

The Right to Choose and Abortion. Is it really a choice?

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The influence of the right to choose.

Although many are against abortion these days and agree that it is the destruction of human life, many more believe that this life is subordinate to the right of choice. Choice is a stronghold that monopolizes the abortion debate. We see here the immensity of the impact of the monumental case that legalized abortion in the United States, *Roe v. a* case that undoubtedly still weighs on the conscience of many Americans. Jane Roe sued because of an infringement of her right to privacy. She asked for the readily available access to choose a safe and legal abortion without the interference of the state or anyone else. In the end the “justices pulled a ‘right to abortion’ out of a vague ‘right of privacy’ from the Bill of Rights.”¹ But is it safe to conclude that the majority of the impact has come from this and other abortion cases? Isn’t perhaps the American culture and now other western cultures, hyper influenced by a warped sense of freedom and the right to choose? Isn’t this more likely what has brought us to the threshold of legalized genocide?

Dr. Vincent M. Rue, Director of the Institute for Pregnancy Loss in Jacksonville, Florida, and a veteran psychotherapist that has served on the faculty of California State University at Los Angeles,² states that the U.S. culture’s fascination with choice has been a strong factor that has allowed for the constant support for legal procured abortion. He finds that “abortion exists within the U.S. culture sympathetic to new rules and new expectations concerning personal freedom and so called “reproductive rights”.³ He believes that the cultural context of abortion in the U.S. is predicted by some fundamental changes relating to a culture that focuses on the value of freedom rather than the value of direction, the permanent desire to self-actualization and the psychological transformation of desires to needs.⁴ The U.S. is a nation that places a great deal of emphasis on independence, freedom and self-actualization. All these factors lend to the importance of choice and privacy. This in turn has lead to the idealization of choice as a supreme value above and beyond many convictions and moral values that once were non-negotiable. Consequently, procured abortion finds itself within a cultural context that helps to support and sustain it.

Yet, the primacy of choice in the American culture has also influenced many in the predominantly pro-life Christian sector. Jean Garton, author and lecturer for Life Concerns in Lutheran Church, points out that “unfortunately, like abortion, the official views of Church bodies (Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran) have been seen as a matter of ‘choice’ by their members.”⁵ In her article on “The Cultural Impact of Abortion” she states that abortion has been one of the major influences in diminishing loyalty and faithfulness of members to their different faith followings.⁶ It is urgent to note that abortion crosses all borders, religious, cultural and

1 D.C. REARDON, *Making Abortion Rare*, Springfield 1996, pg. 37.

2 www.menandabortion.info/1-resource4.html

3 V.M. RUE, *The Psychological Realities of Induced Abortion*, in *Post Abortion Aftermath*, Kansas City 1994, pg. 6.

4 *Ibid.*

5 J. GARTON, *The Cultural Impact of Abortion and It's Implications for a Future Society (Part One)*, in *Post Abortion Aftermath*, Kansas City 1994, pg. 96.

6 *Ibid.*

economical. Being that so many people find themselves personally affected by abortion in some way, more people are submitting to tolerance so that they may not judge or be judged themselves. Therefore more people are found supporting the right to choose over being loyal to their own religious beliefs.

David C. Reardon, the [American](#) director of the Elliot Institute and an advocate in favor of legislating strict barriers to abortion, confirms this unwavering support for the right to choose. He states that although 80% of Americans believe that abortion destroys a life, many still believe that it should remain legal. Furthermore, many women continue to view abortion as an alternative to unwanted or unplanned pregnancies. Although 70% of women who abort believe that what they are doing is morally wrong, they still abort.⁷ In addition, up to 30% of aborting women are Catholic.⁸ This evidence provides us with a clearer picture. Despite such efforts as that of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishop's pro-life movement, choice continues to prevail. Abortion is a "necessary evil." The matter of choice has precedence over the matter of respect for life. Consequently, procured abortion remains one of the most common surgical procedures now performed upon request.

Is it really a choice?

