

Birth

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In James T. Farrell's memorable novel, *A World I Never Made*, there is a scene in which Jim O'Neill's wife tells him that she is pregnant. They already have five children and are so poor that they have been forced to ask a relative to raise one of the boys. Jim realizes that this new child will probably know nothing save the misery of poverty and yet he cannot help but feel a certain pride in the fact that he is to be a parent once more. This is typical of fatherhood.

All of us are proud of what we create ourselves. The gardener shows off his plants, the tailor, his garments, the child, his crude drawings. And we can well imagine the glow of satisfaction that must have come over William Shakespeare when the last line of *King Lear* had been penned.

The parent, by the same token, beams proudly, not just because a new life has been created, but because he has helped in that creation. It gives the parent — be he rich or poor, learned or ignorant, wed or unwed — a wonderful feeling of self-importance. And were we not allowed to feel important occasionally, we should all very likely die of ennui.

There is something awesome about the birth of a baby. Science has uncover-

ed almost everything there is to be known about childbirth down to a point where it may be able to foretell sex; still one can never quite believe it. When I am shown a newborn babe, I am overcome. I can't think of anything to say. There is the baby. So tiny, so helpless and yet so alive. All I can do is stand and gape. Could I ever have been that small? Will those wee little fingers ever be as large as my own? Was this squalling bundle of humanity once just two infinitesimal germ cell? Impossible! The stork theory seems more plausible.

My remembrance of *Gone With The Wind* is largely one vast blurb of gaudy color, but the childbirth scene remains as vivid as if I had read it yesterday. This is hardly surprising, for birth is the most fascinating and impressive event of human life. It has all the elements of great drama — infinite mystery, overwhelming suspense, almost unbearable pain, inexpressible joy. Even more important it has reality. It is so immediate to the experience of every one of us and is such a vital factor in human existence that it never fails to move us. Our entire Christian philosophy turns on a single phrase, ". . . and the Word was made flesh . . ."