

A Personal Perspective

BY Wanda Franz, Ph.D.

When I was ready to begin a family in 1969, I hadn't thought much about abortion. I was working on my master's degree in developmental psychology. Therefore, I had some basic information about human development and reproduction.

I went to see the doctor because I was pretty certain that I was pregnant. In addition, I was coming down with some kind of cold; so I also wanted to know what kinds of medication I could and could not take during the pregnancy. However, what happened at the doctor's office was a complete shock. He informed me that I was in the process of losing my baby.

At that moment, I felt an enormous sense of loss. I hadn't realized that I was already so attached to a baby whose presence had never really been confirmed. I was surprised that I already had an image of the child I had been carrying. He was a boy, blond with blue eyes, very intelligent and with a warm and sunny disposition. I was grieving, but not for an abstract loss. I was grieving for a very specific person—my baby—a particular creation of God's own handiwork. He had all the specific features and characteristics given him by God. God knew him. God doesn't just create embryos. He creates persons, who go through stages of development, including the earliest one, as an embryo. The amazing thing was that I knew him, too. I knew him as a person with specific traits and characteristics and I was mourning that unique person.

The doctor collected the tissue that was coming out of my womb and sent me home. The tissue turned out to be highly infected. There was no embryonic tissue, but it was assumed that I had already lost my child without being aware of it. He ruled out an ectopic pregnancy, prescribed antibiotics, and told me to wait until after my next period before trying to get pregnant again.

From these events I learned much about women's experience of pregnancy. The feeling of attachment to the unborn child is powerful. Research has confirmed that women are attached to the unborn child, but it is important to realize that the attachment is not "small" because the child is still small. Mothers seem to have, at some level, an awareness of the full personhood of the child in their womb. Women, who have had an abortion or miscarriage, can almost always tell you the sex of their child. Hence, I have no difficulty at all understanding that women who have aborted a child have emotional problems afterwards. The pain of the loss is terrible; but they must also endure the pain of knowing that they are responsible for the loss.

When the doctor told me to wait a few weeks before trying to get pregnant again, I was devastated. I desperately wanted to get pregnant immediately. It seemed to me that this was the only way to somehow make up for the loss—to fill the loss with something else. Many women who have had abortions talk about this need to replace the lost child. Of course, a second child never replaces the individual person who was lost. He is unique and can never be replaced. However, the so-called "replacement" baby can help to fill up the broken places in the mother's heart. This baby is "wanted"—less for himself than to provide comfort to the mother. Research into child abuse has taught us that when parents have children in order to meet their personal needs, it is much harder for them to be successful parents.

When I thought I was pregnant again after my miscarriage, I made an appointment to see my doctor, once again, to have the pregnancy confirmed. This time, what happened shocked us both. I was indeed pregnant, but with the first pregnancy. I was so far along that it was clear that I had never miscarried in the first place. It had all been a mistake. I was thrilled, but the doctor was not so happy. He was afraid about the condition of my baby. If I should have had the miscarriage because of a massive intra-uterine infection—as the doctor believed—but I didn't actually have the miscarriage, how would the infection and the medication affect the development of the baby? He didn't say it, but I knew from my own training that the damage occurring at that time would most likely be to his developing brain. The doctor was afraid my baby was brain damaged.

I had all the normal fears and concerns of parents who suspect brain damage in their unborn child. It is a most painful situation to be in. Parents are very susceptible to horror stories about problems that might come with a disabled child. The biggest fear is that you may fail as a parent because of the extra stresses caused by such conditions. Parents need a tremendous amount of support when confronting this situation. I had no support at all, but I also had fewer problems to contend with. There was no ultrasound or special testing available to confirm the possibility. It was never a fixed diagnosis. Of course, abortion was not yet legal, so there was no pressure from the physicians on me to abort. Fortunately, God has always been good to me. He let me know that, if my baby were disabled in some way, I would be given the gifts and strength necessary to care for him.

After all of these concerns and problems, my baby was born, on schedule, a perfectly healthy newborn. Even more amazing, he was exactly the person that I had known him to be after a few short weeks in the womb. He was blond and blue-eyed, quite intelligent, and with a great disposition.

Because I was confronted with all of these problems I was forced to examine my pregnancy more closely, and I learned much from it. I sympathize much more with women in trauma over an unwanted pregnancy or the possible birth of a special needs child. I especially sympathize with the woman who has had an abortion. And I pray that she be healed by God's grace.