

# THE MOVEMENT AND ITS MESSAGE: PRO-LIFE EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS AND THEIR CRITICS

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## Introduction

The pro-life movement has long been analyzed in terms of its political efforts and effects. Less frequent has been the discussion of its role as an educational movement, though from the beginning that function was central to its identity. Indeed few movements in America have produced as much educational and persuasive material as the pro-life movement over the last thirty years: books and pamphlets, billboards and broadsides, banners and bumper stickers, lapel pins and bracelets, slide-tape shows and videotapes. All have appeared in abundance. What have been their central themes, messages and assumptions? In what ways do they reflect the movement which produced them? Which have been the most frequently used? What criticisms have they encountered? How effective have they been? Given the importance of the abortion controversy, and the centrality of pro-life materials to that controversy, the relative paucity of academic attention paid to them is surprising. Few scholars have recognized the need for an analysis of the rhetoric of the movement, but works by David Mall and Celeste Michelle Condit are important exceptions.<sup>1</sup> There is much that we do not yet know about the educational efforts of the movement, but it is possible to make some suggestions about them. What follows are some possible lines of inquiry and interpretation.

One place to begin is to consider some of the constraints and influences which shaped the right to life movement's educational campaigns. One was a mass media overwhelmingly hostile to the cause and unwilling to act as a conduit for the movement to reach the public. Unlike the environmental movement, which could count on the enthusiastic cooperation of the media, the right to life movement could expect indifference at best, but more

commonly distortion and abuse.<sup>ii</sup> It had to go over and around the mass media, taking its message directly to the public. The technical preconditions for doing so were more easily met than they would have been in an earlier era, as printing has become relatively inexpensive for materials such as flyers and pamphlets, photocopying has made matters even easier for simple handouts, and the advent of home video machines meant that audio-visual presentations on videocassette were inexpensive and readily given to even small groups. Pro-life materials could, at least potentially, flow in volume.

The more difficult problem was putting the materials into the hands and before the eyes of the public. Which institutions and networks could be utilized to present information? Some unrestricted access was possible: billboards, widely distributed flyers and occasional newspaper ads could reach, at least in theory, the whole of the public. Given enough money, it was possible to reach a huge public through television advertisements, as the De Moss Foundation has shown in recent years. Much of the time, however, access has had to be obtained through existing social groups which were at least open to hearing the message and could act as channels for the flow of information. Some presentations could be made in schools, but access was dependent on an often hostile or unsympathetic staff. More generally churches and church affiliated groups were the obvious choices. Materials tended to go to people already disposed to consider it, and this usually, although not always, meant groups connected by a religious outlook. Such groups were also the most likely source of recruits. The consequence, it may be suggested, is that material had some tendency to become group specific, charged with the associations, symbols and values meaningful to the group being approached.

This was a natural consequence of the fact that the pro-life movement was not a monolith but rather represented a fair range of diverse backgrounds. Differences arose not only

from denominational affiliation but also from political and social tendency, with some oriented toward conservatism and others inclined to a "social justice" approach to politics. This diversity, little understood by and reported about by the media, was a source of strength for the movement, but it was also a problem, in that potential supporters might well encounter the movement through literature targeted at a specific group. If that group was of an uncongenial religious character, the result was possibly the "turning off" of likely recruits. Thus an approach which was overtly "Catholic" could well deter an evangelical Protestant from active participation. Moreover, it was possible for the media to seize on the expression of one group and present it as *the* right to life movement, thereby furthering the process of pigeonholing and stereotyping the movement.

### **Historical Background**

At this point it would be useful to undertake a brief history of the movement's literature. It quickly becomes apparent that the religious and to some extent political preferences of the authors, and the characteristics of the audience aimed at, helped to shape the arguments advanced. The core contention was always the same: abortion is the unjustified killing of an innocent human life. But the language used, the reasons advanced and the ancillary positions taken tended to differ sharply, reflecting the widely differing sensibilities and worlds of discourse of the writers.

Right to Life organizations began to emerge in the mid-sixties, primarily as small local groups. In 1967 the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) was created as an offshoot of the Family Life Bureau of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to act as a source of information and encouragement for the existing pro-life groups and to stimulate the development of new organizations. The first national meeting of pro-lifers took place under the auspices of the NRLC at Barat College near Chicago in 1970, and these

