

Christian Faith and the issues of life: Abortion considered in the context of the Apostles' Creed

by *Gerrit Dawson*

"On the third day he rose again from the dead..."

The resurrection of Jesus in our real world of space and time is the foundation of Christian hope that we, too, will live again—in a body, as ourselves.

Jesus got up from the dead, alive in the same skin in which he had been crucified, though now transformed and fitted for heaven. As John Knox put it in the Scots Confession, "We do not doubt but that the selfsame body which was born of the virgin, was crucified, dead and buried....did rise again" (*Book of Confessions*, 3.11).

It was really Jesus, in his *selfsame body* whom the disciples met on the Emmaus road and in the locked upper room.

Jesus' resurrection meant the renewal of his bodily existence and the continuation of his consciousness as the very man who had walked the dusty roads of Galilee, who ate with his disciples, who touched and taught the crowds.

True, in forty days he would be removed from their sight and would ascend to heaven. But he would not cease to hold our human nature, our embodied existence, in eternal union with his divinity. The resurrected Jesus is himself the pledge of what kind of life we will have after our earthly days have concluded. So Paul affirms that on his return, "the Lord Jesus Christ...will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3: 20-21). What Jesus has become, we, too will be-come. For, "just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6: 4).

Resurrection and end of life issues

Now, what does the resurrection have to do with end of life issues, in particular abortion and euthanasia? First, of course, is the hope that those whom we have lost to death are not lost in Christ, but rather will, in him, live again. For, as the Larger Catechism declares, in his resurrection Christ has "vanquished death and him that had the power of it" (BOC 7.162).

Death does not have the last word. The resurrected and exalted Jesus has the final say. And all who are united to him, are united to his resurrection (Romans 6: 5). Life wins, because Christ has won the victory over death and sin—even if in the short term decay, violence, accident and death seem to have sway over us.

Thus, for those who have committed abortions, there is the hope that those babies are not lost, but are kept safe in Christ in heaven, where, as Jesus said, "their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18: 11).

For those who have assisted in the suicides of the terminally ill, and are now, perhaps, seized with guilt and remorse, there remains the hope, grounded in the resurrection, that "the dead in Christ will rise" (1 Thessalonians 4: 16). Our terrible choices for death are nevertheless not final. Even these may be redeemed through the eternal life won by Christ's resurrection.

Then why not death?

Reformed Christians have consistently held that infants who die, though they have never had opportunity to confess Christ in faith, are nevertheless covered by the grace of Christ. A revision of the Westminster Confession states, "We believe that all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit..." (BOC 6.193).

But this hope raises a dark question: "So what's really wrong with abortion? After all, we're helping these innocent children miss a miserable life in this wrenching world and instead pass straight into the immediate presence of Christ." Moreover, since heaven is our true home, we may well consider this entire life in the world, and even earth itself, to be expendable. Why not discard what does not last, particularly if pain and suffering can be avoided, since heaven is the final reality? In this reasoning, the reality of the resurrection might actually push a Christian toward abortion or euthanasia.

Resurrection conquers despair

Here a proper understanding is crucial. Resurrection is a countermending of death—by someone who already experienced death. It is an over-riding of despair—by someone who had been beaten by the furious blows of human desperation.

In his submission to death, Jesus embraced as his own the hopelessness of our human situation. He heard in his ears the accusing voice that every love begun falls to nothing in death's triumph. He was pierced in his flesh with the rage of a humanity incensed that our determination to be our own gods ever ends in ruin. He took it all until it piled him under all the way to the hell of God-forsakenness.

Then a word contrary to all human judgement of Jesus was spoken. The Father countermanded the orders. Jesus rose. A triumphant Yes to Jesus sounded from the very center of the universe. But in that clarion call of affirmation, there came also a profound and enduring No. No to despair, No to hopelessness, No to futility, No to every choice for death even when no other options seem apparent.

Resurrection calls us to faithfulness

His return to life in our flesh and in this world directs us to the field of our obedience. Heaven is our goal, but earth is our sphere of faithfulness. Jesus loves this world and, in particular, all life in human flesh. His suffering followed by triumph has taken up and away any choices of hopelessness or despair we might be tempted to make. Rather he sends us right into the brokenness and agony of a world still waiting its full redemption with the life, the love, and the gospel of his resurrection.

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