

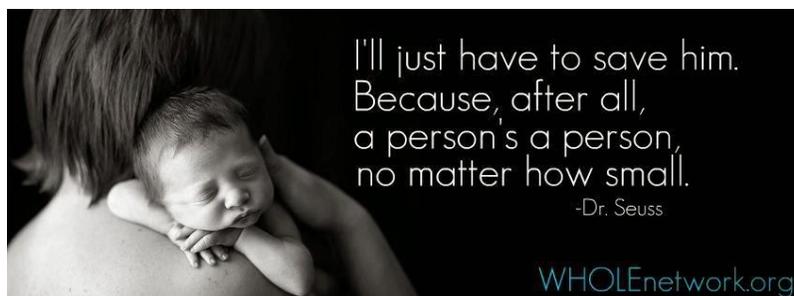
**Tuesday, May 6, 2014**

## **Why Catholics Don't Circumcise**

Below is an excerpt written by Kathleen Centers on the Catholic history of circumcision. Resources for additional reading are provided at the end.

*A child is not something owed to one, but is a gift. The "supreme gift of marriage" is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged "right to a child" would lead. In this area, only the child possesses genuine rights: the right "to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents," and "the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception." Catechism of the Catholic Church #2378*

©2014 Kathleen Centers



The Church has forbidden circumcision in all cases except as a last resort to treat a sufficiently grave and actual medical disorder or disease for which there is no other treatment. Most Catholics are aware that circumcision cannot be done for religious reasons, such as either a commemoration of the Old Covenant or of the specific Circumcision of Christ Himself. They want, however, to justify circumcision through other reasons, such as medical and cultural reasons. But, documentation from the Church condemning all such non-religious reasons is clear.

The most commonly cited document is from the Council of Florence (occasionally referred to as a continuation of the Council of Basel), in particular, the Bull of Union with the Copts, declared on February 4, 1442. This states:

**“Therefore it strictly orders all who glory in the name of Christian, not to practice circumcision either before or after baptism, since whether or not they place their hope in it, it cannot possibly be observed without loss of eternal salvation.”**

The important phrase here is “whether or not they place their hope in it.” That is to say that a Christian may not be circumcised whether out of a religious imperative or for any other reason, of which we could name many, such as for cultural conformity, prophylactic medical hopes, aesthetic preference, etc.

This is supported by the historical context that the Copts did *not* assign **any** religious reason to their circumcisions, instead performing them only for cultural and business reasons, most notably to not be seen as “dirty” by the Islamic-dominated money and power structure of their region. If circumcision was only forbidden if done for religious reasons and was allowed for secular reasons, the Church would not have prohibited the Copts from performing their secular circumcisions.

This is confirmed by Attwater in the Catholic Dictionary of 1942:

**“Among Christians it is still practiced by the Copts and Abyssinians, on the eighth day after birth and before Baptism; it has apparently no religious significance.” (Catholic Dictionary, Attwater, “circumcision”)**

In fact, not only was circumcision not done for any religious reason by the Copts, the religious authorities of the Copts specifically referred to it as sinful to treat it as having any religious significance. As the Orthodox Patriarch Cyril II established in his Canons of 1086 AD, nearly 400 years before the Council of Florence:

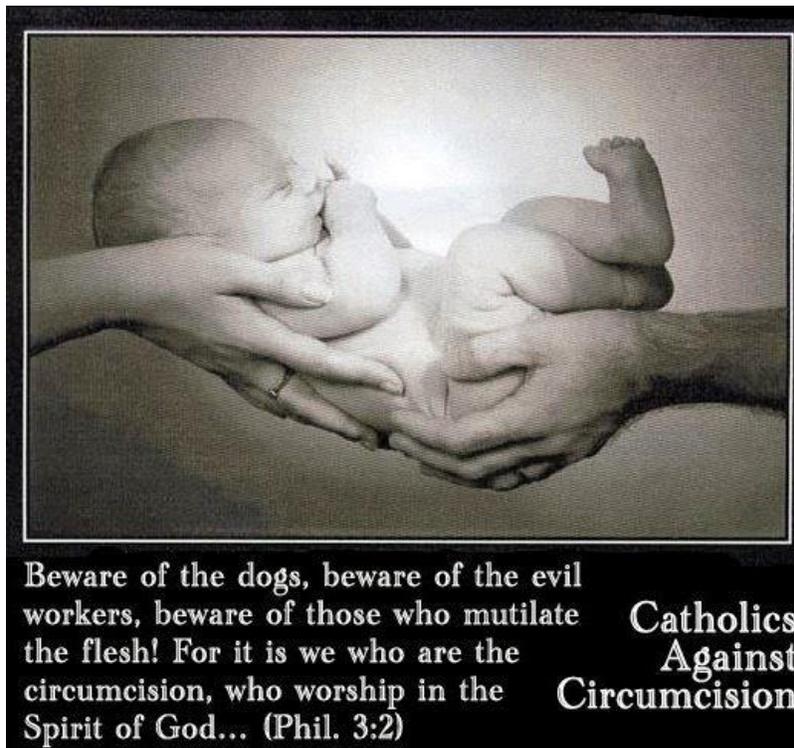
**“The Faithful *who would like to circumcise* their boys ought to circumcise them *before baptism*. No one should circumcise his son after baptism. Whoever breached this should be interdicted, and not have share with us.” (Canons of Cyril II, 19<sup>th</sup> Canon, 1086 AD)**

The later patriarch, Gabriel II, writing in 1140 AD, reinforced what Cyril II had said:

**“No one should be circumcised after holy baptism. He who wants circumcision should do it before baptism.” (Canons of Gabriel II, 20<sup>th</sup> Canon, 1140 AD)**

But, in other writings, he elaborated on why any religious reason for circumcision was against the Coptic Orthodox religion, such as in his Nomocanon, where he gives as the reason why circumcision should never be done for any religious reason as shown by St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians 3:2:

**“Beware of the dogs. Beware of the people of circumcision.”**



Although different patriarchs in the following years had different opinions of it as a custom, some speaking against it but tolerating it, while others recommending it as an important cultural practice, it was never established as any kind of **religious** practice.