meetings became annual events thereafter. During these early years the literature and audio-visual resources available to Right to Life groups were limited and a frequent call was for more and better material. Some groups undertook to create their own – Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (founded in 1968) was particularly active in this regard – and the NRLC made available a limited number of titles. While there were several substantial book length studies of abortion written from a pro life viewpoint available by 1970, as well as some brochures, there was a shortage of materials which could fill the gap between them. Some audio-visual materials were created and these featured both panel discussions and slides of fetal development and of the effects of abortion. As late as 1972 the literature list distributed by the NRLC showed little of the enormous profusion of resources that would become available in later years. By that time there had appeared, however, what would become the all-time best seller of pro-life books: Dr. and Mrs. J.C. Willke's *Handbook on Abortion*.<sup>iii</sup> Shortly thereafter Dr. Willke produced a slide tape presentation which became an instant success. By 1973 the pro-life market for materials had become so large that a bookstore solely devoted to pro-life books had appeared: Life Cycle Books in Toronto. In later years Life Cycle was to become a major publisher of pro-life materials, joining Hiltz (later Hiltz and Hayes), which published the Willke materials.<sup>iv</sup> The new medium of videotape for home units – BETA and VHS – opened possibilities for the presentation of films at relatively low cost and with an easily handled technology. The most dramatic use of that came in 1985 with The Silent Scream, produced by Dr. Bernard Nathanson. Before looking at the critics of that film, and of pro-life materials more generally, we should look at some pro-life books to evaluate their different styles of argument.

What reasons are advanced in them for rejecting abortion? With what other issues is abortion linked? Do they condemn abortion in a general way or do they point to it as a personal

sin? What sort of imagery is used — is it graphic or low keyed in its portrayal of abortion?

As suggested earlier, authors and organizations from different denominational backgrounds exhibited different ways of handling these areas. Moreover, the literature varied depending on whether the general public, rather than a specific denominational segment, was seen as the target of this literature. If the former, a secular and single issue focus became dominant; if the latter religious appeals and references to other issues was common.

### **Early Literature**

The tendency to make secular arguments when the public as a whole was the audience was apparent in one of the earliest pro-life pamphlets ever produced, "Questions and Answers on Abortion," brought out by the Virginia Society for Human Life in 1967. In response to the question "Isn't opposition to abortion usually based on religious grounds?" it replied that while many do oppose it as "contrary to the Judaeo-Christian tradition," there are also "compelling nonreligious reasons for being against abortion." It went on to list medical, legal and social concerns.<sup>v</sup>

Much of the early material opposing abortion was produced by Catholics. Russell Shaw's *Abortion on Trial* appeared in 1968, with a *Nihil Obstat* and an *Imprimatur*; yet despite this Catholic provenance, the book argued against abortion on lines clearly intended to appeal to a general audience. Only in the second to last chapter of the book is the Christian tradition with respect to abortion discussed, and even there the purpose is not to demonstrate that abortion is wrong because of religious condemnation, but rather to show the existence of a consistent tradition. The "natural law" arguments against abortion are highlighted as well.<sup>vi</sup> The natural law approach to argumentation, so central to the Catholic tradition, became a mainstay of Catholics writing on the topic. What made it useful was that it was possible to write from within a

denominational tradition yet to couch arguments in a fashion accessible, at least in theory, to the whole of the public. In practice this approach clearly had limitations as large sectors of the public seemed unreceptive to its style and assumptions.

One work, which reflected a natural law approach in a distinctively Catholic fashion, was Charles Rice's *The Vanishing Right to Live* (1969). While addressed to the public as a whole and appealing to a general principle - the willingness to accept responsibility and the need to exhibit reverence for life - it linked the abortion question with other topics, some of which (contraception, sterilization) were most likely to be salient for Catholics.

It is interesting to note the handling of the religious issue. While Rice explicitly states that "religious conviction" was "the basic motive impelling the writing of this chapter," he spent virtually no time discussing it other than to demonstrate that both Protestants and Jews opposed abortion and that it was thus not a "Catholic issue." Not a single Biblical text was cited and the essential argument was "the compelling secular and constitutional reasons against abortion."<sup>vi</sup> Accordingly he focused on medical information and on refuting claims that legalization was needed to end dangerous illegal operations. The style of argument clearly reflects a strong natural law orientation: abortion can be demonstrated as wrong without recourse to religious arguments. Nor did he rely on emotionally charged descriptions of the abortion procedure. Thus while he does devote several paragraphs to such a description, it is clearly a minor part of his argument and he quickly notes: "the day is coming, however, when abortions will not be messy" — a development he welcomes because it "will present the moral issue of the right-to-life starkly and inescapably."<sup>viii</sup> Clearly what is at work here is an approach which prefers arguments at a relatively abstract and general level.

Rice does link abortion with a variety of what he saw as "life" issues: capital punishment (which he supported), euthanasia,

sterilization, contraception, homosexuality, artificial insemination, and suicide. What is noticeable is that a prominent theme of later pro-life writing - that abortion is "anti-family" - is not directly raised. Obviously it is compatible with Rice's treatment, but the "pro-family" rallying cry had not yet been coined. What is present is an argument which was to become a pro-life staple: the linkage of abortion with the Nazi euthanasia campaign.