If the so called abortion choice calls for the sacrifice of values and beliefs, in the end, is it really a choice? Theresa Burke, the author of "Forbidden Grief" and a psychotherapist who specializes in treating women who struggle with post-abortion issues, writes about the link of abortion to choice. She states that the choice of a woman should be based upon an ideal situation of one who is "fully informed, emancipated and emotionally stable."⁹ Here Burke associates choice with freedom but at the same time connects choice with the benefit of being well informed and emotionally capable of choosing. Based upon Burke's argument and the reality of how women come to make the choice of abortion, which we will look at next, many women are not making choices based on freedom. In reality, Burke writes: "while many women believe they need an abortion, very few, if any, want an abortion... abortion is a tragic attempt to escape a desperate situation... [It] is not a sign that women are free, but a sign that they are desperate."¹⁰

Very few women casually come to the decision of abortion just for the sake of abortion. Most women find themselves in crisis situations of overwhelming fear, pressure and confusion. Women are actually making misinformed and misguided choices. Furthermore, Burke continues, "many women are not truly emancipated; many are emotionally dependent on or easily influenced by parents, boyfriends, husbands, counselors, employers or others who may want them to choose abortion far more than they want to choose it for themselves."¹¹ Burke finds in her studies that 60% to 80% of women would actually have preferred to give birth if only their circumstances had been better.¹² This is indicative that abortion is more often decided under unsuitable circumstances. Reardon also supports this by pointing out that pro-choice rhetoric empha-

7 D.C. REARDON, *Making Abortion Rare*, ix.

8 V. Thom, Project Rachel: Faith in Action, A Ministry of Compassion and Caring, in *Post-Abortion Aftermath*, Kansas City, pg. 163.

9 T. BURKE, *Forbidden Grief, The Unspoken Pain of Abortion*, Springfield, IL, 2002, pg. 224.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*, pg. 116

12 *Ibid.*

sizes the “freedom of choice” but in fact the proof lies in the contrary; “most aborting women feel they have no choice.”¹³ So let us see how and why many women come to the decision of abortion.

Decision making flaws.

Burke examines the “flawed decision making” process of many women through the findings of Uta Landy. Landy is an abortion counselor and former executive director of the National Abortion Federation.¹⁴ It is interesting to look here at the perspective of someone who works in the abortion industry. As a counselor in an abortion clinic, Landy constantly dealt with women in the decision making process. Yet, although Landy verifies these flaws through her own personal experience, she still does not favor abortion providers to refuse abortion on account of such findings. This clearly pro-choice testimony may help to shed light on how abortion is a decision made in conflict and not in freedom.

“Uta Landy defines four types of defective decision-making styles that she has observed in abortion clinics. She labels and defines them as follows: ‘spontaneous approach’, wherein the decision is made too quickly; ‘rational-analytical’ which focuses on the practical reasons to terminate the pregnancy such as financial problems or single parenthood; ‘denying-procrastinating’ approach, which is typical of women who have delayed making a decision precisely because they have conflicting desires to keep their babies; and finally there is the ‘no decision making’ approach which is the woman who refuses to make her own decision but allows others such as a male partner, parents, counselor, or physician to make her decision.”¹⁵

Burke develops her own additional list of influences. She looks at the deeper issues that may derive from a woman’s past or present relationships. Among her finds she lists: coercion, negative attitudes about motherhood or about own mother, communication errors within the couple, prior emotional conflicts, medically indicated abortion and finally the small minority that abort because they simply do not want the baby.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the final reason is in the minority. Most people believe that women choose abortion when they do not want a child. “While women often hope that having an abortion will help them to achieve other goals (such as career, studies, relationships or financial stability), there is no research that shows that it generally does.”¹⁷ Other more pro-choice findings indicate these additional factors: “absence of the father, financial constraints, inability to provide good parenting, conflict with prevailing social norms, health concerns and lack of social support.”¹⁸ All these findings can show us how women are under pressure when deciding to abort.

Does choice prevail?

