

Healing After Abortion: Can You Lead Without God?
Arguments from Natural Reason and Natural Law

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Support After Abortion (SAA) offers an options-based approach to healing for anyone impacted by abortion. The consequences of abortion manifest in unyielding anger, regret, sadness, and shame, which often lead to addictions and unhealthy relationships. SAA's scope, however, reaches far beyond the woman who has had an abortion and encompasses parents, siblings, friends, and pastors - anyone impacted by abortion. The research supporting this approach indicates that those most in need of SAA's resources desire not only anonymity, but autonomy and self-determination as well. In other words, those in search of support and healing do not want to align themselves with any particular religious confession, especially if assistance is perceived to come at the price of a coerced or premature religious commitment. As the SAA literature states: "Options based healing means we meet clients right where they are and provide services based on their stated needs. There are people from all different backgrounds with different life experiences and different beliefs. Therefore, what works for one person may not work for another."

This approach has been called 'not leading with God.' Yet, for many in this ministry the Christian faith has been the wellspring of the work. Can one make a reasonable argument for 'not leading with God' without either betraying faith or offering an ineffective solution? Is it not ultimately God who heals?

Behind these questions loom broader issues regarding God and man, and the interaction between the two. What is the relationship between grace and nature? How does the work of Divine action not constrict human free will? The answers rest upon 1) your anthropology, or what you believe man to be; and 2) your theology, or what you believe God to be.

Anthropology

The first issue regards human nature: What is man? Discerning what is proper to a nature is important because we thereby may know what is common to all members of the species. A thing's nature - its 'what-ness' - determines its operations, for action follows upon being. Conversely, a thing's nature can be known by its actions. Traditional philosophical anthropology has defined the human being as a hylomorphic substance: ὕλη (*hyle*, matter); μορφή (*morphe*, form). You-the-substance are not just *hyle* or the material part of you, nor are you strictly *morphe* or the immaterial part of you that gives form. You are the substance: a substantial unity of form

and matter, soul and body.¹ But do not think of this union as dualist in nature; it is a substantial union whereby your body exists by virtue of its union with its actualizing principle, the soul. This is what is meant by body-soul composite. Of course, all living beings are body-soul composites. What makes humans specifically different from even the most similar animal is the form that organizes the matter, which is the human rational soul.

Consider, however, that if you identify man with intellect, then cognition determines quality of life, an anthropology dangerous for the unborn, the aged, or even the sleeping. If you define man according to the will, then the power to choose becomes a tyrannical absolute. Note that either way, the body loses: whether you are identified by your intellect or your will, your body becomes ancillary and not constitutive of your identity, of your what-ness. And while no human can be animated without a principle which vivifies and organizes the matter that is the body, the human soul in turn needs the body for its faculties to operate properly and be expressed.

To summarize, the rational soul has the powers of intellect and will and makes us a distinct species. Our nature - human nature - is to know and to will in a bodily way. We do so via sense perception which we share with all non-rational animals. Both the pagan and the believer, the sinner and the saint know and will. Moreover, knowing and willing are actions proper to human nature and known by natural reason. Due to our hylomorphic unicity - we are body-soul composites - the objects of our knowing and willing and the consequences of possessing the objects of desire redound unto our bodies and psyches. The strict and comprehensive unity of soul and body causes psychic phenomena to have bodily effects; and conversely, bodily experiences affect our mental and emotional states.² There are real physical effects of falling in love. There are real psychological consequences to killing innocent human life.

If man knows and wills 'on his own' as it were, without partaking of divine life, then what of the work of grace? An important principle in theology is that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.³ That is, grace works with the faculties and operations native to the rational being and brings them to their fulfillment, meaning their end, their goal or *telos*. This means that

¹ Gen 2:7; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, Q.75, a.1, co.

² For an in-depth study on the physical and emotional manifestations of trauma see Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015).

³ ST I, Q. 1, a. 8, ad 2. For a short article on this topic see https://catholicism.org/grace-perfects-nature.html#_ftnref9.

on the level of nature - what is native or natural to the creature - any given being has certain powers or capacities that operate in a way proper to that creature.

Thus, man has natural potencies that are actualized. The power to see, for example, is part of what is included in human nature, and in most cases that potential is actualized, and any given human being sees. Sanctifying grace does not cause the operation of natural capacities; they are part of the species' package, without grace. Therefore, there are goods that are proper objects of our faculties on the level of nature.

This philosophical analysis is important because it tells us that human nature has its proper working which is to know and to will in an enfolded mode of being. Reason and will have their proper objects as does our sense appetite. We seek our individual and collective physical survival through food and sexually differentiated reproduction. Our higher powers seek their proper ends as well. We are made to know not just anything, but the true. And we are meant to desire, but not indifferently, for we are to seek the good.⁴ And although man's created (and therefore finite) nature is limited in scope and wounded by Original Sin, we are indeed hard-wired for truth and goodness. That means that man cannot not apprehend universal being - he cannot not know that an existing thing he perceives simply *is*, for example;⁵ nor can he not seek the good even when choosing something objectively bad. But since Original Sin wounded our already limited nature by darkening the intellect and weakening the will, erroneous choices are all the more possible. Sin, therefore, is a result of pursuing an object that is a perceived rather than an actual good.

