

CHAPTER ONE

FOCUSING ON WOMEN

The traditional framing of the abortion debate is based on the view that the rights of the unborn child are in conflict with the rights of the pregnant woman. But in fact, the rights of the mother and the rights of her unborn child are not in conflict—and in upholding the rights of both, we can create a society that is both pro-woman and pro-life.

In at least a few cases, the traditional adversarial position has led some pro-lifers to focus almost exclusively on the rights of the unborn child. A few even believe any effort to focus public attention on the physical and emotional consequences of abortion on women undercuts the moral high ground of opposing abortion simply because all human life is sacred.

Unfortunately, there are more than a few anti-abortionists who have very little sympathy for women who suffer problems after abortion. Some have even expressed their disdain for women injured by abortion with comments such as, “They deserve what they get.”

Less punitive pro-lifers are simply idealists. They want to believe that somehow, with just a better education program, or a more articulate argument, we will be able to awaken America to the moral superiority of our position. To advance this moral argument, evidence of fetal development is relevant but evidence of physical and psychological harm to women is not.

As this chapter will show, the pro-woman approach is not only consistent with the pro-life moral imperative, it is in fact a fuller and more complete expression of it.

THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS

We begin with a very simple observation. In God’s ordering of creation, it is only the mother who can nurture her unborn child. All that the rest of us can do, then, is to nurture the mother. To help a child, we must help the child’s mother.

There is nothing startling about this observation. Crisis pregnancy centers have known this truth, and have been living it out, for decades. But we must explore this insight more deeply to understand all that it can teach us.

God has created a connection between a mother and her children that is so deeply personal and intimate that the welfare of each is dependent

on the other. As every mother knows from personal experience, this interdependence is for both good and ill. When a mother's children are joyful, their joy lifts her heart. When they are troubled by sorrow, their sorrows weigh on her as well. But in sum, one cannot help an unborn child without helping the mother; one cannot hurt an unborn child without hurting the mother.

This is why, from a natural law perspective, we know that abortion is inherently harmful to women. One does not need to be a "biased" pro-life Christian to see this truth. Consider the testimony of Dr. Julius Fogel, a psychiatrist and obstetrician who personally performed more than 20,000 abortions. According to Dr. Fogel:

Every woman—whatever her age, background or sexuality—has a trauma at destroying a pregnancy. A level of humanness is touched. This is a part of her own life. When she destroys a pregnancy, she is destroying herself. There is no way it can be innocuous. One is dealing with the life force. It is totally beside the point whether or not you think a life is there. You cannot deny that something is being created and that this creation is physically happening.... Often the trauma may sink into the unconscious and never surface in the woman's lifetime. But it is not as harmless and casual an event as many in the pro-abortion crowd insist. A psychological price is paid. It may be alienation; it may be a pushing away from human warmth, perhaps a hardening of the maternal instinct. Something happens on the deeper levels of a woman's consciousness when she destroys a pregnancy. I know that as a psychiatrist.¹

If there is a single principle, then, which lies at the heart of the pro-woman/pro-life agenda, it would have to be this: The best interests of the child and the mother are always joined.

This is true even if the mother does not initially realize it, or if those around her are denying this bond and pushing her toward an unwanted abortion. Thus, the only way that we can help either the mother or her child is to help both. Conversely, if we hurt either, we hurt both.

This is not an optional truth. It reflects God's ordering of creation. This principle is so important that I must repeat it again: Only the mother can nurture her unborn child. All that the rest of us can do is to support and protect the authentic rights of the mother—rights that are exploited and abused by abortion—both for herself and so that she will be empowered to protect her child.

Research shows that most abortions are unwanted or coerced, and that many (if not most) women who have abortions would have carried to term if they had the necessary resources and support to do so. If we help women, then, we will also be helping their unborn children. Conversely, we can never hope to succeed in our efforts to protect the rights of the unborn without first and foremost protecting the true rights of women. Brute-force bans on abortion will not create a pro-life society.

But helping mothers through an aggressive defense of women's legitimate rights will.

It is in this very same sense that the late Pope John Paul II insisted that it is necessary for those who oppose abortion to become "courageously 'pro-woman,' promoting a choice that is truly in favor of women. It is precisely the woman, in fact, who pays the highest price, not only for her motherhood, but even more for its destruction, for the suppression of the life of the child who has been conceived. The only honest stance ... is that of radical solidarity with the woman."

