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FEATURE ARTICLE

THEIR HISTORY AND ROLE IN THE PRO-LIFE MOVEMENT

Graphic Images: An Apologia

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The Nazi Holocaust ended nearly seventy years ago. Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence of the systematic extermination of European Jews, there are those who deny that these atrocities actually occurred. Much, if not all, of such denial is motivated by a politically or philosophically based anti-Semitism. In other words, refusal to acknowledge the Third Reich's Final Solution is fueled by an ideology of hate, fear, and distrust of the Jews. One of the most persuasive rebuttals to Holocaust denial is the photographic record of its victims. This record, both

still photos and film, was used to great effect by the prosecutors during the Nuremberg trials. Consider this quote from the website of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum:

In addition to official photography and films produced at the behest of the Nazi state, German soldiers and police took numerous photographs and film footage of German operations against Jews and other civilians. They documented the public humiliation of Jews, their deportation, mass murder, and confinement in concentration camps. This became powerful visual evidence of Nazi war crimes submitted at Nuremberg.

Further visual documentation came from the U.S. Army Signal Corps, which, in the course of photographing and filming American operations in World War II, also played a crucial role in documenting evidence of Nazi atrocities and the Holocaust....

On November 29, 1945, the IMT prosecution introduced an hour-long film titled "The Nazi Concentration Camps." When the lights came up in the Palace of Justice all assembled sat in silence. The human impact of this visual evidence was a turning point in the Nuremberg trial. It brought the Holocaust into the courtroom.

U.S. chief prosecutor Robert Jackson believed that "unless record was made... future generations would not believe how horrible the truth was."

January 22, 2013, marked the fortieth anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision, which has resulted in over fifty-four million legal abortions. Not unlike those who deny the Holocaust, the vast majority of Americans remain oblivious to the grim nature of abortion. Indeed, there is a concerted effort among those who advocate legal abortion, as well as those who simply do not wish to be

bothered about the issue, to deny that any real human victims perish when abortions are performed. Notice, for example, how the mainstream media essentially ignored the trial of Kermit Gosnell, convicted this May of murdering second- and third-trimester babies born alive from his botched abortion procedures.

In the Nuremberg trials, thousands of documents were retrieved and cataloged as evidence used to convict the Nazi collaborators — but it was the photographic evidence of concentration-camp atrocities that moved the court to “silence.” Why? Because nothing more needed to be said. Similarly, photography of the victims of abortion is the prime evidence that unborn humanity is the target of legalized violence.

A Controversial Subject

The use of graphic images in pro-life work has been, and remains, a controversial subject, even within the pro-life movement. Their effectiveness in combating abortion is hotly debated. One need look no further than an article by Simcha Fisher, “Eight Reasons Not to Use Graphic Abortion Images at the March for Life,” posted at the website of the *National Catholic Register* (Jan. 22). Not only does Fisher oppose the display of such images at the annual March, she argues that “a public place is not the place to use these images — ever.” Her post received over three hundred responses and was much discussed by activists at the March for Life itself.

Fisher articulated a decades-old point of view within the movement that the display of images of mangled, dismembered fetuses is counterproductive. Indeed, opposition to the use of these images recently came to a head when organizers of the 2013 West Coast Walk for Life (WFL) attempted to prevent a display of graphic images by pro-life group Created Equal. WFL asked the city of San Francisco to deny the group a permit, causing city officials to conclude that the signs would “lead to riotous and/or retaliatory acts that may endanger all participants.” The city finally granted Created Equal a permit after a pro-life legal defense group advocated their free-speech rights. During the event itself, however, at least one WFL official tried to hide the images of aborted babies with bed sheets. Mark Harrington, director of Created Equal, in a letter to WFL, stated that such “efforts put you in the unflattering company of radical pro-abortion advocates who routinely attempt to cover up abortion on college campuses by using the same tactic.”

Created Equal also applied for a street permit from the Washington, D.C., park service in anticipation of the 2014 March for Life, only to discover that March organizers had already reserved the space usually used by the activist group in a pre-emptive strike against the displaying of images of aborted babies. It is unclear how the organizers intend to use the space.