Thus it was necessary for the Church to make it clear in the Bull of Union that circumcision was forbidden regardless of reason, i.e. “whether or not they place their hope in it.” Of course, this statement was simply a continuation of how the Church had viewed the Coptic secular circumcision for centuries, as Jacques de Vitry wrote in 1220 AD in his *Historia Orientalis*:

**“Ever since the Enemy sowed discord in them, and blinded for a long time by a lamentable and miserable error, most of them practice the circumcision of their newborns of both sexes, in the manner of the Saracens. They do not wait for the grace of baptism to make the circumcision of the flesh unnecessary, just as in the blossoming of the fruit the flower fades.”**

This viewpoint about the non-religious nature of Coptic circumcision as well as the Church’s condemnation of it as such was echoed 7 centuries later, in 1952, by French Catholic scholar, Jacques Tagher, who wrote in his principle work, “Coptes & Musulmans”:

**“Amongst the customs that the Copts took from the Muslims early is the circumcision of children, which had been banned by Christianity and wasn’t practiced in Egypt prior to the Arab invasion.”**

The Church again encountered and again condemned secular infant circumcision in the case of the Abyssinian Orthodox. St. Ignatius of Loyola, attempting to persuade the Abyssinians (Ethiopians) to return to the Catholic Church, wrote a list of requirements to the Abyssinian Emperor Galawdewos, in 1555, including the cessation of circumcision.

To this, the Emperor responded, in his *Confession of Faith* of the same year:

**“And as to the institution of circumcision, it is not that we are circumcised like the Jews, for we know the word of the teaching of Paul, fount of wisdom, which says: ‘circumcision is of no avail, and lack of circumcision does not empower either – but rather the new creation which is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ’. And furthermore he says to the Corinthians; ‘he who has taken circumcision let him not take off the foreskin’. We possess all the books of Paul’s teaching and they instruct us as regards circumcision and as regards the prepuce. But the circumcision which we have is according to the custom of the country – like the scarification of the face practiced in Ethiopia and Nubia; and like the perforation of the ears among Indians. What we do is not for the observance of the laws of the Pentateuch but rather in accord with the custom of the people.”**

Note that today, circumcision proponents use the same arguments, that it is not for religious fanaticism but merely cultural conformity. They also point out that other cultures practice various forms of mutilations and bodily alterations, thereby attempting to justify circumcision.

It was not until 1622 that the then-reigning emperor, Susenyos, finally agreed to convert to Catholicism and accepted a Catholic Patriarch to reign over the Church in his nation. Upon arriving in 1625, the

Patriarch, His Excellency Alphonsus Mendes, immediately demanded the abolition of circumcision. Within a few years, because of refusal to accept this command, the Abyssinians revolted, forced Susenyos to abdicate and then expelled all Catholic missionaries.

As Fr. Manuel de Almeida, an assistant to Bishop Mendes, wrote at the time:

**“It will be apparent from this how many souls have lost Heaven through this error in the course of so many hundreds of years. Today, after they have received the holy Roman faith, one of the things they cannot be persuaded to do is to abandon circumcision. They say they do not do it to keep the law of Moses but only for elegance. Great folly or blindness!” (Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646, P. 62)**



Again, it is clear that the Church was well aware of the Abyssinian claim that their circumcision was not at all religious. Yet, to the Church, as the Council of Florence had stated, Catholics cannot be circumcised for any reason, religious or otherwise. Fr. Almeida’s use of the word “elegance” as the erroneous reason for the wicked practice of circumcision by the Abyssinians definitely is evocative of many of the words used today in America to justify non-religious circumcision for appearance and cultural acceptance.

The Church’s insistence upon the Copts and Abyssinians ceasing secular infant circumcision is no surprise considering that the very act of routine infant circumcision, without any bearing on religion, has always been seen as an abomination by the Church. Of course, the Roman and Greek medical texts on circumcision as a rare but occasionally necessary surgical procedure for some rare disorders were well known throughout the history of the Church in the same way that any other amputation was known and considered a valid medical option in the last resort. The Church, however, believed that the Jews, based on the Talmud, had a desire to foster circumcision among non-Jews, using any means necessary. Thus, the Church pronounced at the Council of Salzburg-Vienna (1267):

**“Canon XVIII. Christians may not be enticed into Judaism, nor may they be circumcised for any reason.”**

and the Edict of Expulsion (1492) of the Jews issued by Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, in conjunction with the Holy Office of the Inquisition, stated one of the reasons for the expulsion is the Jewish attempt to:

**“by whatever ways and means possible...[to] attract and pervert them [Christians] to their Jewish injurious belief and opinion, instructing them in their ceremonies and observances of the Law...including trying to circumcise them and their children.”**

This perception that Jews wanted to cause Christians to be circumcised was nothing new to the Middle Ages. The Catholic rulers of the early Church era addressed the issue forcefully:

*Emperor Constantine I, October 21, 335:*

**“If one of the Jews shall buy and circumcise a Christian slave (or of any other sect), he shall on no account retain the circumcised in slavery, but he who suffered this shall acquire the privileges of liberty.”**

*And*

*Emperors Honorius and Theodosius II, April 9, 423:*

**“Jews shall be condemned to confiscation of property as well as to perpetual exile, If it shall be established that they have circumcised a man of our Faith or ordered him to be circumcised.”**

*And*

Emperor Justinian (533 AD) (emphasizing a long-standing law):