In summary we find an argument based on a "sanctity of life" theme, but with appeals as well to traditional sexual moral values; an argument based on a natural law approach which is seen as capable of standing by itself without recourse to explicitly religious appeals, such as Biblical references; a focus on principle and social consequences, rather than on the vivid details of an abortion.

A quick review of other early Catholic writings reveals some similar themes, but the beginnings of a different Catholic approach as well. Germain Grisez's *Abortion: the Myths, the Realities and the Arguments* was a massive account of the historical, medical, legal, religious and philosophical aspects of abortion; it concluded with a forthright plea for the complete illegalization of abortion.<sup>x</sup> As with Rice the argument is based on natural law; religious views of abortion are presented as factual accounts of historical positions, not as arguments in themselves. The abortion procedure is treated technically and without sensationalism and the pregnant woman likely to abort is treated not so much as a sinner in need of repentance as someone with problems in need of support. He calls for a "truly humane approach to the broad social problems of poverty, failure of education, inadequate medical care, and discrimination" and endorses publicly supported day care.<sup>x</sup>

While clearly accepting Catholic moral teaching (e.g. on contraception), this book links the abortion issue with the question of "social justice." The works of Rice and Grisez, while both clearly Catholic in their presuppositions and rhetorical style, point to the two complementary approaches

which have tended to dominate Catholic discourse in the area: moral conservatism and social justice.<sup>xi</sup>

### **A Shift in Approach**

The most widely circulated pro-life book in the history of the movement, the *Handbook on Abortion*, appeared in 1971. Using a question and answer format, it argued against abortion on grounds which were resolutely non-sectarian in character and stressed the opposition to abortion by a number of Christian churches and non-Christian religions. Its authors made a point of distinguishing abortion from contraception — as Catholics the Willke's were sensitive to charges of the imposition of religious values. Consciously aiming at a mass audience, they de-emphasized specific denominational characteristics.

The book marked an important shift toward the use of far more vivid and emotionally gripping portrayals of abortion. Where Rice, Grisez and others had argued in a largely abstract fashion,<sup>xii</sup> the Willke's used dramatic color photographs to bolster the text. In the years to come this became a regular feature of both print and audio-visual presentations by a number of anti-abortion groups. This supplemented rather than replaced the argument already made: that abortion was wrong for reasons which could and should be demonstrated largely or entirely on secular grounds.

The Willke's made these points explicit in the guide for pro-life presenters, *How to Teach the Pro-Life Story*.<sup>xiii</sup> Religion was to be firmly relegated to the corner and arguments were to be on secular grounds accessible to all listeners: "Perhaps it is best then to take the whole package of theological judgment of this question, give it the honor it is due, and place it on the pedestal where it belongs. We must then look for other means of judgment that a pluralistic society can agree upon and legislate from."<sup>xiv</sup>

The need to use photographs is perfectly clear: "it has become a near absolute that this story cannot be effectively



told without visuals."<sup>lv</sup> They argue that the pictures are accurate; while they are emotional, they are proper and defensible. After all, the authors remind us, it was emotional footage from Vietnam which galvanized opposition to the war.

Consistent with the policy of emphasizing widely shared values in order to bring together the widest possible opposition to abortion, the Willke's did not try to link it to other moral issues. Regarding contraception they declared: "Any specific couple has the right to use whichever method is acceptable and best for them."<sup>lvi</sup>

Accustomed to thinking in natural law terms about moral issues, Catholics took readily to a line of argument which was virtually devoid of explicitly religious content. As members of a minority which had frequently been labelled as "un-American," Catholics were eager as well to de-emphasize denominational distinctiveness on this issue and to advance arguments compatible with a pluralistic society. These tendencies also manifested themselves in institutional arrangements. The National Right To Life Committee became a separate non-sectarian organization in 1973. The fact that two of its first three presidents after the 1973 re-organization were Protestant women spelled out the same message, that pro-life had to shed its denominational image. Since that time the National Right to Life Committee has continued on the same trajectory: secular in argument and single issue in focus.

### **Religious Perspectives**

This renunciation of religious language and symbolism and avoidance of entanglement with religious issues has proved intensely unsatisfactory for many opposed to abortion.

Many Catholics resented the exclusion of other issues — sex education, pornography, etc. — which they saw as vitally linked to abortion. Some also missed a distinctively Catholic spiritual atmosphere in the movement. Many Protestants felt uncomfortable with the baldly secular character of the

arguments offered and were reluctant to put religion "on the pedestal" as advised. For them the Bible was a source of guidance which had to be openly and frequently acknowledged. Many saw abortion as part of a larger moral decline which could only be successfully addressed if its religious character was clearly recognized. Out of these discontents were to emerge a variety of competing organizations.

