassium chloride into the fetal chest. The dead fetus shrivels over time and remains in the womb until delivery. Why, according to Padawer, do women seek “twin reduction?” Her argument is that for most women “social reasons” define the decision: “Whatever the particulars, these patients concluded that they lacked the resources to deal with the chaos, stereophonic screaming and exhaustion of raising twins.” Further, Padawer argues, “twin reduction” is another example of science empowering women to control their lives: “Today patients in the United States can choose [sperm or egg] donors based not only on their height, hair color and ethnicity but also on their academic and athletic accomplishments, temperament, hairiness and even the length of a donor’s eyelashes.” How then is the choice of which fetus to kill made in a “twin reduction?” Padawer writes that “if both appear healthy (which is typical of twins), doctors aim for whichever one is easier to reach. If both are equally accessible, the decision of who lives and who dies is random. To the relief of the patients, it is the doctor who chooses—with one exception. If the fetuses are of different sexes, some doctors ask the patients which one they want to keep.” She

concludes, “As with reducing two healthy fetuses to one, the underlying premise is the same: this is not what I want for my life.” The desires of the woman trump the right of the child to live!!

- Second, how then should we think about this ghastly development in reproductive medicine? God’s view of prenatal life is vastly different than the doctors who perform “twin reductions.” God’s revelation in the Bible has spoken to this issue. A thorough examination of His Word reveals that God views life in the womb as of infinite value and in need of protection. The challenge is that most areas of the culture--law, politics, many theologians and religious leaders--refuse to heed God’s clear teaching on this issue of prenatal life. A cluster of verses in the Bible clearly establish God’s view of prenatal life:

1. Exodus 21:22-24--Whatever these difficult verses exactly mean, God views life in the womb as of great value. Whether by accident or by intent, to cause a woman to miscarry demands accountability on the part of the one who caused it. The Law did not treat the fetus frivolously.
2. Isaiah 49:1, 5--Referring to Messiah, God called Him for his mission *from the womb*. Life that is prenatal is precious to God.
3. Jeremiah 1:5 and Luke 1:15--As with Isaiah, God viewed Jeremiah and John the Baptist from the womb as of infinite value. He even filled John with the Holy Spirit when he was in Elizabeth’s womb.
4. No other passage deals with the question of prenatal life so powerfully and conclusively than Psalm 139. In this wonderful psalm, David reviews four phenomenal attributes of God--His omniscience, His omnipresence, His omnipotence and His holiness. In reviewing God’s omnipotence, David reviews God’s power in creating life which he compares to God “weaving” him in his mother’s womb. God made his “frame,” his skeleton. Then, in verse 16, he writes, “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance...” Undoubtedly, David is referring to the embryo. If correct, then the divine perspective on life is that it begins at conception. So awesome is God’s omniscience and His omnipotence, that he knew all about David even when he was an embryo! This then is God’s view of prenatal life and His judgment on “twin reduction.” It is not a “reduction;” it is a murder!

See James P. Eckman, *Biblical Ethics*, pp. 28-31 and Ruth Pedawar in the *New York Times Magazine* (14 August 2011), pp. 22-27.

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

Arab Spring or Arab Transition?

As I am writing this, it appears that Libya is now completely in the control of the rebels. Decades of authoritarian rule under Qaddafi are over. In addition, regime change has now occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen—and Syria remains very unstable. It is appropriate now to

ask, where is this “Arab Spring” headed? Quite frankly, no one really knows what all this means and what the results will be. Perhaps it is better to refer to this as a time of “Arab Transition,” rather than “Arab Spring.” The term “spring” connotes an emerging democratic Arab world. I am not certain that is true. Many of these Arab nations are characterized by tribal societies and how these various tribes will mesh together in these respective nations is truly not known. Further, in several of these nations, other Middle Eastern powers are very much working behind the scenes.

Permit me to focus on several aspects of this “transition.”

