

PROTAGONIST CORNER

ANALOGIA PARENTIS

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The twin themes of birth and new life are frequently used in Easter preaching as synonyms for the resurrection and the victory that it brings. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. The analogies are apparent (and herein lies the problem); they are often trite and overworked. Taken in the context of Good Friday, however, these themes can bring fresh insight into the sacrificial nature of the cross.

The birth of a baby is surely one of life's most sublime and profound events. As both mother and minister, I perceived the birth of my daughter as a religious experience which brought a greater theological appreciation for the fatherhood (motherhood?) of God, for the magnitude of His sacrifice of His Son, and for the depth of grace and love shown through the cross to humanity "while we were yet sinners."

It is hard to describe the changes in a woman when she knows she is to be a mother. The awareness of the new life inside is all-pervasive. First there is the intellectual internalization of the fact that conception has occurred. Accompanying mental and emotional adjustments follow:

A mother! . . . I'm not just "me" anymore, I am more "important." I am not just "eating for two," I am two. Will I be a good mother? Will I have enough patience? enough love? Can I practice with this child what I preach?

Physical changes occur--not just the obvious swelling of the belly. There is the inexplicable feeling of being "possessed," and it's true. You are no longer in control of your own body. Someone else has taken it over. This possession affects everything from the condition of your hair to the way food tastes. Lest you ever forget the growing life inside, about mid-way through pregnancy you can feel the patter of little feet.

While a father might not mentally acquire his new status until the actual birth of his child, a mother thinks of herself as a mother almost immediately. The little one inside begins to take on a personality all its own. Patterns develop: the baby kicks at certain times, in favorite places, and even has hiccups! All of these things contribute to a mother's feeling that this child, yet unborn, is already a unique person--a very special little life.

Late in pregnancy, a mother can best be described as a lady-in-waiting. Every waking thought is filled with the impending birth. Patience gives way to anxious anticipation. Every trip to the grocery is envisioned as the last; the hospital suitcase stands packed and ready to go; and a week's menus are planned and posted.

Finally the appointed hour arrives. Excitement and relief are mixed with fear and apprehension. Will the baby be healthy?

In our case the normal degree of apprehension was heightened by the fact that our daughter was born in silence. She was delivered and pronounced female, but she did not cry. For what seemed like an eternity there was no noise in the delivery

room. My thoughts raced.

O dear God, don't let her die. She just can't die. We have so much invested--so much love, so many hopes, so many dreams.

I envisioned what well-wishers would say to me when they heard of her death. They would hold my hand and say, "We are so sorry to hear about your baby, but you're still young and there is plenty of time to have other children." What familiar words. Many a well-intentioned pastor has said these words to grieving parents. They are the wrong words for the occasion, I thought. Another child can't replace this loss--can't fill this void. Each child is unique; each child lost represents lost love, lost dreams and hopes. Duplication is not replacement.

Suddenly I was snapped back into reality by the sweet sound of a sputter and then a belting cry. Oh, what a blessed sound!--(I still try to remember how blessed now that I hear it at 2 a.m.). Our daughter was alive and well.

Afterward I was reflecting on the birth and marvelling over how much love I had felt for this little life--sight unseen. How I would have hated to lose her! How must parents feel when an older child dies; a child who represents many years of nurturing and love, many years of shared experiences both happy and sad, many years of memories to forget. How must God have felt at the loss of His Son; a Son who was perfectly obedient, a Son who was 33 years old.

If I could love my unborn baby so completely, how much more must God have loved His own Son. If I could (even so fleetingly in my imagination) feel the loss of my unborn baby so deeply, how much more must God have been sorrowed by the death of His Son.

It is only natural that human parents identify with the parental aspects and actions of God. This identification begins with the incarnation and leads to the cross. However, it goes no further than Good Friday. Human parents can understand the parental love of God; they can understand grief over the loss of a child, but they cannot comprehend the love that would voluntarily sacrifice a child. With God's sacrifice of His Son all similarities to the human situation end. Whereas I had no control over the life of my baby, God had an alternative to the death of His Son. Jesus need not have died. It was a conscious decision within the will and plan of God for Him to do so. And for what? For good and righteous people whose desire is to serve God? No! for sinners, some of whom actively deny His very existence! If someone told me that I could provide a means of salvation for a bunch of sinners by the death of my child, do you think for a minute that I would sacrifice her?

As a mother, who for a fleeting moment thought she had lost a baby, I now appreciate and understand far more deeply the true sacrifice of my Father in heaven and the vastness of His grace.