Before discussing them we should turn to Protestant writings on the abortion question. Remarkably it was not until 1974 that a pro-life book by an American Protestant appeared, Clifford E. Bajema's *Abortion and the Meaning of Personhood*. Bajema was a minister in the Christian Reformed Church and took an explicitly Protestant viewpoint.

He rejected the belief that secular argumentation alone was sufficient:

There are some who believe (myself included) that personhood is a spiritual concept, not meaningful without reference to the relationship between God and man, and not ultimately explainable except in a theological context. Most of the theological argumentation has been left up to the Roman Catholic theologians.... I shall try in the next chapter to make a theological case for personhood at conception by sharing a few thoughts from the Protestant side.<sup>xvii</sup>

In the argument which followed Biblical quotations and exegesis played a central role, in a fashion quite at odds with the works mentioned above by Catholic authors. An Appendix to the book contains suggested liturgies for a Human Life Sunday. Despite this more explicitly religious approach, Bajema refused to use the word "sin" in connection with abortion, stressing instead the help that should be offered to pregnant women, and the assistance needed by those who had abortions and who felt guilt. This refusal is an illustration of a point made by James Davison Hunter, that in a pluralistic

society religion is obliged to become more "civil," that is, to become more tolerant and less judgmental, at least in public. In general "sin" is discussed in a fashion which is "typically abstract."<sup>xviii</sup> Since the pro-life message is frequently greeted with hostility precisely because it is seen as failing to abide by the understanding that religion is to give "no offense" (in John Murray Cuddihy's phrase<sup>xix</sup>), it is hardly surprising that it does not further enrage its critics by speaking of "sin" in connection with the abortion decision. Bajema makes no attempt to link abortion with a range of other issues and grounds his case in a "respect for life" rather than a "sexual morality" framework. In this respect he resembles earlier Catholic writers, although he has shifted dramatically on the way in which the "life" issue is argued.

In 1976 a far more widely circulated book appeared: C. Everett Koop's *The Right to Live, The Right to Die*. Like Bajema he grounded his case in a "respect for life" ethic, linking abortion and euthanasia. Also he evinced a characteristically Protestant and evangelical sensibility, proclaiming his Christian faith in the first paragraph of the Preface. Later he wrote "I speak as a Christian. I am an evangelical..." and "As a Christian I have the supreme court to which I take my problems for appeal and settlement, and that is the word of God, the Bible."<sup>xx</sup> In the text which followed medical and philosophical arguments were mixed with theological: "My reasons against abortion are logical as well as theological."<sup>xxi</sup>

The works of Bajema, Koop and others made clear that a distinctive Protestant style had emerged in the pro-life movement. The founding in 1975 of the Christian Action Council gave institutional recognition of this fact. The divergence between the National Right to Life Committee and the Christian Action Council is obvious when the CAC's *Abortion Debater's Handbook* is examined.<sup>xxii</sup> The first section (14 pages) is devoted to "Biblical and Theological Material" while the NRLC eschews such an approach. It is

notable, however, that the CAC does not try to make abortion part of a larger crusade against moral ills in American society but focuses instead on the single issue of abortion.

Clearly, however, many Protestants do see abortion as part of a larger moral problem. Anderson is representative of this view: "America's lax attitude toward abortion is a symptom of the larger sickness.... We have intentionally, as a country and as a society, turned away from a God-centered way of life."<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The integration of abortion into a larger critique of society on traditional moral grounds was much more evident in the approach of groups like the Moral Majority (founded in 1979) and Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum. While these saw abortion as one issue among many and did not originate in a concern over that as the central problem facing America from that issue, there were groups which did focus on abortion but which shared the view that a wide range of moral issues was involved. One was the American Life League (ALL), founded in 1979. Rejecting the NRLC's one issue approach it fought sex education, pornography and other targets. While addressing both Catholics and Protestants, it clearly directed some of its attention specifically to Catholic concerns about contraception. As with the CAC, the founding of ALL makes it clear that no one organization or approach could adequately express the whole range of religious sentiments found in anti-abortion ranks.

A very different approach is evident in the materials produced by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops through its Respect Life Program. Reflecting the "social justice" approach referred to earlier, these emphasize a different set of linkages to abortion. Typically the annual publication of this body contains articles on the rights of the handicapped, the elderly, peace issues, and the care of the dying as well as on abortion, *in vitro* fertilization, natural family planning and federal family policy. The agenda and ambience are more clearly of the "left" than ALL, and traditional devotional practices are downplayed.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

What can we conclude from this overview? It seems clear that differences in religious background manifest themselves in very different styles of argument. It is not as simple, however, as Catholic versus Evangelical Protestant. Some Catholics opt for a single issue approach while others variously link abortion with family and sexual morality issues or else with social justice themes. This in part reflects tactical decisions about how best to win support but it also arises from the fact that there are diverse emphases within Catholicism. In general, however, Catholics opposing abortion are reluctant to use clearly religious reasons but try to base a case on medical evidence and philosophical arguments. This natural law approach has been clear from the earliest days and continues into the 1990's.