**“Citizens...who suffer that they themselves or their slaves be circumcised in accordance with the Jewish custom, are exiled perpetually to an island and their property confiscated; the doctors suffer capital punishment. If Jews shall circumcise purchased slaves of another nation, they shall be banished or suffer capital punishment.” (Paulus, *Sententiae* 5:22:3–4, in Linder, *Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (n. 64), pp. 117–20.)**

As cited by Hodges in the journal, "The Bulletin of the History of Medicine" (Volume 75, P. 375-405, Fall 2001, The Ideal Prepuce in Ancient Greece and Rome: Male Genital Aesthetics and Their Relation to *Lipodermos*, Circumcision, Foreskin Restoration, and the *Kynodesme*):

**"Furthermore, the secular Roman law of the Byzantine Empire and the countries of Western Europe, at least through the Middle Ages, preserved and enhanced laws banning Hebrews from circumcising non-Hebrews and banning Christians or slaves of any religious affiliation from undergoing circumcision for any reason."**

These concerns were well-founded. The Talmudic writings condemning uncircumcision with all manner of vile phrases are as numerous as those expressing disgust for the foreskin as a bodily organ. This stems from the Talmudic-era belief spread through the Talmudic texts that God created Adam without a foreskin and that its spontaneous growth in Adam was a punishment for Original Sin:

**"Adam came into the world circumcised, as it is said, 'And the Just One created the Adam in His image'" (Avos D'Rabbi Nosan 2:5).**

As would be evoked later by Jewish doctors and their Victorian physician thralls of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, according to the Talmudic writings, the status of uncircumcision caused an inescapable, perverted and overwhelming insatiable lust, as is written in the Talmud in numerous places such as:

**"Animals must not be allowed to go near the Goim, because they are suspected of having intercourse with them...because they are over-sexed." (Abhodah Zarah)**

These attitudes about the uncircumcised and the foreskin were codified in Talmudic law, as Hodges points out in the same journal and article mentioned above:

**"Hebrew law...requires that Hebrews circumcise their slaves and servants, although this circumcision does not constitute a conversion to Judaism."**

The Church's awareness of the Jewish desire to ape Christians and Christianity itself by having the Faithful circumcised for any reasons including secular reasons, was even seen as being an element of the mission of the Anti-Christ, as St. Victorinus of Pettau writes in his Commentary on the Apocalypse (301 AD):

**(Ch. 17, #16) “he [the Anti-Christ] will recall the saints, not to the worship of idols, but to undertake circumcision, and, if he is able, to seduce any”**

It should be no surprise, therefore, that American and British Jewish “doctors” were exponentially prominent in numbers at the forefront of the push for infant male circumcision in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and they knew exactly the right buttons to push the money-hungry, procreative-hating Victorian Protestant Anglo & American “doctor” counterparts, who were eager for any excuse for an easy payday, especially involving cutting of the male genitals. They were only too eager to accept whatever “research” their Jewish colleagues produced, “research” that was never accepted by physicians anywhere else in the world and which has since been shown to be completely fabricated, but which at the time claimed to show circumcision as the cure for a litany of diseases, from leprosy and hip displacement, to tuberculosis and self-abuse, to cancer and syphilis.

As Dr. Leonard Glick wrote in his book, *Marked in Your Flesh: Circumcision from Ancient Judea to Modern America*:

**“In contrast, it seems beyond question that Jewish physicians have been disproportionately prominent as [circumcision] advocates. In particular, they were largely responsible for promoting claims for circumcision as a cancer preventative.”**

And

**“Jewish names – Wolbarst, Ravich, Weiss, Fink, Schoen and others – will appear disproportionately in the discussion...because Jewish physicians have been disproportionately prominent in circumcision advocacy...”**

And, as for the Victorian Protestant physicians’ willingness to believe anything encouraging routine infant circumcision, the tendency to that attitude had been brewing for many years, stemming from bizarre religious attitudes that we see alive and well today among many American Protestants in particular:

**”[T]here were strong Judaizing tendencies in Puritanism, as fundamentalist radicals turned to the Old Testament in their quest to purge Christianity of its popish accretions. Some of these went so far as to adopt Jewish customs such as Sabbath and dietary observance, and a few even tried to circumcise boys.” (Shakespeare and the Jews, Shapiro, 1996, p. 25)**

But, after all this, one might say, what if circumcision has a health benefit? The Church has condemned circumcision for religious reasons and secular reasons such as appearance, culture and social status, and it seems that it would settle the matter when the Church says “for any reason” and “whether or not” there is any religious reason. But, one might argue, the Church might not have conceived of the possibility that circumcision had positive health benefits.

What if it is shown to decrease UTI infection, or penile cancer, or phimosis, or increases fertility rates, or is just, in general, more hygienic in any way? As will be shown later, none of these is the case and, in truth, circumcision has no impact on these and all other health issues. In fact, it actually is more (often much more) unhealthy. Also, the Church has always been aware of the claims of circumcision being more hygienic and healthy.

The Talmud and the arguments of the Mohammedans have always been filled with such claims. The medical academies of the Church and those of Catholic nations have always, instead, held to the position that the opposite is true, that circumcision is horribly unhealthy and a mutilation, as has been consistently held throughout the civilized world thanks to the most famed of the Ancient Roman and Greek physicians, who wrote in depth about the importance of the foreskin in procreative function and genital health and the serious harm to health that circumcision causes as will be discussed later.

But, again, one might argue, what if the Church’s medical assumptions have been wrong? What if the medical societies of the Catholic world, from Ancient Rome to modern France and from Ancient Greece to modern Germany, not to mention all the non-Catholic medical heritage which has echoed this unchanging caution about the harm of circumcision, such as that of Russia, China, Japan and so many others, are now and always have been WRONG? What if circumcision actually does have positive health benefits? Or, does that even matter? Aren’t Catholic parents justified in circumcising if they merely *believe* it has health benefits?

The answer is a resounding NO. Circumcision CANNOT be inflicted on infants as a preventative measure, regardless of any potential future benefit or belief by the parents in one.

