

## Endorsement

### *The Salvation of Embryonic Human Life* by Francis Etheredge

**Prof. Rev. Alberto Carrara, LC, PhD**

Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy

Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum (Rome)

Member of the Pontifical Academy for Life

#### *A Necessary Book in a Time of Anthropological Blindness*

*The Salvation of Embryonic Human Life* by Francis Etheredge addresses one of the most dramatic and unresolved moral questions of our time: the fate of embryonic human beings generated through in vitro fertilization and left in a condition of indefinite cryopreservation. This is no longer a marginal bioethical issue. It is a structural injustice produced by modern technoscientific culture and sustained by a deep anthropological confusion regarding the meaning of human life, embodiment, and generation. We live in a paradoxical age. On the one hand, human rights are constantly invoked as universal and inviolable. On the other, millions of human beings at the embryonic stage are treated as disposable biological material, suspended between existence and non-existence, deprived of any concrete future. Cryopreserved embryos represent a silent humanity, unseen, unheard, and structurally abandoned. Etheredge's book does not approach this reality primarily through technical, legal, or pragmatic categories. Instead, it proposes a radical shift in perspective: the question of embryonic human life must be re-read in the light of the mystery of the Incarnation, the Annunciation, and the Immaculate Conception. This theological horizon is not an extrinsic or devotional addition to bioethics; it is a foundational anthropological key. It reminds us that Christianity does not begin with an abstract moral norm but with the concrete assumption of human life by God Himself. This is the first major strength of the book: it restores the personal and ontological status of the human embryo, not as a "problem to be managed," but as a subject to be recognized.

#### *The Human Embryo Beyond Biological Reductionism*

A central issue in contemporary bioethical debates is the widespread reduction of the human embryo to a "cluster of cells," a "biological potential," or a pre-personal entity whose moral value depends on future development or functional capacities. This reductionism, biological, neurological, or functionalist, rests on a flawed anthropology in which dignity is no longer grounded in being, but in performance. Etheredge decisively challenges this view by recovering an ontological and personalist anthropology. From the very first moment of its existence, the human embryo is a human being with intrinsic dignity. This claim is not merely theological; it is coherent with a sound philosophical anthropology and with the constant teaching of the Catholic Church, from *Donum Vitae* to *Dignitas Personae*. The theological reflection on the Incarnation plays a decisive role here. If the Son of God assumed human nature from the first instant of His human conception, then no stage of human life can be considered pre-personal or morally negligible. The Incarnation reveals that human life is worthy of communion with God from its very beginning. In this sense, Etheredge's work is not only a defense of embryonic life but also a critique of the broader cultural paradigm that instrumentalizes the human body and fragments personal identity. The embryo is not "something" that will later become "someone." The embryo is already someone.

### *The Original Injustice and the Absence of Ideal Solutions*

One of the most intellectually honest aspects of this book is its acknowledgment of the original injustice that underlies the existence of cryopreserved embryos. The production of human embryos through IVF, followed by their selection, freezing, or abandonment, constitutes a moral disorder at its root. No subsequent action can fully repair this original wrong. As *Dignitas Personae* soberly states, the situation of abandoned frozen embryos constitutes a “situation of injustice which in fact cannot be resolved.” This statement must be taken seriously. There are no ideal or morally “clean” solutions available after the fact. Etheredge does not deny this tragic reality, nor does he attempt to dissolve it through rhetorical optimism. Instead, he poses the most difficult and unavoidable question: what moral responsibility do we have today toward these concrete human beings who already exist and who have been radically abandoned? Silence, inaction, or moral paralysis cannot be morally neutral responses. To do nothing is itself a choice, one that leaves these human beings without any possibility of fulfilling their natural destiny.

### *Adoption for Birth: An Extraordinary Remedy in an Extraordinary Situation*

The question of “adoption for birth” (or embryo adoption) is one of the most controversial issues in contemporary Catholic bioethics. For more than two decades, it has generated serious and legitimate debate among theologians, bioethicists, and Church authorities. My own position, reflected in this endorsement, an in line with the entire Magisterium of Pope Francis, has consistently been that embryo adoption cannot be understood as a new or alternative form of procreation, nor as a justification for IVF. Rather, it can only be considered, under very strict conditions, as an extraordinary and provisional remedy in a situation of radical abandonment. Etheredge’s book moves in this same direction, while offering a distinctive theological depth. The adoption of an abandoned embryo is interpreted as an analogical participation in the logic of the Incarnation itself: a free and gratuitous act of welcoming a vulnerable human life that one did not generate, but for which one assumes responsibility. This point is crucial. Embryo adoption does not legitimize the practices that produced the injustice; on the contrary, it presupposes their moral rejection. It makes sense only if accompanied by a clear and uncompromising opposition to the production and cryopreservation of embryos. Understood in this way, adoption for birth is not oriented toward fulfilling the desires of adults, but toward protecting the fundamental right to life of a concrete human being who otherwise has no future.

### *Theological Insight: The Annunciation and the Meaning of Motherhood*

One of the most original contributions of Etheredge’s work is his theological meditation on the Annunciation as a key to understanding the moral significance of welcoming embryonic life. Mary is not presented merely as a biological model, but as an anthropological and ecclesial icon. Her “yes” is not an act of possession or production, but of reception. Motherhood, in this light, is revealed as hospitality to life, not mastery over it. This distinction allows Etheredge to avoid superficial analogies between embryo adoption and surrogacy. The latter is grounded in contractual logic and instrumentalization, while the former, when properly understood, is grounded in gratuitous care for an abandoned life. This perspective also has ecclesial implications. The Church cannot limit herself to condemning injustice at the level of principles alone. She is also called to discern how to witness to the Gospel of life within the tragic fractures of history, without compromising truth but also without abandoning concrete persons.

### *Toward an Integral Bioethics*

From a bioethical standpoint, one of the greatest merits of this book is its refusal of two opposite but equally inadequate approaches: abstract legalism and sentimental pragmatism. Abstract legalism risks transforming moral principles into barriers that prevent any engagement with real suffering. Sentimental pragmatism, on the other hand, risks dissolving moral truth in emotional reactions. Etheredge avoids both by proposing what can rightly be called an integral bioethics, one that holds together truth, justice, mercy, and responsibility. The tragedy of frozen embryos forces us to think ethically in “limit situations,” where the application of moral principles requires discernment rather than mechanical deduction. This does not mean relativizing moral norms, but recognizing that moral responsibility is always exercised in history, not in abstraction.

### *Why This Book Matters Today*

*The Salvation of Embryonic Human Life* is a challenging book, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. It unsettles comfortable positions and forces the reader to confront the deepest questions about human dignity, technological power, and moral responsibility. It does not offer easy answers, nor does it claim to close the debate. Instead, it elevates the discussion, grounding it in a profound anthropological and theological vision. At a time when embryonic human beings risk becoming invisible casualties of technological progress, this book restores their face, voice, and moral claim.

### *Conclusion*

I strongly recommend this book to bioethicists, theologians, physicians, jurists, and all those who are committed to thinking seriously and responsibly about the beginning of human life. It is a work that does not evade complexity, but neither does it surrender to despair. Ultimately, how a society treats its most vulnerable members, especially those at the very beginning of life, reveals not only its level of technological development, but its moral identity.