In general Protestants have used the arguments advanced by Catholic authors but have seen them as inadequate. Clearly concerned with the need to both make a personal profession of faith and to reach members of their own denominations with an appeal couched in language likely to move them to action, they have typically used overtly religious appeals, especially Biblical texts. Where Protestants have differed is on the question of the framework within which abortion should be seen. Here the divisions parallel those in the Catholic community. The "pro-family" theme has been, since the mid 1970's, a very effective way of uniting both Catholics and Protestants who view abortion within the framework of traditional family and moral values. Given a fundamental divergence over the issue of contraception, however, it was clear that there were limits to this alliance.

It was suggested earlier that to the degree to which groups tried to appeal to the general public they would adopt similar themes and techniques. In fact the institutional fragmentation of the movement has meant that only the National Right-to-Life Committee and its local affiliates (over 2,000 in number) see the public as a whole as an audience. The NRLC accordingly seeks to avoid approaches which will alienate the

large number of Americans with little or weak religious involvement. It has also consistently sought to be non-inflammatory and non-confrontational in approach.

### **Criticisms of Pro-life Material**

Because a popular audience was aimed at, right to life material tended to be simplified and made more vivid. In particular the use of striking photographs of the unborn child and the results of abortion became a movement characteristic.

This practice was defended on the grounds that a purely abstract discussion of abortion was likely to lead to the blanking out of the reality of what actually happened during an abortion and to the denial that human development was continuous. The fetus became the central symbol of the movement, either as a photo, a stylized outline, or as a pair of feet on a lapel pin. This in turn generated much criticism.

Critics have long focused on the movement's use of pictures of fetal development and of abortion. In his hostile account of the right to life movement Andrew Merton speaks derisively of the Willke's educational materials: "a single bloody picture was worth more than all the volumes of sophisticated theological philosophical and scientific arguments they could dredge up."<sup>xxxv</sup> The dismissal of right to life materials as simply "gory pictures" was common although, as pro-lifers pointed out, a similar attitude had not prevailed toward the use of pictures by the anti-war movement in the 1960's. The issue of the use of such pictures became far more acute, however, after the release of *The Silent Scream* in 1985. Critics dismissed the ultrasound pictures of an actual abortion as "technical flimflam."<sup>xxxvi</sup> The controversy over the film even reached the comics, with a Doonesbury strip (pulled by most papers) denouncing it as "an incendiary piece of propaganda."<sup>xxxvii</sup> The follow up film, *Eclipse of Reason*, was denounced as "emotional jargon."<sup>xxxviii</sup> Scholarly critiques of pro-life media have focused on these films and have tended to be as critical as the comments quoted in the popular press.

Celeste Michelle Condit has conceded the importance of the abortion photos for the debate: "Without these compelling and brutal photographs the American abortion controversy probably would not continue."<sup>xxxix</sup> She suggests, however, that the *meaning* of these photos is not a simple fact but has been constructed, and is the product of "complex rhetorical tactics." She denies that visual images are necessarily inappropriate to public argument, since they can summarize narratives. But they are susceptible to analyses of their accuracy: visual images are inexplicit – their meaning is focused by rhetorical devices, and they can be both persuasive and inaccurate. She suggests that pro-lifers have used such devices as metonymy, metaphor, synecdoche and hyperbole to "obscure the differences between me and these developing, incomplete human forms."<sup>xxxix</sup>

Ultimately, if I sift out the particular rhetorical tactics of the pro-life rhetors... and look at all the pictures of fetuses, in all their completeness, I recognize that there are major differences as well as similarities.... And so, at least on the basis of the visual evidence which constitutes the mainstay of this pro-life persuasion, I realize that humanity is something that a fetus grows into only gradually.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Pro-Lifers might object to the apparent assumption that "humanity" is measured by the degree of physical resemblance between the fetus and the adult human, arguing that it is hardly self-evident and begs the central question of the abortion debate. Right to life pictures are selective, as Condit suggests, but is this a distortion? Do they seek to persuade the viewer that the embryo is a miniature adult, or that it is a being which develops continuously, and that the adult is the same being as the embryo forty years earlier, only larger and more fully developed? Condit's argumentation needs to be taken seriously, however, even if not accepted, and a more thorough discussion of it than is possible here would be appropriate.