As Pope Pius XII declared in 1952:

**“From a moral point of view, circumcision is permissible if, in accordance with therapeutic principles, it prevents a disease that cannot be countered in any other way.” (Discourses & Radio Messages of His Holiness Pius XII, Volume XIV, 2 March 1952-1 March 1953)**

It is surprising that Pope Pius XII would have commented on the issue since it was not until after his pontificate that American Catholics throughout the country were routinely circumcised. While there were certainly parts of the country, by the 1950's, where more than 50% of Catholic boys were circumcised, overall the rate was far lower. Routine infant circumcision only passed 50% for the entire population in the United States in the 1950's and only passed 50% for Catholics until well into the 1960's. It never reached more than 50% in Britain for the general population and never anywhere as close for Catholics. It only reached more than 50% in Canada until well into the 1960's for the general population and it is doubtful it ever reached 50% for Catholics. In the entire world, only in Australia was routine infant circumcision prevalent among Catholics prior to Vatican II.

In America, even in 1956, the concept of routine infant circumcision among Catholics was still largely a strange and new phenomenon, though one the Church clearly opposed, as Fr. Edwin Healy shows in his comments about it in his book, *Medical Ethics*:

**“Circumcision of Newborn Males, Case 55 – “Dr. J makes it a practice to circumcise all male infants shortly after birth. He says that this is merely routine procedure and that it is recommended by most competent physicians. Solution: Unless there is a positive indication for circumcision, the operation should be omitted... Some physicians, it seems, circumcise all male infants, and their motive appears to be mercenary. Such physicians act in a manner unworthy of their high calling.” (Medical Ethics, Fr. Edwin F. Healy, SJ, Loyola University Press, Chicago 1956, P. 128-129)**

In this passage, Fr. Healy echoes Pope Pius XII's statement, i.e. that infant circumcision can only be done if there is a present disorder or disease for which circumcision is indicated. But, he also describes routine infant circumcision as something that only “some” physicians were doing at the time, for which he can only posit the motive “appears to be mercenary.”

Considering that upwards of 60% of American male babies were being circumcised at that time, it is a little surprising that Fr. Healy didn't realize many doctors were circumcising a lot of baby boys. But, again, considering that Catholic children were being circumcised at a far lower rate, it is understandable within his focus.

As Fr. Healy's and Pope Pius XII's clear comments show, the Church was simply applying traditional medical moral theology to the circumcision procedure. The entire Catholic world, both because of its roots in the Roman/Greek medical philosophy and because of its long awareness of the revulsion held for the foreskin, as an organ, by surrounding cultures, always regarded the foreskin as a unique body part with a unique function and was simply applying medical ethics and moral theology to the situation. As Fr. Healy states:

**“Mutilation is an action (an excision or the equivalent) by which an organic function or the use of a member of the body is intentionally destroyed either partially or wholly. The action consists of cutting out, crushing, burning, X-raying, or in some such manner directly destroying a part of the human body or of rendering an organ permanently inoperative. The mutilation may result in the suppression of an organic function- for example, the destruction of one's vision or power of procreation- or it may consist in the amputation of an arm or a leg. To strip off skin from the body to use for grafting is not a mutilation, for in this operation no organic function or member of the body is destroyed. Neither would a blood transfusion, nor a face-lifting operation, nor dental extraction be considered mutilations in the technical sense of the term. Even procedures such as these, however, which are not mutilations in the strict sense of the term, may not be licitly used without a justifying reason.**

**The general rule regarding mutilation is this, that mutilation is licit only when necessary for preserving the health of the whole body. The reason that the scope of justifiable mutilations is thus limited is that man has the supreme ownership neither of the whole body nor of its various parts, and that he is therefore not permitted to treat them as though he were the supreme owner. Man is merely the custodian of his body and its parts. Directly to destroy the body or one of its parts is to exercise over that object supreme ownership. One cannot act more clearly in a manner that implies ownership over a thing than by destroying it, for by so doing he puts an end to its very existence.**

**Mutilation is, however, licit if it is required to conserve the health of the whole body. To save one's life even at the expense of losing part of the body is the act of a wise administrator. The whole obviously is better than any single part; and since God has made us stewards of our bodies, we may presume that He desires that we sacrifice a part of the body if that is necessary to conserve the rest.” (Medical Ethics, Fr. Edwin F. Healy, SJ, Loyola University Press, Chicago 1956, P. 121-122)**

**Medical Ethics (Fr. Edwin F. Healy, SJ) (1956) (Nihil Obstat - Fr. AG Schmidt, SJ, Censor Deputatus, Imprimatur - Cardinal Stritch, Archbishop of Chicago)**

Of course, no specific procedures are mentioned here as being either “mutilations” but, he has already clearly stated routine preventative infant circumcision as prohibited. Moreover, as will be discussed later, the critical and unique roles that the foreskin has in the procreative act and genital health clearly demonstrate that it fits the description of a body part for which the removal would be rightly considered mutilation in the truest sense. The information on mutilation and totality of the body is mentioned only as a clear indication of *why* Pope Pius XII and Fr. Healy rejected the concept of infant circumcision being done for preventative reasons, as opposed to therapy for a specific malady for which there is no other less severe treatment.

Fr. Healy's criteria for what justifies removal or permanent damage of a part of the body is in line with the history of medical theology.