What is clear is that such aggressive opposition is founded on a concern for children, post-abortive women, and for how the public views the pro-life movement. The WFL website explains its perspective:

The families who come to this event have come to expect that it will be an event that will respect the innocence of their children, giving all ages a chance to show the world what pro-life looks like.

Additionally, each year we have invited post-abortive women to attend and give their testimony. This requires courage from these women. Many of them cannot see these graphic images without breaking down — the emotional toll is too great.

A Short History of the Use of Graphic Images in Pro-Life Work

By the mid-1960s the legalization of abortion in America was well underway. Early pro-life educational efforts focused on showing photos of fetal development, often having recourse to the famous Lennart Nilsson photos first published in *Life* magazine (April 30, 1965). Disturbing images of mangled, dismembered aborted babies were also a standard feature of early pro-life educational materials, particularly the ubiquitous “Willke Slides,” a boxed set of photos loaded into a now-antiquated carousel slide projector. Developed by Dr. Jack Willke, past president of the National Right to Life Committee, and his late wife, Barbara, these slides were used often in Catholic parishes to educate churchgoers on the need to reverse *Roe v. Wade*. Equipped with these slides, a pro-lifer could instantly set up an educational event almost anywhere.

Willke’s *Handbook on Abortion* (1971) could be described as the pro-lifer’s bible — virtually all serious pro-lifers in the 1970s and 1980s owned a copy and relied on its facts, data, and arguments. The *Handbook* contained graphic images of aborted babies, one of which was the commonly distributed black-and-white photo of late-term aborted babies who were killed at a Canadian hospital and found in a trash bag. At the back of the *Handbook* other pro-life literature was prominently promoted that featured extremely graphic images of abortion victims. These brochures were some of the most widely distributed materials used to awaken a sleeping public to the injustice of legalized abortion. Included was the “Life or Death” brochure, whose front cover showed an unborn child killed by the saline-abortion method. A later edition of the *Handbook* stated that this graphic literature was instrumental in Michigan’s 1972 pro-life referendum that succeeded in fending off the legalization of abortion in that state.

One of the most important books ever published on abortion is Dennis Horan and Thomas Hilgers’s *Abortion and Social Justice* (1972), an anthology with chapters focused on the medical, legal, and social aspects of abortion. This early pro-life volume included not only black-and-white photos of fetal development but very graphic color photos of abortion victims.

In the early days of the pro-life movement, nearly every major group, such as Human Life International, the National Right to Life Committee, and American Life League, made use of graphic images. But educational efforts wouldn’t be limited to still images: One of the first pro-life films to be produced was the hour-long 1983 video *Assignment: Life*, in which an actress playing a female journalist interviews Edward Allred, the real-life owner of abortion clinics all over the U.S. Allred allows the reporter into the procedure room of his California clinic, where she stands by while her camera crew films Allred performing a late-term abortion on a five-month-old unborn child. After the abortion is over, the camera focuses on the dead, limp, red, and shocking corpse of the murder victim.

In 1984 ex-abortionist Bernard Nathanson, with help from the National Right to Life Committee, produced arguably the most well-known pro-life movie, *The Silent Scream*. Nathanson guides the viewer through an abortion captured by ultrasound technology, and the viewer sees a twelve-week-old unborn baby who, sensing danger, moves away from the abortion instruments, only to be dismembered by the force of the suction canula.

Three years later, Nathanson narrated another film called *Eclipse of Reason*, which features an introduction by actor Charlton Heston. This movie pulled no punches with its very graphic footage of a late-term dilation-and-evacuation (D&E) abortion, even showing the baby’s body parts being removed from his mother’s womb.

Graphic images in pro-life films reached an apex in 1991 with the short but very graphic video called *The Hard Truth*, produced by Gregg Cunningham of the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform. Only seven minutes in length, with imagery accompanied only by the haunting music vocal “Malediction,” *The Hard Truth*

juxtaposed film footage of police brutality against pro-lifers blocking clinic doors with the torn, mangled bodies of aborted children.

In the early days of the movement, pro-lifers depended on scarce medical photos of abortion-victims or the few photos taken by sympathetic pathologists who actually had access to the bodies. Then, in the early 1980s, after ten years of legalized abortion and tens of millions of abortions performed, pro-life activists themselves gained greater access to the bodies of aborted babies. Let's just say there were more of them to be found.