LEARNING OUR LESSONS, TOO

Many pro-lifers scratch their heads in confusion, wondering, "How can God have allowed this to go on so long?" So many millions have died of unborn children have died, and so many women, men and families have been harmed. Yet we seem no closer to changing the situation than we were decades ago. How can God allow this to continue?"

This is an important question. As Christians, we believe that from every evil happening, God can resurrect something good—at the very least, the healing of hearts and relationships, and often much more. And because the onslaught of abortion is so terrible, we must pray with hope that there is an awful lot of good which God intends to resurrect from this great evil. Greater respect for the unborn and for the rights and dignity of expectant parents, and for the sanctity of life is one lesson which our society is certainly intended to learn. But it is by no means the only lesson we are meant to learn.

COMPASSION FOR THOSE FACING CRISIS PREGNANCIES

Pro-lifers have clearly done a tremendous job in the last several decades to offer support for those who are facing unplanned or difficult pregnancies, and for those who do not the support of a partner. But there is much more that must be done. Churches, families, friends, and employers must make even greater efforts to be supportive of every pregnant woman or single parent, no matter how the child was conceived.

There is no denying the fact that, in previous decades, righteous and judgmental Christians often discriminated against and shamed women who were pregnant out-of-wedlock. And it is equally true that this condemning attitude ended up causing some women to have abortions or led those around them to insist they abort. For this, we too share in the guilt of abortion.

If we are to be truly Christian, we must strive to live by and promote

the principle that every pregnancy, every birth, is a gift from God. No matter how the pregnancy occurred, no matter what the physical gifts or disabilities of the child, every child is a blessing from God, an opportunity and challenge to follow Him in the way of love. When this gift is received those who are not yet prepared to be parents because of their youth, the unstable situation in their lives, lack of marriage, or another reason, it can offer a tremendous opportunity for growth, love and self-sacrifice. Becoming pregnant should not be seen as a “punishment” for irresponsible or sinful behavior, but as a chance to change one’s life and start anew

As a Christian community, we must cherish life and charitably invite others to seek God’s will in their lives. To do this, we must believe that every child is a gift from God and emphatically spread this message. Therefore, the birth of every child should be an occasion of joy, not of shame.

While some churches may fear that welcoming an out-of-wedlock pregnancy will encourage sinful or irresponsible behavior, we should remind our flock that having sex outside of marriage is not the greatest of sins, much less an unforgivable one. Embarrassed young people announcing a pregnancy do not need to be shamed and condemned, but supported in their efforts to take responsibility for the situation and discern God’s will for their lives. They need to know that we, their families, their church, and their society, want to continue to help them along that path, over which we too must struggle.

During the last several decades, Christians have truly come a long way in learning this first lesson. Concern for the unborn who are threatened by abortion has no doubt played a role in teaching this lesson. Nonetheless, the witnessing work of our many crisis pregnancy centers and the compassion of so many parents toward their single mother/daughters are evidence that this lesson is being learned.

Let us pray that it is never forgotten.

COMPASSION FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HAD ABORTIONS

Many good-hearted people continue to react with quick judgements or even horror toward anyone who has been involved in an abortion. They may condemn the person involved and wonder silently or out loud how anyone could do such a thing. Those who react in this way usually do not know that most abortions are unwanted or coerced. They may not understand the level of pressure or coercion or the frequent lack of viable options for those who are pregnant in a difficult situation, or when those around them think they should not be pregnant. While this does not make abortion right, this knowledge can help people to

better understand and offer compassion for those who have been involved in an abortion.

This is such an important lesson that it is worth repeating: *most abortions are unwanted or coerced*. Many are forced. In a survey of American women who underwent abortions, 64 reported that they were pressured to abort by others. Many abortions are primarily the result of lack of support, pressure, emotional blackmail, coercion, or threats from boyfriends, husbands, parents, employers, doctors, counselors or other people with influence over women's lives.

Polls show that up to 70 percent of women having abortions have moral qualms about abortion, yet end up aborting anyway because they feel they have no other options. Lack of information about options and risks can act coercively on such women.⁴ Yet the above mentioned survey of American women found that more than 80 percent said they did not receive adequate counseling before abortion (67 percent said they received no counseling), even though more than half said they felt rushed or uncertain about the decision.

