

# Letter to an UNBORN CHILD and *his answer*

By Rev. Thomas J. Cawley (1951)

## **Background:**

These two imaginary letters were inspired in part by the following words from an article in a national magazine: *“There were to be no babies at all for the first year and a half. That was to give us time to rush through a GI loan on a home and get part of the way along on paying for our furniture. Only then would we start to think about having children . . . The eighteen-month period had rolled by and I had a serious talk with Jim. He tried feebly to put it off a few more months. There were the car and the refrigerator notes . . .”*

*The first is a letter a woman with these thoughts might write to the son she “decided” not to have. The second is his answer to the parents who refused to give him life. The letters are offered as an inducement to clear thinking on a very vital problem.*

## LETTER TO AN UNBORN CHILD...

### **DEAR SON,**

I’m writing this letter to let you know we have nothing against you personally. We love you deeply and, I think, intelligently. In fact, it is this very love that has kept you from being born.

Had you been born, conditions would have been pretty hard for all of us. Your clothes would have been hand-me-downs and we’d have to live in a smaller house in a neighborhood away across town. Then you’d never go to college and, the way things look now, neither would your brother and sister. We are managing to keep them in school on what we would have had to spend on you.

### **WE WOULD HAVE SUFFERED**

Your Daddy and I would have suffered, too. There would be no television, no deep freeze, no new car, and no summer cottage. I know you wouldn’t want this, for I know you are as loving and as thoughtful of us as we are of you – and we want nothing but the best for you. We couldn’t give it to you. And that’s why you were never born.

Some people, of course, have no real love for children. They bring them into the world without any guarantee of a fine home, a good education, nice clothes and all those other little items that make life so worthwhile.

Honestly, Son, you can’t imagine how thoughtless and cruel some parents are. But I always say, “You shouldn’t have more children than you can care for.” And by “care for” I don’t mean just providing the bare essentials. I mean giving a child all the material, social, educational and financial advantages without which no one can be really happy. That’s what I say, Son. And I know what I’m talking about.

### **POVERTY IS THE WORST THING**

Only the other day, for instance, I heard a famous lecturer condemn women of the poorer class who keep on having children. It’s criminal. Poverty is just about the most awful thing in the world. There’s nothing quite like it and no one is more to be pitied than a child who is poor. He hasn’t got a chance.

The lecturer mentioned also that having too many children is liable to leave some of them weak of body and others weak of mind. That seems reasonable. There’s only so much strength in a woman and only so much food to go around. Minds and bodies are bound to suffer.

We absolutely refuse to expose you to any of these dangers. It would simply kill your Daddy and me to see you physically or mentally defective. And we couldn’t stand to have a son of ours badly clothed or housed or educated. It is, therefore, our consuming love for you that has kept you from being born. I do hope you understand.

*With love from all,  
Mother*

## ... AND HIS ANSWER

### **DEAR MOM AND DAD,**

Mom and Dad! Ironic, isn’t it! That’s the one thing you refuse to be to me. A friend, a brother, a sister — but not a mother or a father. There are so many things more important than I.

### **MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN PARENTS**

Incidentally, folks, I saw the television in the parlor, the car in the garage and my more fortunate brother on his way to college. I also examined the refrigerator and the summer home that kept my less fortunate sister from ever seeing the light of day. They’re mighty impressive gadgets — every last one of them.

I hope sincerely they will be a comfort when you lie dying. I pray they will plead for you at the judgment and trust they add some measure of joy to the long eternity you will one day enter.

Sarcastic? No indeed! That’s a form of dishonesty, a sort of clash between what is said and what is thought. It’s a failing of those who have been born. I never was. So I feel no bitterness, suffer no pangs, actually have no existence. Except perhaps vividly in the mind of God and vaguely in the conscience of you who should have been my parents.

## **I REALLY MEAN IT**

I really mean it. I hope all those material things that seem so important and so much more attractive than I and my rejected brothers and sisters, I hope they bring you all the joy, all the prosperity and all the security you felt we would have endangered.