Many "body finds" were simply the result of discovering the remains of aborted babies in trash dumpsters behind the very clinics where they had been killed. Sometimes, the bodies were smuggled out of pathology labs and turned over to pro-lifers. Now activists themselves were doing abortion-victim photography—however amateurish—and were highly motivated to show the world the truth about abortion. These photos, blown up into giant posters, became a common element of public pro-life demonstrations. With the increased intensity of pro-life activism, some pro-lifers during the 1980s and 1990s dedicated themselves to doing nothing but producing these posters and making them available to the movement—and they prided themselves on perfecting the production methods and the quality of the images. One such supplier was Wisconsin's Chet Kilgore who, while living in a trailer, managed to mass produce thousands of posters of graphic images from negatives supplied to him by pro-life activists.

In 1982 a major abortion-related scandal erupted when the bodies of over 16,000 aborted babies were discovered in a semi-trailer rented by Los Angeles pathologist Malvin Weisberg and parked in the back yard of his upscale Woodland Hills home. The abortion victims, many between twenty and thirty weeks' gestation, had been shipped to Weisberg from abortionists all over the U.S. This body find was the occasion of some of the most disturbing abortion-victim photography ever shot when pro-life activist Albin Rhomberg, equipped with a 35-millimeter camera, gained entry to the L.A. County coroner's office. His shocking photos were published in a widely distributed mini-newspaper with the headline "American Holocaust." Rhomberg's photos were some of the first to expose the horror of late-term abortions.

One of the photos often used by pro-life activists is that of a baby called Malachi, who was aborted at twenty-one weeks' gestation. The baby's badly mangled body lies horizontally in the photo, his head and legs severed from his torso. The website of Operation Save America (OSA), a Texas-based pro-life group headed by Flip Benham, tells the story of the 1993 discovery of Malachi, whose remains shared a plastic container with three other aborted babies. The bodies were "discovered" in a Dallas abortion clinic by OSA members. Without explaining how or why they gained access to the abortion center, an OSA brochure describes the experience:

There were jars upon jars of frozen children in that abortion mill. Rhonda Mackey, our executive secretary at the time, brought this one jar out and asked me what we should do with it. I had no idea, but I instinctively knew we could not leave it there. We brought the jar to Dr. McCarty, a wonderful Ob-Gyn in Dallas, who put the pieces of this baby and the others back together.

The entire process was put on video as Dr. McCarty and all who were present wept at the reconstruction of these precious children. The life that was once there was now gone forever. It became apparent to all of us that God had given us these children, one in particular, to show to the entire world the horror of abortion. One picture can speak louder than a truckload of words.

We prayed, and asked God to allow this little boy to speak to our

nation. We remembered the scripture in Hebrews 11:4: “...*he still speaks, even though he is dead.*”... Malachi means “my messenger.”

In 1987 Citizens for a Pro-Life Society and the Pro-Life Action League teamed up and retrieved the remains of aborted babies from a trash dumpster behind the Michigan Avenue Medical Center in Chicago and again in 1988 from the loading dock of the Vital Med pathology lab in Northbrook, Illinois. Altogether nearly six thousand abortion victims were recovered and photographed. Human Life International (HLI) enlarged some of those images to poster-size and made them available to activists all over the country. One photo I took features the face of a black unborn baby killed by D&E at twenty-one weeks’ gestation. HLI made a poster of this victim, emblazoned with the caption “Civil Rights?”

Certain pro-life groups, such as the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform (CBR) and Created Equal, are completely focused on the public display of graphic images. CBR has staged what it calls the Genocide Awareness Project on hundreds of college campuses all over the U.S., in which it erects a display of large photos depicting victims of the Nazi Holocaust, the lynching of blacks, and graphic images of aborted babies. The intent is to stimulate discussion of the injustice of abortion.

It is important to recognize that nearly every major pro-life organization, from the start of the movement, has made use of abortion-victim photos — and that their use in the early years was not debated. Rather, it was taken for granted that such images were an essential aspect of anti-abortion educational efforts.