Further, making abortion easily available has also made it easy for others to pressure or even force women and girls into unwanted abortions. If given real support, options, and resources to have their children, the vast majority of women having abortions would continue the pregnancy. Instead of receiving support, however, many find that they are pushed, coerced, lied to, or threatened until they undergo an abortion. In some cases, women have been assaulted and even murdered by their partners for refusing to have abortions—homicide is the leading cause of death among pregnant women.

Raising awareness of these issues and resisting this exploitation and abuse of women is an act of justice toward women—and to their partners who may also be victims of coercion.

For pro-lifers who are primarily concerned with protecting the lives of unborn children, it is important to recognize that protecting the rights of women facing exploitation or abuse is a moral imperative both for the women themselves. Further, we can never hope to end abortion without protecting the rights of women and empowering them to protect the lives of their unborn children.

While this chapter is entitled "Focusing on Women," it is important to realize that men may also be victims of coerced and unwanted abortions. The abortion may take place without their knowledge or their efforts to support their partner and unborn child may be dismissed or ignored by others who think abortion is the best solution. In the United States, men have no legal say over the fate of their unborn child. While some believe that abortion should be left to the decision of the woman alone, this does not stop men from being hurt or traumatized by their

involvement in an abortion.

Hearing the personal stories of women and men who have been involved in a past abortion, or working along side those who have experienced abortion, has helped to increase the understanding of pro-lifers. Understanding that anyone can be vulnerable to the injustice and exploitation fostered by abortion is the basis for offering real support and compassion to those hurt by abortion. Over the past several decades, this understanding has finally established a firm foothold within the pro-life movement, but it is still far from being universal all pro-lifers or Christians in general.

This issue, too, will be discussed at length in the following chapters. Let it suffice for now to say that Christians must refrain from condemning and judging the women and men who have been involved in abortions. To do so is not only wrong in and of itself, but it may also drive them into isolation and despair. Instead, we must treat them with the love, dignity and compassion that is the right of each human person. More, we must be willing to offer more than words of support—we must be willing to walk with them on their journey.

REACHING THE MIDDLE MAJORITY

The “middle majority” of Americans believes that abortion is wrong, but they also believe that it should be legal, at least in some cases. There are many things that can be said about this mindset, but for now it is enough to say that they are uneasy pragmatists. While they firmly believe that abortion is the killing of a human being, they also believe it is sometimes necessary and almost always beneficial to the woman.

This discomfort has sometimes made people seem resistant to efforts by pro-lifers to educate them about the humanity of the unborn child. While technological advances that allow a “window to the womb” and the efforts of pro-lifers have made inroads in this area (polls show that many people, including women, have a more pro-life attitude about abortion than in years past), many who are uncomfortable with the idea of abortion are still unwilling to “deny” abortions to women who may want or need them.

There are two ways to address this issue. First, evidence that most abortions are unwanted and coerced, that it leaves women and their loved ones vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and that abortion has left many people traumatized and hurting, will help people rethink their position on abortion.

Second, allowing those who have lost a child to abortion the opportunity to grieve will not only help those who are hurting, but it will also help open the eyes of others to the humanity of the unborn child.

Wherever facts of fetal biology will not change hearts, the pain of those who have lost children to abortion can do so: "It was my baby who died that day!"

In this very real way, the issue of the unborn child's human rights is not replaced by a focus on post-abortion issues; it is subsumed into it. Leaving aside the exploitation and abuse experienced by so many, it is the humanity of their lost unborn child that makes abortion such a painful issue for so many mothers and fathers.

Thus, the best thing for us who have not had abortions to do is to give women and men who have experienced abortion an opportunity to grieve and to speak of their loss. Not only will this help those who are suffering, but it will also forward our efforts to create a society in which no mother or father feels compelled to undergo an abortion. This does not leave the unborn voiceless; rather, it offers their parents a chance to be heard and to speak for their unborn children.

Let me be clear, however. This effort is not about using those who have experienced abortion to promote our own agenda. Nor am I saying that appeals on behalf of the unborn child are ineffective. Rather, it is about recognizing that we all share the same concerns as those who have experienced abortion, showing our support, and allowing those who can best speak for their children the chance to do so.

A PRO-WOMAN/PRO-LIFE PERSPECTIVE

In a very real sense, this pro-woman/pro-life perspective offers a path by which our society can emerge from a "culture of death"—a culture that sacrifices the lives of unborn children and causes great harm to all those touched by the experience—toward a "culture of life" in which both unborn children and their mothers (not to mention their fathers and families) are treated with dignity and respect. It is a process which follows the reverse path of the pro-abortion movement.