We have been able to see briefly how the abortion dispute, typically divided into pro-life and pro-choice, is so influenced by the rhetoric of choice. The pro-life movement still has made enormous progress in dispersing information on the respect for human life in the womb to Christians and non-believers alike. Yet, the

13 D.C. REARDON, *Making Abortion Rare*, ix.

14 T. BURKE, citing Uta Landy in *Forbidden Grief*, pg. 226

15 *Ibid.* pg. 227

16 *Ibid.*, pg. 240

17 *Ibid.*

18 A. FAÚNDES & J. BARZELATTO, *The Human Drama of Abortion*, Nashville, 2006, pg. 54-59.

rapid secularization of the U.S. society and other western cultures coupled together with the reigning culture of freedom of choice have moreover infiltrated the moral conscience of many. Therefore the constant mainstream support of procured abortion has continued throughout the years and continues to grow as a multi-billion dollar industry. Yet, the evidence shows that many women are making hasty and desperate decisions. Many are facing unplanned and unwanted pregnancies in crisis, going against their own conscience and values. Now we come upon another question: what can be concretely done to shift the weight away from choice?

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) read the signs of the times long ago when legalized abortion had just reared its ugly head. They saw the impact of legalized abortion upon U.S. society. "Respect for human life has been gradually declining in our society during the past few decades. To some degree this reflects the secularizing trend and a rejection of moral imperatives based on belief in God and His plan for creation. It also reflects a tendency for individuals to give primary attention to what is personally rewarding and satisfying to them, to the exclusion of responsible concern for the well-being of other persons and society."¹⁹ Their plan was launched in hopes of educating the general public and instilling conviction and commitment in all faithful. They called for the belief in the sanctity of life reflected in the Gospel truths. But we see that Americans still support abortion even though they do believe that abortion is the taking of a human life. What else can be done to help Americans and other societies choose with their conscience rather than against it?

Healing and reconciliation.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the USCCB's program was that of healing and reconciliation. Since the onset of this plan there have been many healing and reconciliation programs put into place by the Church. Such programs as Project Rachel and Rachel's Vineyard have brought hundreds and even thousands of women and men back to the folds of the Church and her Sacraments. These programs deal with another side of abortion that is usually left in the dark realms of what remains taboo: the silent suffering of those men and women that "freely chose" to abort their child/children.

There is certain despondency that women and men who have aborted their children always carry. Because this hopelessness and suffering is not openly discussed in public forums and political debates it is all the more suffered in guilt and shame. Society makes abortion a right but later turns a blind eye to any consequences that those who have aborted their children may suffer. Choice and independence does not allow for public regret or complaint. American society and more and more other cultures do not tolerate self-made victims. This is where these aforementioned healing and reconciliation programs have successfully brought forth a wellspring of new life within the Church. This healing is a resurrection of sorts; a death and resurrection of a person who has been convinced that freedom is lived without boundaries, even the boundaries that protect human life. "The once unforgivable sin now becomes an offering to God. "Because they [the men and women] believe they have committed the unforgivable sin, their encounter with God's love and mercy is monumental. These people undergo a conversion experience unlike anything else...they come to a profound sense of the power of the sacraments."²⁰

¹⁹ US CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS, Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life (1975), 1.

²⁰ V. THORN, Project Rachel: Faith in Action, pg. 163.

The mission of the whole church.

Another major key lies in the mission of the whole Church to bring healing and reconciliation to those who have aborted. The USCCB stressed the mission of the Church by stating her call to be “both means and an agent of reconciliation; calling individual faithful to a role and “duty of promoting reconciliation.”²¹ Therefore this call enveloped the whole praying community. It is the same call issued in the words of Pope John Paul II in *Reconciliation et Paenitentia* when he wrote “the message of reconciliation has also been entrusted to the whole community of believers, to the whole fabric of the Church, that is to say, the task of doing everything possible to witness to reconciliation and to bring it about in the world.”²²

Yet the Church herself is not exempt from this division that evil brings about, particularly the evil of abortion. Within our own Catholic Church the faithful are divided on just this issue. As aforementioned up to 30% of women who abort, if not more, are Catholic. This only more clearly reveals that the mission of the Church is sometimes a daunting task in the face of the ongoing battle against abortion. She has to not only fight the battle outside her boundaries and within society, but she must also be an instrument of healing to repair division that exists within her own boundaries.

