



## The Snares of Death

Respect for Life Month touches down on both ends of the human spectrum: our first hours, in the darkness of the womb, and our last hours, on the way to the darkness of death.

What we observe in October we need to keep all year round, for a culture that once fostered respect for life now forcefully resists it with abortion and assisted suicide. These practices converge on the same legally sanctioned objective: to bring death about or speed it along. Both dispense from the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."

Nonetheless, opinion polls show the public to be deeply unsettled about the rightness and wrongness of legalized death dealing. As regards life's beginning, many people evaluate the morality of abortion in relation to the age of the fetus. Late-term abortion, when the little being is recognizably human, counts as infanticide and cannot be justified; but "termination" in the early months, when our creaturely resemblance has scarcely begun to develop, is seen to be just a form of contraception. In this view it's not "really" abortion at all and is therefore acceptable.

Opinion about the end of life is confusingly conflicted as well. In a 2016

Gallup poll only 18% approved of self-administered suicide, but 53% favored the practice with doctors' assistance. "The only way this makes sense," Matthew Lu concluded, "is if they think that doctor-assisted suicide isn't really suicide at all." They may indeed think this way, Nicholas Frankovich notes, because suicide prevention campaigns are "on a collision course with a creeping social acceptance of suicide as a 'rational' exercise of a right to die.

The "right" to abortion sets the stage for the "right" to die. A woman may end a pregnancy out of compassion for the hardship her child's future holds in store for him. She judges his future prospects to be so terrible that it is not in his best interest to live them, that he should be spared them, that he has a right to die. On his behalf, therefore, she exercises this right as his proxy, the person designated to make life or death decisions for someone unable to decide for himself. And she does this as she exercises her own right to abortion. The two "rights" are joined at the hip.

At the beginning of life as at its ending the choices before us can be soul-twistingly difficult to contemplate, but it helps to remember several characteristics they all have in common. They all have to do with the future, with what's *going to happen*. But I live in the present and can't know for sure what's going to happen until it does. I can (and must) project my present understanding forward in reasonable anticipation of situations to come, but I can never

foresee unforeseeable circumstances (including changes in myself) that turn weakness into strength or despair into hope. This I know: my most carefully thought-through expectations are vulnerable to being turned completely upside down by a future I cannot know in a world I did not make.

But unshakable depression, unbridgeable loneliness, or dread of intolerable pain can weigh so heavily upon me that I give up on my Creator. I make myself judge of His power to save and find it wanting. I can't bring myself to trust that He will be true to His promise and stay with me to the end. I fall down in disbelief that He can give me—and others—new strength to bear the unbearable in ways I could never foresee.

It comes down to this: I don't know what the future will bring, but God does. Time belongs to Him, not to me, and He has time for me still, He Who makes all things new. He asks only that I put my time in His hands. If His is a world where "all things are possible," who am I to refuse?