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Encyclopedia acknowledges fetal pain as a scientific fact

By Elise Harris



Ultrasound. Credit: CDC/Jim Gathany.

Vatican City, Feb 17, 2014 / 04:25 am (CNA/EWTN News).- A new chapter published by Dr. Carlo Bellini in a prestigious German encyclopedia explores the topic of fetal pain, stating that it is a proven fact that the unborn are able to feel pain, even as early as 20 weeks.

"Fetuses can feel pain. Now we should define it better, but it is a scientific matter of fact," Dr. Bellini explained in a Feb. 14 interview with CNA.

"We still do not know the exact moment since when the sensation of pain is possible, but evidence allows us to say that it is possible since 20-22 weeks since conception."

Dr. Bellini is an Italian neonatologist and a bioethicist, and is also a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life. He serves as Secretary of the Bioethics Committee of the Italian Pediatrics Society, as well as on the Directive Board of the "Scienza e Vita" Association.

An author of various research papers on the study of pain in children and babies, Dr. Bellini has now published a chapter in the second edition of the German-born "Encyclopedia of Pain" exploring the issue of fetal pain.

"It is one of the most authoritative textbooks in this field, collecting essays of almost all the most outstanding researchers in this field," the doctor noted, explaining that the publication of a chapter on the topic of fetal pain "is the acknowledgement of this issue by the scientific community."

In his abstract for the chapter, published in "The Journal of Maternal-Fetal and Neonatal Medicine," Dr. Bellini states that "Most endocrinological, behavioral and electrophysiological studies of fetal pain are performed in the third trimester, and they seem to agree that the fetus in the 3rd trimester can experience pain."

However, the doctor also highlights that "the presence of fetal pain in the 2nd trimester is less evident," and although "most studies disclose the possibility of fetal pain in the third trimester of gestation...we cannot exclude its increasing presence since the beginning of the second half of the gestation."

Expressing his "hope" that this chapter will help to foster "a better treatment of the unborn, starting from its treatment during fetal surgery," Dr. Bellini emphasized that "many fetuses undergo surgery to treat several diseases when they are still in the womb, and they deserve to feel no pain during these procedures."

Referring to the effect that the scientific evidence presented in the chapter will have on the ongoing debate of abortion, the doctor noted that "time will answer

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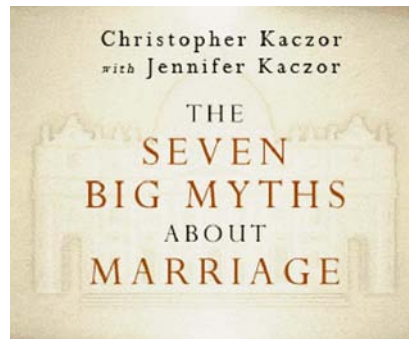
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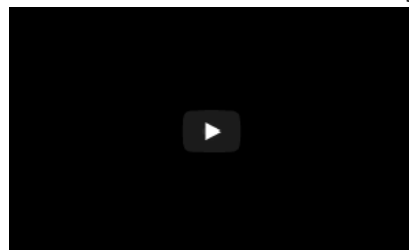
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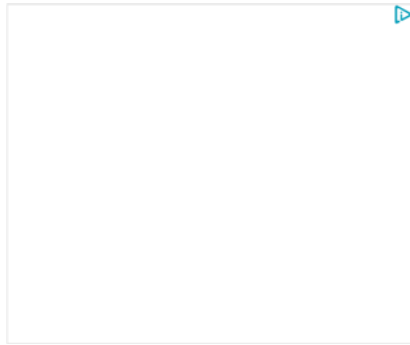


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this "question" however "the evidence that fetuses can feel pain in the second half of pregnancy can induce interesting reflections in many."

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