Natural Law

Our nature points to the fact of objective moral norms which we call natural law. Natural law is sourced in human nature, and since human nature does not change, neither does natural law. It is not a human construct.⁶ The most fundamental principle of natural law is to do good and avoid evil and this is known by unaided human reason. And just as laws of physics produce certain effects, so it is with natural law. The law of gravity is such that one cannot jump unaided from the top of a five-story building without suffering the natural effects of such a fall; this will

⁴ The true and the good are related for the true is a good to be desired, and the good is true for it is intelligible. See ST I, Q. 79, a.11, ad 2.

⁵ ST I, Q.78, a.1, co.

⁶ It is in fact a participation in Eternal Law. As John Paul II explained: "Natural Law enters as the human expression of God's eternal law." John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 43.

happen whether one believes in gravity or not. Yet one can be healed of injuries despite a disbelief in the laws of physics.

Similarly, breaking the natural law will have consequences. By unaided natural reason we can determine that human life has intrinsic value, and that therefore the taking of innocent human life is wrong. Thus, the natural consequences of deliberate killing of innocent human life are to be expected. Breaking the moral law, which is discernible by human reason, entails psychic pain. Natural law flows from unchanging human nature which is characterized by seeking the true and the good. This means that objective moral norms are intelligible meta-culturally and meta-linguistically for the natural law, like human nature, is immutable and universal, transcending the limitations of historical and cultural particularities.⁷ Discerning between good and evil, then, is intrinsic to man as a physical being with reason and will, and so is written on the human heart.

Theology

The limitations of our finite nature and the damage wrought by Original Sin have made for much error in human reasoning. Beyond that, however, to understand the full dignity of the human person we need theology. This brings us to our second issue involved in justifying SAA's approach to healing after abortion which is one's belief about the Divine Nature, or what we believe God to be. God in his Divine Nature is completely other, meaning ontologically distinct, from the rest of creation: there is God, and there is everything else.

There is a metaphysical link between God and creatures because of his being the efficient cause of all created beings. We can know the existence of God by natural reason through the effects of which he is cause, albeit with much confusion and error. Despite our intellectual limitations natural theology is attainable. Thomas Aquinas articulated this through his well-known Five Ways, five philosophical proofs for the existence of God. These are arguments from: 1) motion - God as source of all change, the most fundamental being bringing beings into existence; 2) efficient causality - God as First Cause; 3) necessity - God as the only necessary being through his own essence; 4) gradation - God as source of perfections in creatures; and 5) governance - God as the intelligence directing creatures to their ends.⁸ Thus, we can know that

⁷ *VS*, 51.

⁸ ST I, Q. 2, a. 3, co. For a detailed commentary see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 442-500. For a concise explanation, see <https://aquinas101.thomisticinstitute.org/the-five-ways>.

God is omnipotent; omniscient; one; the highest good; and providential. In a nutshell, we can know that God exists and that he cares for us.

More specifically, however, we need the tools of Christological anthropology which deal with the relationship between God and man in light of the Incarnation. That to which God calls man's nature - divinization or *theosis* - is only intelligible through the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word, His Paschal Mystery, and the work of grace in the soul. The Only Begotten Son of God became incarnate, assuming a fully human nature which was divinized by the hypostatic union. He fully redeemed, transformed, and glorified human nature by His death, resurrection, and ascension into glory. Christ's fully divinized humanity was made the means of our participation in the Divine Nature by sanctifying grace. The dignity and glory for which we are destined underscore the value naturally inherent in human life.

These truths have come to us by faith. Before the seeds of faith may be planted, though, the soil must be tilled. This is how a 'not-leading-with-God' approach may be implemented. Similarly, healing after abortion can begin without immediate advertence to God. How can we know this? Just as an unbeliever's broken arm can be treated by an unbelieving doctor - the body is made to heal itself - so can emotional and psychological healing begin on a purely natural level. Of course, a person's ultimate good, the *summum bonum*, is God himself. And although we are capable of God, that potentiality must be made actual by God's grace and our response to his grace. As noted above, grace perfects nature by bringing it to its fulfillment. The more sound the nature, the further grace can take us.

Not Leading With God?

So, if we need theology, the question remains: how can we justify SAA's 'not-leading-with-God' approach? We can take solace in the fact that for the believer God is already leading, so he is in the working of natural reason because he is the author of that power. God begins, sustains, and brings to completion every good work.⁹ Every one. Additionally, we should recall that what is received is received according to the mode of the recipient.¹⁰ Therefore, a human being can only know something in a way that is proper to human nature and in accord with his state, healthy or otherwise. Healing on the level of nature may be the best possible preparation

⁹ *And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* (Phil 1:6)

¹⁰ ST I, Q. 12, a.4, co.

for receiving the more profound spiritual healing offered in sanctifying grace. In order to receive that grace, however, one must first come to faith.

John Paul II wrote: “The rational ordering of the human act to the good in its truth and the voluntary pursuit of that good, known by reason, constitute morality.”¹¹ Human reason even without God’s grace can see this. Therefore, there is every reason to use the approach of not leading with God. One may faithfully and fruitfully offer help after abortion on a natural level with confidence. After all, God is there in the midst of the situation - He is leading to healing. And for those open to hearing about God, an initial appeal to human reason is absolutely justified. For the unbeliever, in fact, there may be no other way.

¹¹ *VS*, 72.