

Review of 'The Salvation of the Embryonic Person', by Francis Etheredge

After reading this book, we might wonder at the almost total disengagement of Western Christians, especially Protestants, with the anthropological crisis Francis Etheredge lays bare here. In terms of comparatively recent history, this can easily be traced to the Anglican Church's giving of the green light to contraception in the 1920s—but in fact it goes much further back in history.

Francis quotes Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom". In this sense we are looking at an entire civilization from which basic wisdom about itself has long departed—along with the fear of God. How long ago did the fear of God cease to be a ruling psychological and moral touchstone of Western culture? I would date it as long ago as the rise of Nominalism from the 14th century onwards. This takes it to before, not after, the Protestant Reformation. Luther was a Nominalist through and through. Thenceforward, and until today, a thing IS whatever we choose to CALL it—no matter what we choose to call it. The creative word is now ours, and no longer God's. A human being IS whatever we choose to call it/him/her.

Embryonic humanity can be seen as the ultimate target of this demonic assault on God's creation. The smallest and most helpless are paying the highest price. Francis Etheredge's account of their fate is a major contribution to placing their situation in its true anthropological and theological context. As Thomas Aquinas taught, TRUTH, which is a transcendental attribute of the Creator, is also 'the good of the intellect'. An entire culture for which truth itself is whatever anyone cares to call it has lost the good of its cultural and political intellect. It must conclude that there is no definitive truth about the human person except whatever use anyone cares to make of it—or of humanity.

In terms of more recent history, the relentless rise of the disaster we are confronted with today can be traced, incrementally, from the student sexual revolution of the 1960s and its glorification of "casual sex" as an inalienable human right, through all its sexual—and transsexual—developments, to the abolition of human personhood taking place today. Francis Etheredge's book is a major contribution to this history, taking it to its theological, not only anthropological, consequences, and proposing the beginnings of a solution in the adoption of cryo-preserved embryos, at least by those who have understood and taken to heart their real identity as images of God.

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