St. Thomas Aquinas states in the Summa (2, 2, 65, 1):

**“Now a member of the human body is of itself useful to the good of the whole body, yet, accidentally it may happen to be hurtful, as when a decayed member is a source of corruption to the whole body. Accordingly so long as a member is healthy and retains its natural disposition, it cannot be cut off without injury to the whole body...A member should not be removed for the sake of the bodily health of the whole, unless otherwise nothing can be done to further the good of the whole. Now it is always possible to further one's spiritual welfare otherwise than by cutting off a member, because sin is always subject to the will: and consequently in no case is it allowable to maim oneself, even to avoid any sin whatever. Hence Chrysostom, in his exposition on Matthew 19:12 (Hom. Ixii in Matth.), "There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven," says: "Not by maiming themselves, but by destroying evil thoughts, for a man is accursed who maims himself, since they are murderers who do such things." And further on he says: "Nor is lust tamed thereby, on the contrary it becomes more importunate, for the seed springs in us from other sources, and chiefly from an incontinent purpose and a careless mind: and temptation is curbed not so much by cutting off a member as by curbing one's thoughts."**

Pope Pius XI powerfully stated this same principle in his Encyclical, Casti Connubii:

**“71. Furthermore, Christian doctrine establishes, and the light of human reason makes it most clear, that private individuals have no other power over the members of their bodies than that which pertains to their natural ends; and they are not free to destroy or mutilate their members, or in any other way render themselves unfit for their natural functions, except when no other provision can be made for the good of the whole body.”**

Therefore, for infant circumcision to be done routinely and not only as a specific treatment to a specific disease they are currently suffering from for which there is no other treatment, it would have to be the treatment for a disease that EVERY new baby boy is born with and for which there is no other treatment. Even as a preventative treatment for some disease that EVERY man would eventually develop, it seems clear the Church does not condone it but would say that the person must wait until the disorder manifests. Of course, there is no such disease which ALL baby boys have or which ALL will develop in time, for which there is no other treatment. But, it is a clear violation of the Catholic Faith to even suggest that there could be such a disease that is inherent to the male body in a universal way as it contradicts the constant teaching of the Church, that every part of the human body serves a purpose and is important.

As St. Ambrose says (Letter 407):

**“Nature has created nothing imperfect in man, nor has she bade it be removed as unnecessary.”**

This same teaching is echoed in literally hundreds of writings of the Church. All of which draw from the same Scripture citations, such as:

**“God hath set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him.” (1 Cor, 12:18)**

**“And God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good.” (Genesis 1:31)**

**“For thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which thou hast made: for thou didst not appoint, or make any thing hating it.” (Wisdom 11:25)**

For 2000 years, Catholics have been taught by the Church to never circumcise and to revile the practice of circumcision through a wide array of methods, which endowed them with the wisdom to reject out of hand the wildly false “scientific claims” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century made by Jewish and Victorian American and British pro-circumcision doctors.

They have developed this unflinching rejection of circumcision in any form by virtue of it being made illegal by the Church and State on pain of exile, imprisonment, death or forfeiture of property for any reason other than as a last resort medical treatment for particular disorders. They had been clearly told they could not circumcise as a preventative measure or even as a specific disease treatment if other measures were available. They had been told they could not circumcise for hygienic reasons or appearance. They were told they could not circumcise for cultural reasons. They were taught to be on guard against the manipulations and enticement of other religious leaders and cultures to have them circumcised with or without any religious aspect.

But, alongside these lessons by Holy Mother Church, another that should not be overlooked is the constant teaching of the Church about the intense and heart-breaking pain The Circumcision caused Our Lord in the purely natural sense. It was unthinkable for them to subject their children to pain exponentially worse than what they were taught that Our Lord endured based on dubious claims of enemies of the Faith. Here below is a sampling of what Catholics have been aware Jesus suffered, in a natural way, from His own Circumcision.

Consider that the routine infant circumcision practiced in America removes much more of the body, causes vastly more bleeding, puts the child in greater physical danger, and subjects the child to increased physical harm compared to the method Jesus underwent. The low circumcision rates among Catholics outside of America, Britain, Canada and Australia in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, despite every dishonest effort of the pushed upon them, is now understandable.

St. Bonaventure - Meditations on the Life of Christ:

**“On this day [Feast of the Circumcision] our Lord Jesus began to shed His most precious blood for our sakes. So earnest was He to begin early to suffer for us, that He who knew no sin undertook this day to endure the pain of it for us. Here let tenderness move us to compassionate Him: let us shed at least some few tears with Him, who on this day shed so many for us...We have said before, that on this day He began to shed His sacred blood for us, and that indeed in a most severe manner; for His tender flesh was cruelly separated with a blunt and edgeless instrument of stone. What pity then ought not this move us to, towards Him and His holy Mother? What tears then did not the tender infant Jesus shed at the incredible pain He suffered in the incision of His sacred flesh; for His was truly so, and as sensible of pain as that of any pure mortal. And can we reasonably imagine then, that His holy Mother, when she saw her beloved Child in tears, could contain herself from them? No, we may well suppose, that like a compassionate parent, she ever accompanied Him in all His afflictions ; so that her tender heart melting now with grief in seeing Him cry, she burst forth into tears herself, and wept bitterly. So likewise, may we imagine that more affected with His Mother's grief than His own, the holy Babe, as He lay extended on her lap, waved His little hands towards her lips, her cheeks, and her eyes, as it were to dry up those precious drops, and to request her to forbear shedding them, struggling at the same time, to hide the excess of His own torture to mitigate her's. But she, alas was too sensibly affected with His suffering not to shed tear for tear with Him. Yet the divine wisdom within her, supplying the want of speech in Him, enabled her to know His pleasure, before He had words to utter it; hence, perceiving that her grief added to His pain, often would she try to suppress it, and with signs of forced tranquility endeavor to console Him; still often would she sigh, and with forbidden tears, ready to flow from her eyes, and waiting as it were in a state of violence to break forth, thus frequently would she address Him with complaints of the most tender love: "Forbear, lovely babe! Forbear those precious tears, or suffer mine to flow. How can thy loving Mother see those dear eyes bedewed and cease to weep?" Hence the blessed Infant, in compassion to His holy Mother, would moderate His sobs and give over weeping, and she with a Mother's tenderness, would wipe His sacred eyes and her own, incline her face to His, closely and tenderly press His blessed cheeks, and give Him suck; and study meanwhile the most likely means to lull His pain and cherish Him...From this time, indeed, the circumcision of the flesh was abolished, and its obligation ceased, baptism being instituted in its place, which is a sacrament of more extensive grace, and less repugnant to nature, as being void of pain.”**