It's not too pleasant knowing you ran a poor second to objects that were made to rust and disappear. Nor is it very flattering to recall that an actual car was considered more valuable than a potential child but that's the way you wanted it. You just couldn't afford everything and us. So we were dropped off the list.

Oh, I know you felt simply awful. You promised yourself that just as soon as possible, I or another potential would be welcomed, or at least accepted. In the meantime, folks, no matter how much you love all these shiny machines, all the nice clothes, the car, and the summer home they will never run to you for a healing kiss, never call you Mom and Dad, never love you. I could have — but then there were those terrible important "other things."

## **WE'D RATHER LIVE**

I'm not forgetting that you see the problem differently than we do. You insist that refusing us life is an irrefutable proof of your love for us. We feel differently. In fact, some of my companions among the legions of those who never quite made the team laugh unroariously at such self-deception. Others are satisfied with exclaiming, "Oh, come now!"

I won't presume to lecture my betters, especially my "almost parents." But this must be said: The greatest gift you parents have to share is life. Nothing else approaches it in value. Compared to it all these "important things" are so much rubbish. When, therefore, you refuse life to a child — you refuse the only really important thing you have to offer.

In the eyes of your neighbors both of you are religious people. But are you? Sometimes I wonder. And I'll tell you why. Any one with even the skimpiest knowledge of religion knows that life temporal is a preparation for life eternal. Life temporal is also an essential, indispensable condition of life eternal. If there is no life temporal there cannot be any life eternal. Consequently, by denying me the chance to life in time — you thereby denied me the chance to live in eternity. And this you did in the fair name of love.

You say in your letter that you were thinking only of me when you decided I should never be born. You couldn't stand to see me poor. Let's take a look at that too.

## **THAT CHILD IS WEALTHY**

Somewhere in your world right now is a youngster who can be described as the "poorest boy on earth." Look at him. His clothes are in tatters. He has no home, no parents, no future. He's not sure of a place to eat, or sleep or visit. In a material sense he has nothing. He is the poorest of the poor.

But mark this, my ever loving parents, compared to me that child is wealthy. He possesses a wealth that is the wonder of the heaven he will one day inhabit. Sure he doesn't have a lot of things you moderns think are indispensable. But he's alive! He's a millionaire compared to the likes of me. For no one is quite so poor as one who has never been born.

Then you mention health of body and mind. Somehow that doesn't impress a person who has no body to be diseased and no mind to be defective. Frankly, I wish I did. And if you can arrange it I'll take a body wracked by the most loathsome disease. I'll accept a mind that will never develop — I'll endure anything — if only I can live.

## **THEY CLING TO LIFE**

I'm not going to belabor the point but why don't you look around you? The poor (according to your standards) are very happy people. Surely they prefer poverty to non-existence. And the sickly! Did you ever notice how they cling to life? Oh yes, folks, life is sweet. But what could you possibly know about that!

Some day, if and when you make heaven, you can check on these points. Search out an individual who lived 75 years on earth in the midst of the most frightful squalor. Ask him if after 500 or 1000 years of celestial happiness he wishes he had never been born. Then find a former leper, a hopeless cripple or one who had been the town idiot back in the year 250. Inquire of them if they would have preferred the sentence you have imposed on me to the difficult time they had on earth!

## **ONE WHO MIGHT HAVE LOVED**

I'd like to say, "I must be going now." That wouldn't be quite accurate. I'm not going anywhere. I've never been anywhere. I've never really been, period. But I'll leave you to meditate on the child you never had. I'm not much on theology but I wonder if perhaps a God of strict justice will not ask you one day about me and all the other children He intended you to have. Confidentially, you'd better have something more convincing to tell Him that you tried to tell me. Good bye, from one who might have loved you.

*With endless regret,  
Your never-born Son*

*Nihil Obstat:*

Thomas J McHugh, LL.D.  
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