Taking a somewhat different critical approach is Rosalind

Pollack Petchesky, who speaks of the "formidable cunning" of the *Silent Scream* and argues that fetal imagery excludes women from the picture. Of pro-lifers she says: "Wafting these fetus-pictures as icons, literal fetishes, they both propagate and celebrate the image of the fetus as a autonomous space here and the pregnant woman as "empty space."<sup>xxxii</sup> She protests what she regards as the exclusion of the woman: "First, we have to restore women to a central place in the pregnancy scene."<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Clearly the use of fetal images by the Right to Life movement is defensible, but the case for that use should be made more clearly and explicitly, with the critiques of authors such as Condit and Petchesky acknowledged and answered. This leads us to another question. Are these images effective? How effective in general has the pro-life educational campaign been? The relative stability of public opinion on the subject of abortion over the last twenty years, despite enormous media support for easy access to it, indicates that at least it has held the line, even if it has not rolled back the support enjoyed by abortion rights advocates. In large measure it has had a real impact, just as Condit suggests.

But the limitations implicit in a strategy which lays near exclusive focus on the humanity of the fetus should be recognized. For one thing public opinion surveys reveal a complex pattern of public opinion with respect to abortion: many who concede the humanity and personhood of the fetus also consider abortion not as serious as the killing of life at later stages.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The pro-life movement always assumed that it would be sufficient to prove the human character of the fetus, when in fact many who concede it also condone abortion. These people need to be addressed directly, with arguments salient to them. Moreover, the criticism by Petchesky mentioned earlier leads to a question also asked by Frederica Matthewes-Green: does the focus on establishing the existence of the baby not lead to the woman coming to be seen as not only separate from but opposed to the fetus?<sup>xxxv</sup> Without



conceding the core of Petchesky's argument, would it be valuable to recontextualize the fetus and to go beyond establishing the existence of the baby to attacking the idea of "choice," with its suggestion of opposition between mother and child?

Ironically, the advice given to the pro-life movement by the Wirthlin group, which undertook a major analysis of public opinion, was that it should "reclaim the language of "choice."<sup>xxxvi</sup>

James Davison Hunter regards this suggestion as fatal, arguing that by adopting the language of the opposition the movement would be accepting its cultural premises: "To adopt a communications strategy for the pro-life movement that accepts this cultural premise is, for them, to fight a battle by conceding the war."<sup>xxxvii</sup> There are issues here worthy of sustained discussion.

Hunter's research also supports the contention that any suggestion of opposition between the interests of mother and unborn child should be avoided. There is already a widespread belief, even though erroneous, that the pro-life movement does not care about women, only about the unborn child. As Hunter notes, "the pro-life movement finds it nearly impossible to shake the image that it is hostile to women."<sup>xxxviii</sup> Much pro-life material already tries to overcome that perception – some of the De Moss Foundation ads come to mind – but more is clearly needed.

Concerns about the effectiveness of one pro-life advertising campaign have been expressed by David Mall in his analysis of the materials prepared by the public relations firm of Hill and Knowlton for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.<sup>xxxix</sup> Both David Mall and Wanda Franz have pointed to the importance of taking into account the theories of moral development advanced by Piaget and Kohlberg.<sup>xl</sup> These reflections should be a part of any re-examination of pro-life education work. Indeed, now that the pro-life movement is rapidly approaching the beginning of its fourth decade, it might be appropriate for it to undertake a general review and

reconsideration of its educational approaches. The styles of argumentation, the use of images, the methods of delivery, all might be looked at. After all, the movement's only real power lies in its ability to persuade. If it wishes to not merely keep the abortion issue open, but to move towards a satisfactory resolution of it, some recasting of its educational efforts appears inescapable.

### NOTES

1. See David Mall, ed., *When Life and Choice Collide: Essays on Rhetoric and Abortion*, vol. 1, *To Set the Dawn Free* (Libertyville IL: Kairos Books 1994) and Celeste Michelle Condit, *Decoding Abortion Rhetoric: Communicating Social Change* (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press 1990). See also Randall A. Lake, "The Metaethical Framework of Anti-Abortion Rhetoric" in *Signs* 11/3 (Spring 1986); Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction" in Michelle Stanworth, ed., *Reproductive Technologies: Gender, Motherhood, and Medicine* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press 1987), also found in *Feminist Studies* 13 (1987); Robert James Branham, "The Role of the Convert in *Eclipse of Reason* and *The Silent Scream*" in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77/4 (1991) 407-26; Marsha L. Vanderford, "Vilification and Social Movements: A Case Study of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Rhetoric" in *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75/2 (1989) 166-82.

2. For a discussion of media treatment of the pro-life movement see Marvin Olasky, *The Press and Abortion, 1838-1988* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 1988); David Shaw's articles in the Los Angeles Times, July 1-4, 1990; and James Davison Hunter's discussion of the topic in *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching for Democracy in America's Culture War* (NY: The Free Press 1994) 154-68.