St. Peter Julian Eymard refers to the pain of Our Lord's Circumcision as one of the Seven Sorrows of St. Joseph (Sufferings of Saint Joseph, St. Peter Julian Eymard):

**“The Circumcision of Jesus. What a shock to Joseph to think that he himself would make the Infant-God suffer and would shed the first drops of His blood. How his heart ached at the sight of that wound, the blood that flowed from it, and the tears of the divine Mother.”**

Fr. Edward Healy Thompson, in his masterpiece based on all the traditional teachings and approved visions detailing the life of St. Joseph, wrote about the Circumcision (The Life & Glories of St. Joseph, EH Thompson):

**“That Jesus was in no way bound by this law of circumcision is plain...Nevertheless, as He had come, not to destroy but to fulfil the Law, He willed to submit Himself to this painful and humiliating rite in order to give to all a sublime example of obedience, mortification, humility, and purity ; and He, no doubt, interiorly made known to His Blessed Mother that such was His desire... In this act Joseph accomplished three sacrifices in one : the sacrifice of Jesus, who began the great work of our redemption by suffering in His innocent members ; the sacrifice of Mary, who with indescribable sorrow, but with perfect resignation, offered her Son to the Eternal Father, and held, as it were, the victim bound ; and the sacrifice of himself, who had to nerve his hand to perform an act so painful and repugnant to his tender heart. It was an act of heroic obedience and fortitude on his part, greater, St. Bernard says, than was that of Abraham in sacrificing his son Isaac ; for Joseph loved Jesus incomparably more than Abraham did his son Isaac, and well knew the difference between the son of any mortal man and the Son of the Eternal God. Thus the knife which cut the flesh of Jesus wounded the heart and pierced the soul of Joseph. Here there was no angel to stay his hand. The act must be accomplished, and in performing it Joseph was, indeed, more than a martyr.”**

Abbe Constant Fouart wrote (in *The Christ the Son of God*, 1917, p. 54):

**“The Christ, in order to fulfill all justice, was required to endure this humiliation, and bear in His body the stigma of the sins which He had taken upon Himself. Yet He only underwent circumcision that He might set us free from its bondage, by substituting for it a purification more elevated, one wholly spiritual, that of the heart and of the heart’s evil desires.”**

The Great Gueranger wrote in *The Liturgical Year* (Book 1, Volume 2, P. 389)

**“On this the eighth day since the Birth of our Emmanuel, let us consider the great mystery which the Gospel tells us was accomplished in his divine Flesh: the Circumcision...Let us compassionate our sweet Jesus, who meekly submits to the knife which is to put upon him the sign of a Servant of God. Mary, who has watched over him with the most affectionate solicitude, has felt her heart sink within her as each day brought her nearer to this hour of her Child’s first suffering. She knows that the justice of God does not necessarily require this first sacrifice, or might accept it, on account of its infinite value, for the world’s salvation: and yet, the innocent Flesh of her Son must, even so early as this, be torn, and his Blood flow down his infant limbs. What must be her affliction at seeing the preparations for this painful ceremony! She cannot leave her Jesus and yet how shall she bear to see him writhe under this his first experience of suffering? She must stay, then, and hear his sobs and heartrending cries; she must bear the sight of the tears of her Divine Babe; forced from him by the violence of the pain. We need St. Bonaventura to describe this wonderful mystery. ‘and if he weeps, thinkest though his Mother could keep in her tears’?”**

Fr. Rohner, in *“Life of the Blessed Virgin”* writes (P. 213-214):

**“And oh, how gladly would this tender Virgin have had her divine Child exempted from this painful and humiliating process of circumcision!”**

Ven. Anne Catherine Emmerich relates (The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, P. 214-215):

**“The circumcision took place at dawn, eight days after the birth of Our Lord. The Blessed Virgin was distressed and anxious...The Infant Jesus wept loudly after the sacred ceremony, and I saw that He was given back to St. Joseph. He laid Him in the arms of the Blessed Virgin, who was standing with two women in the back of the cave. She wept as she took Him, and withdrew into the corner where the Crib was...In the night that followed I saw the Child often restless with pain and crying a great deal. Mary and Joseph took Him in their arms in turns, carrying Him about and comforting Him.”**

Ven. Mary Agreda writes (Mystical City of God, P. 434-435):

**“The mystery of the Circumcision required a special and particular dispensation...In the meanwhile, addressing in these words the law that required it, She [Mary] said: ‘O law, made for all, thou art just and holy; but thou dost afflict my heart by thy hardness, if thou art to wound Him, who is thy life and thy Author! That thou shouldst inflict thy sufferings upon those, who must be cleansed of guilt, is just; but that thou shouldst visit with thy severity the Innocent, who is without fault, seems the excess of rigor unless his own love concedes this right to thee. O would that it might please my Beloved to exempt Himself from this punishment! But how shall He refuse to undergo it, since He came to seek pain, to embrace the Cross, to fulfill and accomplish the law? O cruel knife! Would thou couldst direct thy attacks upon my own life, and not upon the Lord, who gave it to me! ..O eternal Father, let the knife now lose its sharpness and the flesh its sensitiveness! Let pain descend rather upon me, insignificant wormlet; let thy Only begotten Son fulfill the law, but let me alone feel the punishment...’ Such grief the sorrowful Mother mixed with the joy of seeing the Only begotten of the Father born of Her and resting in her arms, and thus She passed the days which remained before the Circumcision.”**

And (P. 436):

