

Courage Is Worth the Risk

["I took a chance on an 'imperfect' pregnancy,"](#) the title of a *New York Times* article recently proclaimed. Intrigued, I read about author Jacquelyn Kerubo's journey through a fertility clinic where, after initial treatments, she and her husband were told that they had a "mosaic embryo."

A mosaic embryo, Kerubo explains, is one which could result in a perfectly normal baby, but it could also result in a baby with physical defects. Kerubo agonized over this risk, but finally decided to go ahead with the embryo implantation, asking, "Who was I to make this life and death decision for another human?"

I felt like cheering at this news. Despite her fears, this woman looked at the facts, valued her baby's life regardless of its possible imperfections, and went forward with the pregnancy.

Such courage in the face of risk is rare these days. In fact, refusing risks is almost a virtue today, for we label our quest for risk-free perfection as "caution" or "safety." But if we're honest with ourselves, this can just be a nice way of disguising cowardice.

"Cowardice," C.S. Lewis's famous demon "Screwtape" explains in [*The Screwtape Letters*](#), is the only vice which "is purely painful—horrible to anticipate, horrible to feel, horrible to remember." Fear, he notes, goes hand in hand with hate, and if one wants to cripple a person's love and kindness, or rather, "charity," they must "first defeat his courage." Perhaps this is why we have so much hate today—because we have cast courage aside.

Demonic forces do their utmost to stamp out courage because they realize the power of this virtue, Screwtape explains, for it "awakes thousands of men from moral stupor." Instructing

his nephew Wormwood, a Junior Tempter, Screwtape notes:

This, indeed, is probably one of the Enemy's [God's] motives for creating a dangerous world—a world in which moral issues really come to the point. He sees as well as you do that courage is not simply *one* of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality. A chastity or honesty, or mercy, which yields to danger will be chaste or honest or merciful only on conditions. Pilate was merciful till it became risky.

A simple look around demonstrates that courage is sorely lacking today. Just look at the case of Kerubo and her mosaic embryo. She took a risk knowing that she might give birth to a child with potential physical defects, which could cause great pain and trouble. In contrast, many young women today won't even take the risks associated with having healthy children, arguing that little ones would hinder their careers or add to climate change problems. We want children to be perfect and convenient, and if they seem to be anything else, we quickly give up on them.

But the matter of giving birth and raising children isn't the only arena in which we seek perfection and avoid risks like the plague. Take COVID, for example. We insist that it be eradicated completely before we take off our masks, emerge from our cubbyholes, and live life normally again. COVID is dangerous and health is paramount, we tell ourselves, so we can't take the risk!

Or consider our insistence on politically correct speech and politically correct verdicts in highly politicized cases, such as the recent [Derek Chauvin trial](#). These must line up perfectly with the popular cultural narrative, for we know that anything less will result in canceling or riots in our highly contentious society. Thus we ditch courage, shut our mouths, and turn a blind eye to facts, murmuring the acceptable "woke" platitudes to save our own skins.

Each of us can probably think of times in our lives where we looked for perfection and cowered in the face of risk. It's easy to do! But in pondering Lewis's words, I can't help wondering how much our lack of courage is at the root of the problems in today's society. If, as Lewis says through Screwtape, fear and hatred go hand in hand, would a return of courage dissipate the vitriol in our world?

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