The Ethics of Abortion-Victim Photography

Abortion-victim photography should be guided by certain ethical principles. It matters how the subjects are obtained, and it matters how the subjects are presented by the photographer. In obtaining photos of abortion victims, the pro-lifer must not be complicit in the actual abortions in any way. If an abortionist videotapes an abortion or takes photos of the fetal remains and *later* makes these images available to pro-lifers, they can be used. If an abortionist or clinic employee gives the bodies to pro-lifers after the abortions are completed, they can be taken. It could even be argued that pro-lifers can “pay a ransom” for babies’ bodies after they have been killed. However, for a pro-lifer to negotiate with an abortionist, or pay an abortionist to videotape or photograph the abortion procedures and fetal remains or to obtain such bodies or images, would be immoral. This is complicity in the unjust killing of an innocent human being — indeed the exploitation of the death of the innocent. One may not exploit the death of the innocent, directly take advantage of such murder, or supply additional motivation to the murderer in the way of payment for the sake of using the images to draw attention to the injustice and bring it to an end.

Making a formal agreement with an abortionist to film his murders involves the pro-lifer in those murderous acts. In a sense, he and the abortionist are “acting together” in the death of the baby. It doesn’t matter that the killings were going to happen anyway — the issue here is the personal moral integrity of the pro-lifer *vis-à-vis* those killings. The problem is not that the abortions are filmed, or that the fetal remains are turned over to the pro-lifer — the problem is that, by *making an agreement* with the abortionist, the pro-lifer has directly involved himself in the abortionist’s intent to kill, to do evil, even though the pro-lifer seeks to bring good out of evil. As such, one may fault the movie *Assignment: Life* for its complicity with Allred, when its crew simply stood by and filmed his killing of the second-trimester unborn baby.

The Ethics of Shooting the Photos

Photos of abortion victims should never be doctored or “photoshopped” to depict

something other than the truth of what happened to the aborted child. The photographer should not artificially twist the figure or add more blood to the image in order to make the photo more disturbing. Abortion advocates often accuse pro-lifers of such deception. With my own thirty-five years of front-line activist leadership, and as one who has actually taken photos of aborted babies, I can safely state that such deliberate deception is rare in the pro-life movement — if it even exists at all. The sad fact is that there is no need to manipulate the subjects. The trauma of the abortion procedure written into the bodies of the unborn is innately obvious, disturbing, and graphic.

It is, however, perfectly legitimate and helpful to reconstruct the body, as was done in the Malachi photo, to provide as close as possible a full-body image of the baby who was aborted. Yet even the authenticity of Malachi was challenged by *New York Times* reporter Damien Cave in an article featured on the *Times's* photography website, www.Lensblog.com (Oct. 10, 2010). Cave's article was one of the very few since 1973 that focused on and actually featured images of aborted babies — even mounting a gallery of such images taken by this author. In fact, it may be the only article appearing in mainstream media to have done so!

Cave nonetheless tried to cast doubt about the Malachi photo. He interrogated Benham about its origins: "How did you know all the parts in the image belonged together?... How did you know for sure that Malachi was not a miscarriage? How did you know the damage to the fetus did not come from simple decomposition, or the month that it was outside the freezer?"

As Malachi was found in a facility dedicated to abortion, Cave's question is analogous to asking someone who took photos of dead Jews in a concentration camp: "How do you know that these people didn't die from starving themselves to death?" And as for possible damage "from simple decomposition," is Cave sincerely suggesting that decomposition caused Malachi's legs to be completely severed from his body?

The best and thus most effective abortion-victim photography will focus on the humanity of the unborn child as well as the violence, showing the beauty in the midst of the tragedy and blood. Abortion-victim photos cannot help but present the innate gore of abortion, but they must also focus on the beauty of the developing baby, allowing the abortion victim to speak his humanity and draw the viewer into that humanity.

Certain facts must accompany the photo. The size of the aborted baby can be indicated by photographing him next to a ruler or a coin. The gestational age of the victim should be established as accurately as possible and added to the photo; it might be necessary to consult a pathologist experienced with aborted or miscarried babies to accomplish this. Any information having to do with the abortion should be documented, including the date (or at least the year) and method of the abortion; the name of the abortionist, his clinic and its location; the baby's date of burial and burial site. Unless the pro-lifer has obtained written notarized permission from the mother, in no case should her name *ever* be disclosed.

Life Is Short. Use Better Abortion Photos.

