

'Tis Finished! The Messiah Dies*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

'Tis finished! The Messiah dies—
cut off for sins, but not His own;
accomplished is the sacrifice—
the great redeeming work is done.

The veil is rent; in Christ alone
the living way to heav'n is seen;
the middle wall is broken down,
and all mankind may enter in.

'Tis finished! All my guilt and pain,
I want no sacrifice beside;
for me, for me the Lamb is slain,
'tis finished! I am justified.

The reign of sin and death is o'er;
all grace is now to sinners giv'n;
and lo! I plead th'atoning blood,
and in Thy right I claim my heav'n.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Preborn Babies? Just Stop!***Kevin T. Bauder*

Has anybody else noticed that certain right-to-life organizations have started referring to fetuses as “preborn babies”? This turn of phrase first caught my attention a couple of months ago. Of course, I'm slow on the uptake, so it might have been around for quite a while, and I might not have caught on. Still, I think I'd remember if I'd seen it earlier because I find the expression so inappropriate as to be jarring.

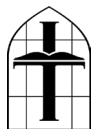
Not that I object to calling fetuses in the womb *babies*. That's exactly what they are. In fact, the Latin word *fetus* means *baby*. I don't believe for a moment that some magical transformation takes place when an infant emerges from the birth canal, as if it could be a non-person while encased in its mother's body but a human being as soon as it has been exposed to air.

No, between conception and birth nothing is added to the baby except growth. She or he is a human being from conception onward, with all the rights, honors, and privileges pertaining thereto. Anyone who takes Psalm 51:5 seriously understands that humans are fully moral persons from the instant of their conception. Since they are human beings, they are fully entitled to all the protections that every human deserves.

So my objection is not at all to the word *baby*. No, what I object to is that quirky and abominable neologism, *preborn*. Exactly what is that word supposed to mean?

The prefix *pre-* has the idea of doing something in advance or ahead of time. A prepaid card is one that has been purchased ahead of time. A prefabricated house is one on which significant components have been previously assembled. A preowned car is one that has already belonged to someone else. A predestined event is one that has been determined ahead of time. A prearranged meeting is one that has been arranged before the meeting has taken place. A precooked meal is one that has already been in the oven.

By this standard, a “preborn” baby is an infant that has been born ahead of time. But ahead of what time? That is where the neologism becomes murky. Does it mean that the baby was born ahead of the expected time? Does it mean that the baby was born before the present time? We are not sure. The



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only thing we are reasonably sure of is that a preborn baby cannot still be waiting to be born, any more than a preowned car is still waiting for its first purchaser or a precooked meal still sits raw in the freezer.

The New Testament has a word that comes close to the meaning of *preborn*. The word is *ektrōma*, and it means “a birth that violates the normal period of gestation (whether induced as abortion, or natural premature birth or miscarriage)” [BDAG, s.v.]. Paul uses this term to refer to himself when he talks about Christ appearing to him out of sequence when compared with the other apostles. In this sense, Paul sees himself metaphorically as an apostolic miscarriage resulting in a live birth.

And maybe that is how we could use the term *preborn*. By following the regular pattern, a preborn baby could possibly be a fetus that miscarried, whether or not it survives the event. At least that use of the term would be recognizable and defensible, even if still inelegant.

Someone might try to defend the word *preborn* by comparing it to a different set of English *pre-* words. These are words in which a thing is said to occur before a different thing, designating the earlier thing as pre- the latter. So prehistoric events are happenings from before history began to be recorded. Prepubescent children are those who have not yet arrived at adolescence. Pregame jitters must be endured before the competition begins. Pre-Columbian America is the Americas before Columbus stumbled into them.

It is difficult to imagine, however, that the term *preborn* could reasonably fit this pattern, and we should be, well, predisposed against taking it that way. Even if the neologism could somehow be stuffed, kicking and screaming, into this usage, its meaning would still be unclear. The best thing to do is to stick with an expression that everybody already understands, namely *unborn* babies.

I have no idea what the appeal of *preborn* is supposed to be. Does it sound more stylish? More modern and streamlined? Is it somehow more socially acceptable to the kind of public that can no longer recognize distinctions between men from women? Whatever the purpose of using the word, it represents a verbal clunk, as if the linguistic transmission has dropped out of the drivetrain and is now dragging along the pavement. It does not even save space: it has just as many syllables as *unborn*, and it adds an additional phoneme. Using *preborn* is like pushing a shopping cart around the store when one of those little handbaskets would do.

We already have a perfectly good term. The word *unborn* is clear and widely understood. *Unborn* has, so to speak, been predigested for us, while *preborn* is just plain undigestible. It is awkward. It is cloudy. It is sand in the verbal gearbox. Taken on balance, the word *preborn* is just about as appealing as a pre-eaten dinner.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