The pro-abortion movement was born from a social vision which separated the mother's interests from her unborn baby's. If their interests are separate, then there is a potential conflict between the woman's rights and her unborn child's rights, and only one of them can prevail.

We cannot accept any part of this reasoning. We must reject every ideology which frames the abortion issue in terms of a mother versus her child. We are both pro-woman *and* pro-child.

We believe that we can and should help both the mother and her child. We believe that the legalization of abortion was not an advance for women's rights, but an advance for social engineers and others who are exploiting women and men in times of personal crisis.

SUMMARY

The pro-woman/pro-life approach to the abortion issue places defense of women's rights at the center of our national debate. It is pro-woman because it recognizes that fact that harming the unborn child harms the mother. And it is pro-life (in the sense of being "pro- unborn child") because it recognizes the fact the only way to help the unborn child is to help the mother. Defending the authentic rights of women is necessary if we are to call ourselves followers of God.

This focus also acknowledges abortion's destructive affect on men and other family members, and will promote the father's ability and role in supporting his partner and their unborn child.

By giving those who are hurting because of a past abortion a voice, we are acting rightly to recognize and help heal their pain and trauma. We are also giving those who are best able to do so the chance to speak on behalf of their children. In this sense, we are not ignoring the unborn. We are instead recognizing the concerns we share with their parents that these children be acknowledged and grieved, and to help support other unborn children and their parents.

This pro-woman/pro-life perspective is offers a path for our society from a "culture of death" that sees the right of the child and the rights of the mother in conflict, toward a culture of life in which both the mother and the unborn child (and the fathers and families) are treated with dignity and respect.

None of what I have presented in this chapter is novel, as is demonstrated by a letter which Dr. O.E. Worcester wrote to the Journal of the American Medical Association over 100 years ago. Dr. Worcester wrote to complain against her male colleagues who treated women who were pregnant out-of-wedlock with great disrespect. When a colleague asked her to help perform abortions, she refused, saying, "I loved woman too well to help her add murder to her other sin. If mother love and the touch of baby fingers did not save her to God and womanhood, nothing could. That it could, I had proof in many cases where forsaken mothers had, in spite of all, carved for themselves and their fatherless children an honorable place in the world."

Dr. Worcester concluded her reprimand of her colleagues with a pointed condemnation of misogynist abortionists, an appeal to the inseparability of woman and child, and a plea for true compassion:

I have never seen cause to hold the male element less responsible for the slaughter of the innocents than in the days of Herod. Then, as now, men seem to fear the coming of Christ born of woman....

This is my plea: "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder," in the medical profession or elsewhere.

Let men and women join forces under the banner of Him who said: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," and also: "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more."

Let us join forces all along the line, and fight this hydraheaded monster to the death and save our nation.⁷

To this plea I can add only one word: Amen.

NOTES

1. Colman McCarthy "A Psychological View of Abortion," St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press, March 7, 1971. Dr. Fogel, who did 20,000 abortions over the subsequent decades, reiterated the same view in a second interview with McCarthy in 1989, in which he disagreed with the Koop report. "The Real Anguish of Abortions," The Washington Post, Feb. 5,

2. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 207.

3. VM Rue et. al., "Induced abortion and traumatic stress: A preliminary comparison of American and Russian women," *Medical Science Monitor* 10(10): SR5-16, 2004.

Los Angeles Times Poll, March 19, 1989. See also MK Zimmerman, *Passage Through Abortion* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1977) and DC Reardon, *Aborted Women, Silent No More* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002).

5. I.L. Horton and D. Cheng, "Enhanced Surveillance for Pregnancy-Associated Mortality-Maryland, 1993-1998," *JAMA* (2001); see also J. Mcfarlane et. al., "Abuse During Pregnancy and Femicide: Urgent Implications for Women's Health," *Obstetrics & Gynecology*

6. See DC Reardon, *Making Abortion Rare: A Healing Strategy for A Divided Nation* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2009).

7. O.E. Worcester, M.D., "From A Woman Physician: An Open Letter to Dr. W.W. Parker," *JAMA* 22:599, 1894, reprinted in "JAMA 100 Years Ago," *JAMA* 271(15), April 20, 1994.