Not all abortion-victim photos are equal. Some are excellent, and others are really bad and should not be used at all when better ones are easily available.

Unfortunately, many of the photos used in pro-life demonstrations, on the sides of "truth trucks," on posters, postcards, and video are, in a word, *awful*. Many activists believe that the gorier and bloodier the image, the more effective it will be in depicting the injustice of abortion. This is a mistake. There are some graphic abortion images in which the unborn baby, so mixed with blood and uterine contents, its body so mangled and twisted, is, at least at first glance, unrecognizable as human.

If the primary purpose of abortion-victim photography is to reveal the tragedy of abortion, the most effective photos will focus on the humanity of the victim — the blood and gore will be at best secondary elements. This means that the gory aspect of the photo, to an extent innate in abortion-victim photography, must not overwhelm the image of the baby. The viewer of the image of an aborted baby should be able to identify with the victim — not simply be shocked or repulsed by the blood-drenched image. The photo should provoke pathos, pity, sorrow, and a response to the injustice done to the baby, whose humanity is obvious *in the midst* of the tragedy and violence. To the majority of viewers whom pro-lifers are trying to reach, that first glance is the most important — indeed, it might not just be the first glance but the *only* glance — and thus its impact in drawing the viewer into the humanity of the victim cannot be squandered.

The bloodiest images do indeed depict what the abortion procedure does to the unborn. And some activists who use the bloodiest pictures believe that doing so is an act of honesty. But a picture that is only, or primarily, focused on what the abortion procedure does isn't necessarily a true photo of the *victim* himself. And it is the victim whom pro-lifers want people to recognize immediately. The photographer has an opportunity to be the messenger of that child's life — to allow that child, this personal someone who was unwanted, abandoned, put to death, and treated as if he had never lived, to finally speak his truth. Photography is an art form; there is no worthier subject than a victim of injustice for the purposes of ending that injustice.

A difference exists between a graphic image and an image of an abortion victim — between a repulsive image and a disturbing image. They are not always the same thing. There needs to be a deeper appreciation for this distinction. Those who oppose the use of graphic images need not necessarily oppose photos of abortion victims *per se*. Whatever side one may take in the debate, given that a distinction exists between a graphic image and a photo of an aborted baby, opposition to the use of all abortion-victim photography stands on shallow ground.

How & When to Use the Photos

There are few if any pro-lifers who would argue that there is *no place* for abortion-victim photography in the pro-life movement. The primary voices in this discussion argue, on the one hand, that such images should be shown only rarely and never publicly, or, on the other hand, that the images must be shown often and publicly whenever possible. The first group believes that graphic images are too repulsive and thus alienate the audience the pro-life movement is trying to convert. They are convinced that the only acceptable photos are those of fetal development of intact, healthy unborn children. Some pro-lifers are so adamantly opposed to the images that they will not attend a pro-life demonstration where abortion-victim photos are displayed. The second voice believes, as Fr. Frank Pavone of Priests for Life stated, "America will not end abortion until America sees abortion," and is firmly committed to the public display of the photos of victims of abortion — however poor some of those photos may be.

Perhaps the strongest and most common objection to the public display of abortion-victim photos is that young children will see them and become upset. First of all, it would be wrong to set up such images near places where young children gather — namely, a preschool, grammar school, or playground. Care should be taken that children will not be the primary audience of such photos. However, pickets, Face the Truth-type tours such as those conducted by the Pro-Life Action League, "truth trucks," and so on display graphic images for the benefit of an adult audience. If children happen to see the pictures, this is an indirect consequence and not the intent of such displays. Will some children be exposed to the disturbing images? Yes. Will some of those children be upset by the

images? Yes. In light of this, is it still justified to display such images? Yes.

It does no good for pro-lifers to be insensitive to this issue. Under normal circumstances, who could be indifferent to a child seeing photos of dismembered human beings? With the legalized killing of human beings, and with fifty-four million having been put to death since 1973, we are not living in “normal circumstances.” We are living in very extreme and urgent circumstances. If the media were honest about the nature of abortion and showed the victims, or if the vast majority of Americans were not ignorant and apathetic about abortion, then an argument could be put forward more easily that the public display of the truth about abortion is not justified, especially since there is the risk that children will see the horrors and be upset by them.