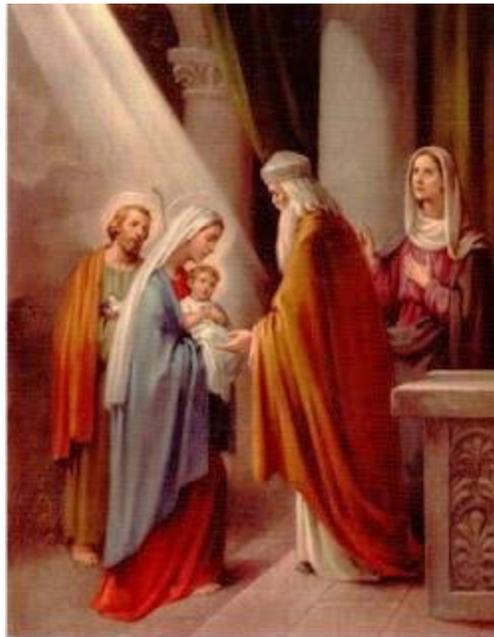
**“The Most High answered Her, saying: “My Daughter, do not let thy heart be afflicted because thy son is to be subjected to the knife and to the pains of circumcision. I have sent Him into the world as an example, that He put an end to the law of Moses entirely fulfilling it.”**

In the masterpiece compilation, The Life of Mary as Seen by the Mystics, it is related:

**(P. 126) “During the first days after the Nativity, whenever Mary thought of the painful ceremonial operation known as Circumcision, which the Law of Israel prescribed for every male child on the eighth day after birth, she suffered intensely. Then one day while Mary was kneeling in prayer, the Lord said to her: ‘My Daughter, do not let your heart be afflicted because your Son is to be subjected to the pains of circumcision. I have sent Him into the world as an example. Therefore resign yourself to the shedding of His Blood.’ Whereupon the Blessed Virgin prayed: ‘Supreme Lord and God, I offer to Thee this most meek Lamb. But if His pains may be mitigated at the expense of my suffering, Thou hast power to affect this exchange’”**

And

**(P. 130) “[After the Circumcision] When the Holy Family was alone again, as the Infant Jesus was crying from pain, Mary withdrew to the end of the grotto with Him, and, sitting down, she lowered her veil and soothed Him by nursing Him, weeping quietly as she did so. That night, Jesus’ pain was so severe that he could not rest, and often cried. So Mary and Joseph took turns walking up and down the grotto with Him. In moments when they were not grieving over His suffering, they sang canticles of praise and joy in honor of the Holy Name of Jesus.”**



As we can see, Catholics throughout history were aware of the intense and horrendous pain suffered by Christ in Circumcision. Alongside this awareness rested the clear prohibition of the Church for any reason but absolutely necessary therapy for a specific disease as well as the 2300 year old record of both Eastern and Western medical literature writings of the biological importance of the foreskin and the harm caused by its damage or excision. And what was on the other side of the argument? Simply the wild ravings and pseudo-science of Victorian Protestant American and English “doctors” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, completely rejected by all rest of the world’s doctors of their time, whose only other notable contribution to modern medicine is a list of other procedures which are now universally condemned as barbaric, such as hysterectomy for female “hysteria”, routine tonsillectomy and appendectomy, pouring carbolic acid on the female clitoris, and more. Obviously, no Catholic in their right mind would be persuaded by the latter over the former.

As a physician, Kellogg was professionally admired and publicly influential, and he earned a fortune publishing books discouraging masturbation. His recommended treatments for “the secret vice” were quite extreme. For example, he advocated that persistent masturbation in boys be treated by sewing the foreskin with silver wire or, as a last resort, by circumcision without anesthesia. Female masturbation was to be treated by burning the clitoris with carbolic acid. Kellogg, like Graham, was also very concerned with dietary health—especially with the idea that consumption of meat increased sexual desire. Thus, he urged people to eat more cereals and nuts and invented Kellogg’s cornflakes “almost literally, as anti-masturbation food” (Money, 1986, p. 186).

Given the influence of physicians like Kellogg, it should come as no surprise that many people believed that masturbation caused insanity (Hare, 1962). This hypothe-

Still, some might argue that since Jesus was circumcised, therefore either it can’t be wrong to circumcise OR that we can circumcise as a commemoration of Christ’s circumcision

On the contrary, the circumcision of Jesus, that of the Old Covenant, was a completely different and much less harmful procedure than that practiced today in routine infant circumcisions. That painful sacrifice of Jesus did not remove the entire foreskin, did not mutilate Him, did not destroy function. Moreover, even this Old Covenant Circumcision, as was clearly demonstrated by the citations above, was a procedure done to Jesus only for the religious significance of the act and His willful part in the covenant.

The current procedure forced onto American boys today is identical to that instituted by the Talmudic writings in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century as it mutilates and destroys the entire foreskin and all of the functions of the organ. Finally, the Church has always clearly taught that to circumcise for any kind of religious custom is part of the Judaizing heresy and is blasphemous.

Some argue that anything Jesus submitted to have done to Him cannot be wrong in and of itself. But, of course, this is absurd. We do not crucify our children, nor scourge their bodies to the bone, nor pierce their skulls to the brain with crowns of thorns, though Jesus suffered to have these things done to Him. Jesus willed to be circumcised for the same reason as He willed to be crucified, that is, to fulfill what needed to be fulfilled for mankind to be ransomed and the gates of Heaven opened. That does not mean these acts are acceptable for us to force onto our children short of a serious medical reason without any other medical treatment available.

