

## A REFLECTION ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF ROE V. WADE-FR. JIM

When a friend of mine was a nurse over forty years ago, it was rare that a premature infant survived less than 28 weeks gestation. Twenty-five years ago it dropped to 25 weeks. Today premature babies are now routinely surviving at gestational ages under 28 weeks. One study showed that 15% of premature infants at 23 weeks and 56% at 24 weeks gestation survive. There even is a record of 11 cases of survivors at 22 weeks and two survivors at 21 & 20 weeks gestation. Has the humanity of the preborn changed during these past forty years? No, viability is a function of measuring the advancement of medical technology and the availability now of neonatal intensive care units. **It measures the advancement of external life support systems not the humanness of the premature infant.** It is unrelated to the question of whether the preborn are living human beings. The child remains in the mother's womb up until 20 weeks because medical technology is not yet able to provide an alternative environment in which he or she can survive. There are some researchers who predict that if an artificial womb and placenta are developed, as well as further development of the use of oxygen-saturated liquid (instead of air), preborn infants could survive less than 20 weeks of gestation (by 12 weeks the preborn child's whole system is developed and fully functioning). Viability is not a fixed or definitive line.

Defending pre-viability abortion on the basis that the child cannot survive if removed from the womb is playing moral gymnastics. The argument that the unborn are not viable because they are dependent on others to survive doesn't make any more sense than expecting that a one day old or one year old baby can survive on their own. They are no more viable than an unborn baby. Neither can survive alone. This could also be said about people who are severely handicapped or suffering from some debilitating illness, as well as people who are comatose, unconscious, under general anesthesia or suffer from advanced Alzheimer. **Dependency does not affect the status of whether someone is human or not. It reflects the fragile state of the human being's situation not their humanity.** If the ability to survive without the aid of others is what creates the right to life, these people, and many others, have no more right to life than the unborn.

If viability is the yardstick, an argument can be made that we now know that the unborn are viable from the moment of conception. After all, if that were not true, in-vitro fertilization would not be possible since the new human life created in this process would die immediately. Once conception takes place, nothing is added to this human life except nourishment and time to develop. The process of gestation is like a chain that naturally moves to the conclusion of birth, unless this process is interrupted at any point, and the chain is broken.

If someone is 24 weeks and six days in their development, they are not considered human, but a day later at 25 weeks, are they somehow magically transformed into a human being, who now deserves protection? Is there something the preborn acquires on one side of this line that it doesn't have on the other side? We know that their humanity is there all along.

**Viability concerns the ability to sustain life not the status of that life.** For example one child at 23 weeks gestation might be viable because that child's mother lives near a hospital with a sophisticated neonatal intensive care unit, where another child at 24 or 25 weeks gestation may not be viable because the child's mother lives in a remote rural area or in a third world country. Does living in a different place change the status of one's humanity? Of course not. The concept of viability reflects a human beings relation to a certain environment at a certain point of development, it does not change whether that life is human or not. As Dr. Bernard Nathanson has written: **"The concept itself (viability) is not viable!"**

Viability cannot be used because the abortionist is always the one who gets to determine whether his intended victim, is viable or not. And if there was ever a textbook example of letting the wolf guard the sheep, this is it. It is important to remember that there are estimates of **5,000 abortions each year that are done on pre-born infants of 20 to 24 weeks gestation.** Even the pro-abortion rights group such as the American Medical Association has stated that there is never a medical justification for doing these so called "partial birth abortions." The majority of Americans are clearly are against these partial birth abortions. Unfortunately, our new President, Barack Obama, and other legislators, support the "Freedom of Choice Act," which would continue this tragic practice of late term abortions (as well as require tax payer funding of abortions, and strike down all limitations of abortion including parental notification & informed consent).

As we again reflect back on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, I would urge us to increase not only our efforts of education and action (James 2;14-19), **but especially prayer** (Mark (9:14-29) to bring about protection not only for all pre-born children, but to save thousands of women (and men) the devastation that their abortion will bring into their lives.