The pro-life movement has an obligation to publicly reveal the injustice of abortion, to awaken, as Simcha Fisher acknowledges, sleeping souls to America’s national tragedy. Even pro-lifers can fail to realize the crisis that legalized abortion represents — a social/moral crisis that sends thirty-five hundred innocent people to their deaths *each day* with the sanction of the law. This crisis requires that the truth be publicly exposed. The magnitude of the injustice overrides the possibility that children will see the pictures. It simply makes no sense to forego the public exposure of a national slaughter that has sent tens of millions of children to their deaths for the sake of sparing children who might see and be affected by the photos. The horrific injustice of abortion, and our nation’s continued support for it, *requires* that the photos be shown — despite the possibility of children seeing the disturbing images.

Women who have had an abortion may see the images and may be hurt by them. This is true, and pro-lifers must be sensitive to the needs of post-abortive women. But again, the primary victims of abortion are the tens of millions who perish under the law in a violent death in a nation that at least tolerates, and at worst advocates, such killing. The enormity of the injustice requires that the public be awakened to the slaughter. No pro-lifer is forcing post-abortive women to look at the bloody remains of an aborted child. That is not the purpose of a demonstration that uses graphic images. There simply is no one-size-fits-all response of post-abortive women to such images. It is unreasonable to stop showing the photos in order to spare post-abortive women who might become upset, especially when those very photos actually prevent other women from choosing abortion and spare them a lifetime of torment.

Even Fisher acknowledges that women scheduled for abortion have changed their minds after viewing the pictures. It must be understood that these women most likely would not have opted against abortion had they not been confronted by its graphic reality. In other words, there are babies who would *not be alive* had those very same images not been publicly displayed. This may be the strongest argument there is for the public display of graphic images: *They save lives.*

Some pro-lifers who oppose the use of graphic images fear that their use makes the movement look extreme. They associate those who use the images with the “lunatic fringe” and are afraid that this is how the public views the pro-life movement in general, that opposition to abortion is based on sheer emotion and not on logical argument. Leaders of the West Coast Walk for Life are sensitive to the way outsiders view the pro-life movement. On their website they explain why they “do not condone graphic images of abortion.” Their primary concern is that prohibiting such images “respects the innocence of children,” thus “giving all ages a chance to show the world what pro-life looks like.” The statement seems to imply that demonstrations that use graphic images are not what the *true* pro-life movement “looks like.” Harrington pointed out in a letter to WFL that it is ironic that the very persons for whom the Walk is designed to advocate deliberately remain banished and invisible.

It is time for leaders of national walks and marches to find ways to accommodate

images of abortion victims that are sensitive to the needs of children and post-abortive women. To show the images or not to show them need not be an either/or situation. Agreements could be made that there be no public display of graphic images but instead that a designated enclosed gallery be set up along the route. Marchers should be encouraged by event organizers to enter the gallery so that those who wish to do so would have the opportunity. The gallery should be prominently featured as an element of the march — but in this way, children, for instance, will not be automatically exposed to the pictures. Another possibility is that less graphic, poignant images of abortion victims could be printed in official event literature. These are just a couple of ways that the victims of abortion can still be recognized at such events while accommodating concerns about children and post-abortive women.

When Not to Use the Images

As already noted, graphic images should not be displayed where children congregate. But there are other instances when posters of aborted babies should not be used. Oddly enough, they should not be publicly displayed near abortion clinics if pro-lifers actually have the opportunity to talk to the mothers arriving for their appointments. In other words, pickets that use the photos should not occur when other pro-lifers are sidewalk counseling. Sidewalk counseling — namely, the effort to personally engage abortion-bound women and counsel them out of abortion — and protesting are two different activities. Pictures of aborted babies have a negative impact on sidewalk counseling because women will conclude that the assembled pro-lifers are protestors and psychologically steel themselves against them before any effective counseling can occur. Picketing an abortion clinic and the use of graphic images should be scheduled for a different time from sidewalk counseling.

Outside an abortion clinic, where the deaths of the unborn are imminent, the most effective method is to persuade women *then and there* not to abort — and in this situation personal engagement is the best method. In this way, the sidewalk counselor now has more opportunity to really discuss with women why they feel the need for an abortion and talk them out of it. Whatever diminishes that personal engagement needs to be avoided.