- First of all, a thought about Syria. Columnist David Ignatius writes that “The Syrian confrontation is already devolving into a regional proxy war. Iran has been rushing assistance to Assad, who is Tehran’s key Arab ally and provides a lifeline to the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon. To counter the Iranians, a newly emboldened Saudi Arabia has been pumping money to Sunni fighters in Syria. Damascus is a fault line—for Sunni-Shiite tensions, and for the confrontation between Iran and the United States and Israel.” As Ignatius argues, it is doubtful that this time of transition in the Arab world will be good for economic development. Indeed, it will probably slow it considerably. Few will be interested in investing in these societies until there is some certainty about the nature of this emerging new order. Secondly, if indeed a democratic order emerges in these nations, it will likely disappoint many, if not most everyone. The protesters in these various nations have been demanding jobs, freedom from the secret police and personal dignity. The impatience of the protesters is obvious but it is doubtful they will see these rights realized soon! For example, Asia (e.g., China) placed economic reform ahead of political reform—and it has worked, at least to some extent. Will these Arab protesters who have led this transition be patient? Will they wait? Finally, these various Arab nations now in transition will need to rise above their sect and tribal loyalties and embrace a tolerance and a spirit of cooperation to build a new nation based on respect and tolerance of differences in religion, ethnicity and tribes. This is a tall order and many are not convinced that this will occur. Civil war is a real possibility in some of these nations as the various tribal groups and sects begin to compete for power. An example of what this could look like is Iraq. With Saddam gone, the old tribal and religious loyalties are now paramount—the good of the nation as a whole is not! This time of Arab transition is problematic and perplexing! No one knows where this will all end.
- Second, what about Israel? It faces Hezbollah to the north and the uncertainty in Syria could dramatically affect the status of Hezbollah. Let me explain. Israel fought two wars in Lebanon, one that ended in 2000 and one in the summer of 2006. From the first war emerged Hezbollah, playing on the long-oppressed Shiite population in Lebanon and with the bounteous blessing of Iran. The second war did indeed deter Hezbollah but the UN peacekeepers have proven both unable and unwilling to fulfill their mandate of keeping rockets and arms from flowing to Hezbollah. In fact, Hezbollah now has some 50,000 rockets, four times the number it had in 2006. Israel’s antiballistic missile system is very effective and has intercepted 8 missiles fired by Hezbollah. But the fundamental result of all these developments concerning Hezbollah is that Lebanon is no longer an independent nation, leaning to the West, as it had been for decades. It is, in the words of Michael Oren, Israel’s ambassador to the US, “a terrorist stronghold supplied by Syria and subservient to

Iran.” If the Syrian regime crumbles, the influence of Iran in Lebanon could also diminish. But neither of these possibilities is certain. The developments in Syria, therefore, are of real interest to Israel. But what has occurred in Lebanon with Hezbollah is important for Israel’s future: It cannot permit a future Palestinian state to become a terrorist stronghold, as Lebanon has become under Hezbollah! Much is at stake for Israel in how this time of Arab transition plays out!

See Michael Oren in the *Wall Street Journal* (12 August 2011) and David Ignatius in the *Washington Post* (19 August 2011).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

Is the Health Care Law Unconstitutional?

The provision in President Obama’s health care law requiring Americans to purchase health insurance or face tax penalties was ruled unconstitutional on 12 August 2011 by the US Court of Appeals of the 11th Circuit in Atlanta. The court ruled that Congress exceeded its powers to regulate commerce when it decided to require people to buy health insurance (aka the “individual mandate”). [The rest of the wide-ranging law was allowed to stand.] The court argued that Congress “cannot . . . under the Commerce Clause . . . mandate that individuals enter into contracts with private insurance companies for the purchase of an expensive product from the time they are born until the time they die.” The Court also ruled that the “individual mandate” is “breathtaking in its expansive scope. The government’s position amounts to an argument that the mere fact of an individual’s existence substantially affects interstate commerce, and therefore Congress may regulate them at every point of their life. This theory affords no limiting principles in which to confine Congress’s enumerated power.” The argument of the 11th Circuit Court is compelling and the first real challenge to the constitutionality of the “individual mandate.” It is erudite and persuasive. There is little doubt now that the US Supreme Court will need to rule on the constitutionality of this provision. For the first time since it was passed, this provision of the health care legislation is in real jeopardy. Perhaps as early as next spring, we could see the Supreme Court overturn this provision of the health care law.

See the editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (13-14 August 2011) and the news article by Michael Cooper in the *New York Times* (13 August 2011).