3. Dr. and Mrs. J. C. Willke, *Handbook on Abortion* (Cincinnati: Hiltz 1971). Eight reprintings, some with revisions, had appeared within twelve months of the initial publication.

4. Life Cycle Books began as a bookstore and took the first steps to becoming a publisher in 1975. By the mid 1980's the majority of its business was coming from the U.S. Interview with Paul Broughton, July 15, 1994.

5. "Questions and Answers on Abortion," Virginia Society for Human Life (Richmond VA). The pamphlet is found in the records of the National Right to Life Committee held by the U. S. Catholic Conference, Box 89-14, along with a Dec. 18, 1967 press release by the VSHL.

6. Russell B. Shaw, *Abortion on Trial* (Dayton: Pflaum 1968).

7. Charles Rice, *The Vanishing Right to Live: An Appeal for a Renewed Reverence for Life* (NY: Doubleday 1969) 28.

8. Rice 43.

9. Germain Grisez, *Abortion: the Myths, the Realities, and the Arguments* (NY: Corpus 1970).

10. Grisez 464, 465. For a volume with a similar approach see Thomas W. Hilgers and Dennis J. Horan, eds., *Abortion and Social Justice* (NY: Sheed and Ward 1972).

11. For a discussion of differing Catholic approaches to the abortion question see Mary Jo Neitz, "Family, State and God: Ideologies of the Right-to-Life Movement" in *Sociological Analysis* 42/3 (1981) 265-76 and Michael Cuneo, *Catholics Against the Church: Anti-Abortion Protest in Toronto, 1969-*

1985 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press 1989).

12. For other examples of this approach see K. O. Whitehead, *Respectable Killing* (New Rochelle NY: Catholics United for the Faith 1972) and John T. Noonan, ed., *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP 1970).

13. Dr. and Mrs. J. C. Willke, *How to Teach the Pro-Life Story* (Cincinnati: Hiltz and Hayes 1971).

14. Ibid. 18-19.            15. Ibid. 29.

16. Willke, *Handbook* (8th printing, revised, May 1972) 126.

17. Clifford E. Bajema, *Abortion and the Meaning of Personhood* (Grand Rapids: Baker 1974) 28.

18. James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers UP 1983) 88.

19. John Murray Cuddihy, *No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste* (NY: Seabury 1978).

20. C. Everett Koop, *The Right to Live, The Right to Die* (Wheaton IL: Tyndale House 1976) 19, 20.

21. Ibid. 26. A similar approach could be found in Harold O.J. Brown's *Death Before Birth* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson 1977). What is distinctive in Brown is a sharp reminder to the reader of the need for personal activity to oppose abortion. "A principle part of the witness Christ requires of us may be designated as martyr-witness" (159). He warned of Divine retribution should Americans fail to act: "In the United States, we the people are the authority. Therefore it is we, not a king

or emperor, who will have to answer to God for the justice of our institutions" (163). See also Donald Shoemaker, *Abortion, the Bible and the Christian* (Cincinnati: Hayes 1976).

22. Christian Action Council, *CAC Abortion Debates Handbook* (Falls Church VA 1984).

23. John O. Anderson, *Cry of the Innocents: Abortion and the Race Towards Judgment* (South Plainfield NJ: Bridge Publ. 1984) 93.

24. A even clearer example of the same sort of attitude is found in *Sojourners* magazine, a voice of the left wing of American Evangelicals. In its November 1980 issue, devoted to the theme, "What Does It Mean To Be Pro-Life," it criticized the existing pro-life movement but declared "However, the problems of shortcomings of the anti-abortion movement cannot continue to be excuses for us. Our deepest convictions about poverty, racism, violence and the equality of men and women are finally rooted in a radical concern for life" (p. 1).

25. Andrew H. Merton, *Enemies of Choice: The Right to Life Movement and Its Threat to Abortion* (Boston: Beacon 1981) 78.

26. *Time* (March 25, 1985) 62.

27. The strip was reprinted in *Ms.* (November 1985) and in *The New Republic* (June 10, 1985).

28. *Newsweek* (Feb. 2, 1987) 32.      29. Condit 79.

30. Condit 79, 81, 91.      31. Condit 91.

32. Petchesky, "Fetal Images," 281.

33. Ibid. 264, 287.

34. Hunter 106-10.

35. Frederica Matthewes-Green, "Pro-Woman, Pro-Child, Pro-Choice," paper delivered at the Fourth Annual UFL Conference held at Fordham University, June 3, 1994.

36. Hunter 118.

37. Ibid. 119.

38. Hunter 79.

39. David Mall, "The Catholic Church and Abortion: Persuading through Public Relations" in Mall (cited in n.1 above) 107-56. See also Mall's *In Good Conscience: Abortion and Moral Necessity* (Libertyville, IL: Kairos 1982).