On the other hand, pictures of aborted babies should be displayed at clinics when one-on-one contact with women is limited, very difficult, or impossible — when, for instance, a large expanse of parking lot sits between the public sidewalk and the clinic entrance.

Victim Photography & Social-Justice Causes

That the graphic public exposure of injustice can effectively arouse concern for that injustice is illustrated by a radical decision made at the funeral of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old black youth who was beaten to death in 1955 when, visiting Mississippi, he whistled at a white girl and attempted to talk to her. At his Chicago funeral, his mother, Mamie Till, after viewing her child's hideously mangled body, insisted that the boy's coffin be left open. She was determined that the world should see what was done to her son. Mark Gado of "Crime Library," an online resource, states:

It was a decision that had a profound effect, not only on the many thousands who viewed the mangled corpse, but on the civil rights movement in America as well.... The grotesque appearance of the body, made worse by the waters of the Tallahatchie River, was difficult to look at and those who did would never forget the sight....

In their September 15 issue, *Jet* magazine published an unedited photo of Till's face as he lay in his coffin. It had a devastating impact upon black America. For the first time, the public saw the

terrifying reality of racial killing. Soon, other publications followed *Jet* magazine's lead and also published the shocking photograph of Till lying in his coffin.

Emmett Till's funeral is, in many respects, analogous to the public showing of the victims of abortion. In 1987 I helped retrieve the remains of aborted babies from a trash dumpster behind the Michigan Avenue Medical Center in Chicago. Later I participated in a press conference in which the bodies of the aborted unborn were put on display on busy downtown Michigan Avenue directly in front of the doors to the abortion clinic where they had been killed. As recounted in my book *Abandoned: The Untold Story of the Abortion Wars*:

Many who walked to and fro upon Michigan Avenue stopped at the table to peer at the bodies.... Most of those who looked at the crushed bodies were dumbfounded at the obvious humanity of the fetal babies and aghast at the evidence of violence written upon the torn flesh and severed limbs. One man who came by shook his head and muttered, "This ain't nothin' but murder." A group of three African American women paused to gaze at the bodies. One began to cry. "That's a baby! A real baby!" said another, completely amazed....

There was something pure in these reactions. These people were not prepared for what they saw.... The aborted babies, who were never meant to be seen, now intruded into the lives of these strangers. The passersby had no psychological preparation, no time to set up any mental barriers against the obvious tragedy of the torn bodies, no opportunity to theorize about abortion or put it into a ready-made political category. They had not read any editorials or commentaries just before arriving on the scene that might somehow mitigate the reality that these were real human beings who had suffered a form of violence. It was a privileged moment for me to see a kind of spontaneous enlightenment erupt in the souls of others. I knew that those who saw the fetal children would never think of abortion in the same way again.

Those outside of the pro-life movement understand the need of visual imagery to arouse viewers' consciences. The cover of *Time* magazine (Jul. 29, 2010) featured a graphic, disturbing image of an Afghan woman with her nose missing, having had it and her ears sliced off by the Taliban. In response to some readers' complaints, *Time* editor Richard Stengel printed a defense of the photo. He agreed that the picture was "shocking and disturbing." He acknowledged that children would certainly be exposed to the image but stated that "bad things happen to people, and it is part of our job to confront and explain them. In the end, I felt that the image is a window into the reality of what is happening." He referred to the leak of classified documents that sparked debate about the Afghan war and stated, "Our story and the haunting cover image...are meant to contribute to that debate.... What you see in these pictures...is something you cannot find in those 91,000 documents: a combination of emotional truth and insight." Stengel's editorial also applies to the showing of images of aborted children — something the secular media refuses to do.

Photographer Todd Maisel shot photos of victims of the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers. One photo was that of a man's severed hand — a photo printed in the *New York Daily News*. Maisel defended the publication of the photo: "Some people thought it was wrong, but that's what happened that day. It was a horror. I saw body parts all over the place. The horror of that day must not be diminished" (*American Photo Magazine*, Sept.-Oct. 2011).

I know of absolutely no pro-lifer who would not leap for joy should the secular media print photos of the aborted unborn. Yet, there continues to be a controversy

within the movement itself about their display in pro-life literature, events, and demonstrations.

