

Presentation at the Presbyterians Pro-Life dinner, 215<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, May 25, 2003

## WHY ABORTION STILL HURTS

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*The following talk was adapted from Dr. Budziszewski's new book **What We Can't Not Know: A Guide**. You can read the Introduction to the book by jumping to < <http://click.topica.com/maaaWUmaaWTDJbbNZ4Ac/>> and scrolling down.*

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In the 1992 case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the Supreme Court wrote that "For two decades of economic and social developments, people have organized their intimate relationships and made choices that define their views of themselves and their places in society in reliance on the availability of abortion in the event that contraception should fail. ... An entire generation has come of age free to assume [this] concept of liberty."

To put the thought more simply, what we did has separated sex from responsibility for resulting life for so long that people are used to it. To change the rules on people now would be unfair.

That raises a question. If we are so used to abortion, why does it still hurt? Because it does still hurt, doesn't it? Joan Appleton, a former N.O.W. activist and head nurse at a Virginia abortion facility, reports that she used to ask herself why abortion "was such a psychological trauma for a woman, and such a difficult decision for a woman to make, if it was a natural thing to do. If it was so right, why was it so difficult?" She thought, "I counseled these women so well; they were so sure of their decision. Why are they coming back after me now -- months and years later -- psychological wrecks?"<sup>1</sup>

When I say abortion hurts, I don't mean that people who have abortions always have guilty feelings. Some don't. But consider this remark from a pro-abortion counselor, quoted by a pro-abortion journalist: "I am not confident even now, with abortion so widely used, that women feel it's OK to want an abortion without feeling guilty. They say, 'Am I some sort of monster that I feel all right about this?'"<sup>2</sup> I don't think either the counselor or

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Mary Meehan, "The Ex-Abortionists: Why They Quit," *Human Life Review* 26:2-3 (Spring-Summer 2000), pp. 12.

<sup>2</sup>Nicci Gerrard, with Kim Bunce and Kirsty Buttfeld, "Damned If You Do ...", *The Observer* (22 April 2001), webbed at < <http://www.observer.co.uk/review/story/0,6903,476313,00.html>> .

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the journalist saw the point, but you do, don't you? Plainly, if a woman has guilty feelings for *not* having guilty feelings, she must have guilty knowledge.

When I say abortion hurts, another thing I don't mean is that people who have abortions are always sorry. Some aren't. But consider this story from a crisis pregnancy counselor with whom I spoke. Her client had aborted her first child to punish her husband for sleeping with another woman. Later the woman aborted her second child too -- but this time to punish herself. As she explained to her counselor, "I wanted to be able to hate myself more for what I did to the first baby." You see, she was trying to atone without repenting. The one thing that could make her self-loathing greater yet was to increase her guilt; the one thing that could increase her guilt was to repeat the abortion. So she did it.

That puts a different spin on the words of the prophet Micah, doesn't it? He asks, "With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"<sup>3</sup> That's what she offered -- the fruit of her body for the sin of her soul.

The problem is that none of these things can pay the price. We do know what the price is. The Psalms explain that. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."<sup>4</sup> The problem is that guilty knowledge will not be placated with substitutes. If you won't break your heart, you may go on paying pain after pain, price after price, because you refuse to pay the one price demanded.

Speaking of paying pain after pain, price after price, do you know, for example, what really happened with RU486? It was once expected that release of the "abortion pill," RU486, or mifepristone/misoprestol, would generate a vast increase in the number of abortions because it is so much easier to swallow a pill than to undergo a surgical procedure. The facts are much different; it isn't easier. RU486 can cause severe bleeding, cramping, and nausea, the expulsion of the embryo may take several days, and the woman may be able to recognize the remains of her child in the toilet or collection bucket. The dread of it all is that for some women these burdens are just what makes RU486 attractive. They welcome the suffering; they regard it as a price they ought to pay. A study of the U.S. clinical trials of the drug describes one such case as follows. "Pauli's experience with mifepristone/misoprestol dragged on for weeks; she bled heavily on and off, and eventually had to have an aspiration. She saw her prolonged experience as a sort of penance she was

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<sup>3</sup>Micah 6:6-7 (NIV).

<sup>4</sup>Psalm 51:17 (NIV). Compare Micah 6:8 (NIV): "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

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paying for the act of abortion."<sup>5</sup> The medical director at one of the locations conducting the trials made the same observation. "There were a couple of cases of women who had a feeling that in a way they were sort of accepting their punishment for being pregnant because they would bleed more, they would have more pain." An LPN amended "a couple" to "a lot": She said, "A lot of that *mea culpa* stuff was, like, 'I am guilty. I am suffering. I am having more cramps. I am having more bleeding. I'm having more time to suffer over my choice in choosing this miscarriage rather than having an abortion.' A lot of women seemed to get real involved emotionally with that."<sup>6</sup> You'll notice, by the way, that the LPN couldn't face the truth either. Despite her medical training, she tried to tell herself that RU486 was "choosing a miscarriage" rather than "having an abortion."