40. Ibid.; Wanda Franz, "Abortion through the Eyes of the Beholder: A Cognitive Analysis" in Mall (cited in n.1 above) 287-300.

i.

ii.

iii. Dr. and Mrs. J. C. Willke, Handbook on Abortion (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hiltz Publishing Company, 1971). Eight reprintings, some with revisions, had appeared within twelve months of the initial publication.

iv. Life Cycle Books began as a bookstore and took the first steps to becoming a publisher in 1975. By the mid 1980's the majority of its business was coming from the United States. Interview with Paul Broughton, July 15, 1994.

v. "Questions and Answers on Abortion", Virginia Society for Human Life (Richmond, Virginia). The pamphlet is found in the records of the National Right to Life Committee held by the United States Catholic Conference, Box 89-14, along with a Dec. 18, 1967 press release by the VSHL.

vi. Russell B. Shaw, Abortion on Trial, (Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Press, 1968).

vii. Charles Rice, The Vanishing Right to Live: An Appeal for a Renewed Reverence for Life (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 28.

viii. Rice, Vanishing Right to Life 43.

ix. Germain Grisez, Abortion: the Myths, the Realities, and the Arguments (New York: Corpus Books, 1970).

x. Grisez, 464, 465. For a volume with a similar approach see Thomas W. Hilgers and Dennis J. Horan, eds., Abortion and Social Justice, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1972).

xi. For a discussion of differing Catholic approaches to the abortion question see Mary Jo Neitz "Family, State and God: Ideologies of the Right-to-Life Movement" Sociological Analysis, 42(3), 1981, 265-276 and Michael Cuneo Catholics Against The Church: Anti-Abortion Protest in Toronto, 1969-1985 (Toronto:

University of Toronto Press, 1989).

xii. For other examples of this approach see K.O. Whitehead, Respectable Killing (New Rochelle, New York: Catholics United for the Faith, 1972) and John T. Noonan, ed., The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

xiii. Dr. and Mrs. J.C. Willke, How to Teach the Pro-Life Story, (Cincinnati: Hiltz and Hayes, 1971).

xiv. Willke, How to Teach, 18-19.

xv. Willke, How to Teach, 29.

xvi. Willke, Handbook, (8th Printing, Revised, May 1972), 126.

xvii. Clifford E. Bajema, Abortion and the Meaning of Personhood, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1974), 28.

xviii. James Davison Hunter, American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 88.

xix. John Murray Cuddihy, No Offence: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

xx. C. Everett Koop, The Right to Live, The Right to Die, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1976), 19, 20.

xxi. Koop, Right to Live, p.26. A similar approach could be found in Harold O.J. Brown's Death Before Birth, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977). What is distinctive in Brown is a sharp reminder to the reader of the need for personal activity to oppose abortion. "A principle part of the witness Christ requires of us may be designated as martyr-witness" (159). He warned of Divine retribution should Americans fail to act: "in the United States, we the people are the authority. Therefore it is we, not a king or emperor, who will have to answer to God for the justice of our institutions" (163). See also Donald Shoemaker, Abortion, the Bible



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xxiii. John O. Anderson, Cry of the Innocents: Abortion and the Race Towards Judgment (South Plainfield, N.J.: Bridge Publishing, 1984), 93.

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xxv. Andrew H. Merton, Enemies of Choice: The Right to Life Movement and Its Threat to Abortion (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981), 78.

xxvi. Time March 25, 1985, 62.

xxvii. The strip was reprinted in MS (November, 1985) and The New Republic (June 10, 1985).

xxviii. Newsweek, February 2, 1987, 32.

xxix. Condit, Decoding, 79.

xxx. Condit, Decoding, 79, 81, 91.

xxxi. Condit, Decoding, 91.

xxxii. Petchesky, "Fetal Images", 281.

xxxiii. Petchesky, "Fetal Images", 264, 287.

xxxiv. Hunter, Before the Shooting Begins, 106-110.

xxxv. Frederica Matthewes-Green "Pro-Woman, Pro-Child, Pro-Choice" paper delivered at the Fourth Annual Conference of University Faculty for Life, June 3, 1994, Fordham University.

xxxvi. Hunter, Before, p.118.

xxxvii. Hunter, Before, p.119.

xxxviii. Hunter, Before the Shooting Begins, p. 79.

xxxix. David Mall "The Catholic Church and Abortion: Persuading through Public Relations" in Mall, ed., To Set the Dawn Free, 107-156.

xl. Mall, "The Catholic Church and Abortion"; Wanda Franz, "Abortion through the Eyes of the Beholder: Acognitize Analysis" in Mall, To Set the Dawn Free, 287-300.