Some, like Fisher, argue that the viewing of abortion images should be infrequent and for the most part voluntary. This would mean, however, that only those who are willing and motivated to check out a website, read a book with graphic images, or seek out pro-life literature that contains them will ever be confronted by the reality of the abortion atrocity. We are talking about the very few!

If the pro-life movement relied solely on a voluntary audience, we would not educate those millions of people who need to be exposed to the tragedy of our national slaughter and have their consciences awakened. It is painfully obvious that we cannot depend on the media to do this for us.

Conclusion

Some, like Fisher, argue that the display of graphic images dishonors the unborn baby killed by abortion. A statement made by famous humanitarian and concentration-camp survivor Elie Wiesel is appropriate here: "To forget murder victims is to kill them twice." Photos of the aborted unborn and their public exposure in no way dishonors these children. Abortion kills *real people*, it assaults the life of a *personal someone* — a someone whom the very act of abortion meant to keep hidden forever, as if he had never existed. For a pro-lifer to photograph an abortion victim and expose the injustice done to him is the *highest possible* respect, short of a humane burial, that can be shown to that aborted child. When a graphic image is displayed, it is *that child* who speaks. The abortion photo is the definitive way that unwanted, discarded unborn children can prove that they lived, that their lives matter, that their all-too-brief existences can impact this world and change it for the better. The photos of abortion victims are the only tangible guarantee they have that their lives, and even their murders, were not in vain. Through their photos the world is stimulated to contemplate the injustice suffered by the aborted unborn — and be aroused to do something about it!

In 1993, when I was in jail for blocking the doors to an abortion clinic, I was able to bring with me a packet of photos I had taken of babies retrieved from the trash. When in conversation with an inmate about abortion, I sometimes took out the photos to show them the reality of abortion. One evening, a prisoner named Amelia, in jail for prostitution, said to me, "Hey, Monica, you got any of them pictures of the dead babies? Somebody wants to see them." I took out the photos and soon a small crowd of curious inmates gathered around. As recounted in *Abandoned*:

Sitting nearby was Camille, a large, tough, quick-witted black woman who was also a cocaine addict. Although she was a lesbian, Camille conceived a child while drunk at a party. Her daughter, whom she cherished, was now two years old. Camille stared at the photos. She was utterly stunned by what she saw. The graphic images of the broken bodies instantly shocked her into a depth of reality and a zenith of emotion. Her feelings were frozen by the tragedy the broken, twisted bodies caused her to penetrate.

I knew this feeling. Many years ago, when I first saw the photos of aborted babies in the "Life or Death" brochure, I went into a kind of shock. My emotions were frozen as I was utterly unprepared for the horror and sorrow that the crushed bodies revealed to me. It is the reaction of that last pure part of the soul confronted by the desecration of the holy — a desecration beyond what one can imagine. Yet the unspeakable crimes took place and are taking place. Now these crimes are part of a terrible truth, as if a veil had

been torn away to expose a glimpse of Hell. The sight makes us tremble and weep, and the shock solidifies within us a great, absolute “No” as we refuse to be part of this terrible darkness. Our being is filled with a resolve to stand against it. Nothing in this glimpse of Hell can be right, and the evil of it all is incarnated in broken bodies that cry to you for justice. Once you see the bodies with the right mind, you can never go back. They have taken you into their world.

Those who live in a culture of death desperately need to be awakened to the terrible fate of the aborted unborn. The mask of normalcy that cloaks the injustice of abortion — an injustice that is all around us, yet remains largely concealed — needs to be ripped away. In a society that promotes abortion, or remains generally apathetic to its reality, the victims of our American slaughter have a right to be seen, and the truth of their tragedy, written into their flesh, revealed.

“Images in media determine not just what we see but how journalists describe the world, and thus what we know about it and how we talk about it. Photographs may be sanitized because we’re reluctant to confront unvarnished reality, but sanitized images make it easier, in turn, to accept bloodless language.... It is difficult to discuss ‘fetal demise’ abstractly when the accompanying images show the little arms and legs that were dismembered.” — Conor Friedersdorf, “The Gutless Press,” *The Atlantic* (Jul./Aug. 2013)

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