I began by asking the question: If we are so used to abortion, why does it still hurt? The answer is that being used to it doesn't make it stop being wrong. Conscience runs deeper than habit, and deeper than ideology.

Let me explain why this is so. As St. Paul said, there is a law written on the heart; there are certain things that we can't not know. One of the things that we can't not know is that it is wrong to deliberately take innocent human life. If we want to parse that sentence, we find only six possibilities of rationalization. All six of them have been tried, but what do they do to us?

1. It's wrong to *deliberately* take innocent human life. But this isn't deliberate! I didn't mean for it to happen; I wasn't trying to get pregnant.

The reasoning here is that if something happens that I don't want, then no matter what I do about it *afterward*, I am not responsible. Thinking like this destroys the very idea of personal responsibility, and therewith any possibility of leading a holy life. It is a formula for personal chaos.

2. It's wrong to deliberately *take* innocent human life. But I'm not taking life, the doctors are doing it! This is just something happening to me. I'm not involved.

This time the reasoning is that once I have made a decision, the results are out of my hands -- even if they I planned and intended them. To think this way I must almost say "I am not me." But I *am* myself, whether I like it or not; there is no one else for anyone to be.

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<sup>5</sup>Wendy Simonds, Charlotte Ellertson, Kimberly Springer, and Beverley Winikoff, "Abortion, Revised: Participants in the U.S. Clinical Trials Evaluate Mifepristone," *Social Science and Medicine* 46:10 (1998), p. 1319.

<sup>6</sup>Simonds et. al., 1320-1321.

3. It's wrong to deliberately take *innocent* human life. But the fetus isn't innocent! It's an aggressive trespasser in my womb, and it *made* me pregnant.

Although it is hard to imagine an actual woman taking this view, some abortion proponents consider it quite promising, perhaps because judges will believe things that most women will not. Eileen McDonagh writes, "the fetus is not innocent but instead aggressively intrudes on a woman's body so massively that deadly force is justified to stop it." She complains that the baby "makes her pregnant without her consent." She even compares the baby to a rapist, saying "Some might suggest that the solution ... is ... to wait until the fetus is born .... [but] this type of reasoning is akin to suggesting that a woman being raped should wait until the rape is over rather than stopping the rapist." The basis of this third rationalization is hatred of human nature -- especially of female nature. The sole purpose of the woman's uterus is to home and house the baby, who has noplacel else to go. It's hard to see how he can be a trespasser in his own home.<sup>7</sup>

4. It's wrong to deliberately take innocent *human* life. But this thing isn't human! It can't feel, it can't communicate, it can't make plans -- and how could it be human if it's so small?

Among pro-abortion philosophers, this rationalization is by far the most popular. The reasoning is that human personhood, *who-ness*, depends on criteria like sensitivity, self-awareness, ability to communicate, and ability to form purposes and carry them out. The unborn baby doesn't have all those abilities, so he is just a *what*. Of course toddlers lack some of those abilities too. Are they not persons? For that matter, so do teenagers. Are they not persons? *You* may have all of those abilities, but if someone else has them to a higher degree than you do, then by this reasoning he is more of a person than you are, and if he wants to kill you, you haven't any right to complain.

5. It's wrong to deliberately take innocent human *life*. But the fetus isn't alive! It's more like a blood clot. Or like my period just won't come down.

Such a thing would have been easier to believe before the discovery of the nature of conception. It takes a ferocious act of denial to go on believing it in the age of ultrasound. Blood clots don't roll over, kick, and suck their thumbs.

6. It's *wrong* to deliberately take innocent human life. *But sometimes you have to do what's wrong!*

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<sup>7</sup>Eileen L. McDonagh, *Breaking the Abortion Deadlock: From Choice to Consent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 7, 11-12, 192.

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This is the most disturbing rationalization of all: "Let us do evil that good may result."<sup>8</sup> Some men and women involved in an abortion promise themselves to repent later. Unfortunately, to promise repentance *later* is to harden the heart *now*, and injure the very capacity to repent. Others involved in an abortion promise themselves to "make up for it." But suffering and good works are not a *fee* that makes the deed all right. You can certainly pay a price. You may pay many prices. But it does not pay the price. Our hearts know this. How many of those who say that they'll "make up for it" go on to find other punishments for themselves?

In the early days of abortion it used to be said that although abortion is a very sad thing, it ought to be permitted out of compassion for the mother. I hope we know better now. We are all made to have compassion for each other, but a mother is made to have compassion for her child. She cannot help herself by hurting him, and you cannot help her by encouraging her to do so. If she hurts her child, she also hurts herself.

That's why, even after thirty years of getting used to it, abortion still hurts. It would hurt after a hundred years. It would hurt after a thousand. There is nothing we can do to blot out conscience.

We hear a lot these days about the prayer of Jabez. I think we should be praying the prayer of Daniel:

"O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws .... Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary .... O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."<sup>9</sup>

May He incline His ear to our call.

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<sup>8</sup>Paul condemns it: "And why not do evil that good may come? -- as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just." Romans 3:8 (NIV).

<sup>9</sup>Daniel 9:4-5, 17, 19 (NIV).