Whether staunchly Catholic or not, we can see that when faced with an abortion decision, many people set aside their convictions in an act of despair. The late Pope John Paul II wrote “too often it happens that believers, even those who take an active part in the life of the Church, end up by separating their Christian faith from its ethical requirements concerning life, and thus fall into subjectivism and certain objectionable ways of acting.”²³ Choosing against conviction in many ways is choosing against oneself. This leads to moral ambiguity and moral ambiguity obviously leads to a resignation of religious beliefs in the long run. The loss of religious beliefs can lead to a life of immoral choices and continual separation from God. The vicious cycle continues until healing and reconciliation are sought out within the confines of the Church whose Sacraments bring forth new life in Christ.

If evangelization is the mission of the Church proper and the means by which the Church delivers the message of Christ the person, should it not set out to evangelize in these very areas where healing is most needed and where more and more believers leave the folds of the Church out of guilt of sin and ignorance of the truth? Although the message remains the same, because Christ is “the same today, yesterday and forever” (Hebrews 13:8) the means in which this message is extended to modern man should be adapted according to the time. The message of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection must become the very hope of those who live the passion of abortion, die to themselves and to God and are in search of resurrecting in Him.

To evangelize in a new way (the new evangelization) is not about becoming more complex in approach but moreover it is about being simple. People are searching for a truthful and direct approach. People are surprised by sincerity and simplicity because it is wanting in today’s society. A simple and bold witness through actions and life are needed in all parts of society but perhaps the one that affects the most is that which involves abortion. Perhaps we must realize that if men and women are willing to give up their convictions, their beliefs, their morals and their very emotional well being in order to bring about something they know

21 US CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS, *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life* (1975), 1.

22 JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 1984, 8.

23 JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 95.

goes against their very nature as women and as a parent, there is even a deeper problem that we are not addressing.

An integral pedagogy.

Education on sanctity of life is not enough. There must be an education of the whole person, of what it means to be a man and a woman. There indeed needs to be an integral pedagogy of what it means to be human, to love and love within the boundaries of responsibility for self and for others. Indeed there are such grassroots programs that have begun that task. One program in particular has gradually gained success in various U.S. Diocese and is growing in strength and in mission. The program is called Generation Life.

Generation Life is a movement of young people committed to building a Culture of Life through youth educating youth on the pro-life and chastity messages and developing new leaders for the pro-life movement. By spreading the message of chastity at this young age there is a greater chance of stopping abortion at its root cause. It reaches over 25,000 students each year. This program offers educational programs for 7th – 12th grade students and college students in various diocese throughout the U.S.²⁴ As John Paul II pointed out in *Evangelium Vitae*: the formation of conscience is the work of education, which helps individuals to be ever more human, leads them ever more fully to the truth, instills in them growing respect for life, and trains them in right interpersonal relationships.²⁵ If we attack abortion at its root cause, the lack of education on what it means to be human, what it means to be a man and woman created by a loving God, then we are more likely to see abortion come closer to its last days.

Generation Life is also very unique in that it targets youth and educates them in the vital elements of what it means to be human and the value of human life both with and without touching the topic of faith. This is unique and necessary in that it allows young people to discover the sacredness of life and sexuality that may in turn lead them to God where as otherwise they would not have had the chance to discover God or faith within the confines of secularized society. Generation Life and other programs like it are educating the future generations that will lead their country and culture. By reaching young people and giving them the information they do not have access to in every day culture they are able to establish new areas of communication within the youth sub-culture a sub-culture that inevitably influences and dominates so much of today's mainstream culture.

Conclusion in brief.

In summation, by reaching out to those who are in need of healing and reconciliation, by asking the faithful to take on the mission of the church and “promote reconciliation” in their every day lives and finally by educating future generations in what it means to be human and the sanctity of human life, we will ultimately make leaps and bounds towards the end of abortion. It is certain that choice and freedom are terms that have lost their true meaning. The reigning prevalence of this so called “right to choose” must be exposed for what it really is and is not: it is a desperate act and certainly is not a choice by any means. The real right to choose is ours, in the freedom as children of God, we have the right to choose to be a part of this mission

²⁴ www.generationlife.org/mission/

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* 1995, 97.

and calling of the Church. We must choose to end this legalized genocide that continuously kills millions of children every day. We must choose to be a part of this mission and we must choose now.