As St. Bonaventure stated, in Meditations, as quoted above:

**“From this time, indeed, the circumcision of the flesh was abolished, and its obligation ceased, baptism being instituted in its place, which is a sacrament of more extensive grace, and less repugnant to nature, as being void of pain.”**

That is, what Jesus had endured for a religious reason, without such holy reason any longer existing, the act itself becomes no different than any other physical damage done to our flesh. It would clearly not be permitted to pierce our skull with thorns simply because Jesus had allowed that to happen to Him. No more sensible is it to say that it is acceptable to slice off an entire genital organ, a third of the entire tissue of the male genitalia, completely disabling the human body from all the many functions of the foreskin and then try to justify it by the fact that Jesus had a tiny bit of the foreskin removed, so small that neither the function nor the appearance was significantly altered. That would be like saying that we can chop off our entire hand today if it had been the case that the Old Testament called for ritual clipping of the skin off the tip of a finger.



In regard to the vast differences between the Old Covenant form of circumcision suffered by Our Lord as opposed to the exponentially more brutal and mutilating procedure used in current routine infant circumcision, identical to Talmudic circumcision began in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Dr. James Peron, in the Journal, Many Blessings (Volume III, Pages 41-42, Spring 2000, Circumcision: Then and Now), writes:

***“Milah: Symbolic Circumcision of Covenant.*** The original biblical circumcision of Abraham's time was a relatively minor ritual circumcision procedure in which only the redundant end of the foreskin extending beyond the tip of the glans was removed. This was called "Milah". It is from this term that the Jewish Religious Covenant circumcision ritual Bris Milah or Brith Milah got its name. Following "Milah", a penis so circumcised would still contain a considerable portion of the foreskin and the penis would have continued to go through its natural development since most of the foreskin would have remained intact. Protection of the glans would still have occurred. The foreskin would not be stripped back off the glans and would naturally separate from the glans gradually as the child matures, much as it would had the child not been circumcised. The sensitive frenulum would not have been disturbed or moved, and the foreskin remaining would continue to cover and protect a substantial portion of the glans, especially when flaccid, and the glans would appear as uncircumcised. There would be minimal loss of sensitivity or intended protection. This type of circumcision continued throughout the ages and during the time of Christ. The circumcision of Christ would have been this type of circumcision as referred to in the bible. Indeed, biblical reference to circumcision is strictly this form of circumcision. It continued into the New Testament. It has been argued that Michelangelo's David should show David as Circumcised. Interestingly, Michelangelo presented David precisely as he should have appeared following an infant "Milah" circumcision. His glans is essentially covered with only the tip of the glans showing.”

Dr. Peron continues, describing Talmudic circumcision as identical to that currently practiced in hospitals on baby boys today in America:

***“Changes to the Ritual Circumcision Procedure:*** No other feature was added to the religious ritual until about 140 AD when a second step to the ritual circumcision procedure was introduced [Periah]. ***Periah: The laying bare of the glans.*** After performing "milah", the cutting back of the end of the infant's foreskin, a second step, Periah was then performed. Periah consists of tearing and stripping back the remaining inner mucosal lining of the foreskin from the glans and then, by use of a sharp finger nail or implement, removing all of the inner mucosal tissue, including the excising and removal of the frenulum from the underside of the glans. The objective was to insure that no part of the remaining penile skin would rest against the glans corona. If any shreds of the mucosal foreskin tissue remained, or rejoined to the underside of the glans, the child was to be re-circumcised. This is a much more radical form of circumcision. It was dictated by man, and is not the biblically commanded circumcision rite. Its introduction has a bizarre history. The rabbinate sought to put an end to the practice of youths desiring to appear uncircumcised...By introducing the painful and debilitating "Periah" they would obliterate the foreskin completely such that a circumcised Jew could not disguise "the seal of the covenant.”

This is echoed by Dr. David Lang in his article on Circumcision in “Social Justice Review” (March-April 2011, Vol. 102, No. 3-4, p. 53-56):

**“But how could non-therapeutic circumcision be forbidden by the natural moral law? Didn’t God command routine circumcision for all males in the Old Testament, even for infants who could not**

consent? So how could such an operation be intrinsically unethical? The answer, according to many researchers, is that the Abrahamic-Mosaic circumcision rite mandated in Genesis 17 is not the same procedure as the modern form...The Old Covenant rite, though painful, involved only what is called *brit milah*: a token cut (prophetically symbolic of the blood to be shed by the promised Redeemer and a foreshadowing of Baptism) that clipped off merely the overhang flap or tapered neck (akroposthion) of the prepuce...Now this curtailing, though visibly detectable, left sufficient skin to cover the glans, thus maintaining normal male physical function. Around the middle of the second century A.D., however, the rabbis instituted a much more drastic version...This total uncovering is called *brit periah*, accomplished by cutting, tearing, and ripping away the whole preputial sheath. The Jewish Encyclopedia, in its article on Circumcision, makes clear that the Muslim practice (essentially *milah*) differs from the Judaic radical version (*periah*). The latter is the brand of surgery performed in modern times with the use of various surgical instruments (probes, forceps, clamps, scalpels). Without precedent in Christendom, it was adopted in the West by the medical establishment of several English-speaking nations in the nineteenth century, but recently in vogue only in the USA, which for a century has had a high rate of (non-therapeutic) routine male infant circumcision (RMIC).”

In summary, then, it is clear that even if routinely circumcising infants were morally acceptable, the circumcision procedure practiced today in American hospitals does not in any way resemble that of the sacrificial method Jesus experienced. The radical amputation of the entire organ through cutting, ripping, clamping, and necrotizing the flesh is not supported within any of the arguments put forth by proponents of routine infant circumcision. Catholics have not and still do not have justification to force a medically unnecessary circumcision onto their infant boys, and within the context of history and science, they should have no desire to do such a thing.

#### Related reading

[Catholics who circumcised, do not despair](#)

[Catholic hospital involved in unethical circumcision trial](#)

[Catholics thoughts on a whole body](#)

[Catholics and circumcision...do you know your faith](#)

[Catholics Against Circumcision](#)

[The Daily Catholic Crunch](#)

Posted by [Guggie Daly](#) at [2:04 PM](#)