



FALL 2013

LIFE MATTERS JOURNAL VOLUME 3 - ISSUE 1

our worth

is not based on

CIRCUMSTANCES

but in our shared

humanity



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	<i>Thing or Two</i>

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& MORE...

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars, that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, half-way attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called "Left" or "Right", and instead embrace a consistent life ethic toward *all* victims of violence.

We are Life Matters Journal, and we're here to defang the viper that is legalized homicide.

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cover art: "Humanity, Not Circumstances" by Aimee Murphy

LIFE MATTERS JOURNAL

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INTRODUCTION - LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers, supporters, and friends,

Life is changing so quickly in my house -- all due to lines and bumps and growing as a family. Unfortunately, the lines are not two little pink ones on a test, but state lines, as we look to move to Pennsylvania. The bumps are the immense bumps in the road we've discovered with medical difficulties and trials and learning to cope. Our growing as a family is me and my husband clinging to each other and our convictions amidst trials and growing together in our marriage. But I've had to learn something through this trial that I hadn't really learned before. At least, not well.

To begin, I want to lay out just a handful of the circumstances of my life: I have a history of anxiety and depression. I've made mistakes and screwed up and was a "promiscuous" teenager. I have infertility and may never be a mother. I struggled through college. I am Catholic. I am Latina. I am a woman with same-sex attraction. I am not altogether healthy.

I used to take these things and tie my worth to them. Or rather, because I had so many of these circumstances build up over time, I considered myself less worthwhile. I would berate myself and hate myself and want to give up on life.

But through my time working with Life Matters Journal, I have tried to take what we tout as a more perfect ethics to heart. I have tried to look myself in the mirror each morning and say "You are beautiful, you are loved, you are worthwhile. You are beautiful because you exist. You are loved immensely by [insert various names here]. You are worthwhile simply because you are a human being."

Because the truth is, we are not the sum of our circumstances and events that have transpired in our life, whether we had full agency and culpability then or not. Whether we are guilty of some grave crime or innocent of anything major, or whether we are the tiniest zygote or the tallest man, or whether we are the most disabled woman in a vegetative state or the picture of perfect health, [or anything else that could be used to "define" us other than "human being"], those circumstances all lie on some arbitrary scale of worth. Our worth is not derived from circumstances like innocence, size, or health, but lies in our shared human nature.

I am really excited for the next year and what Volume 3 has to offer. Please join us at the Peace & ALL Life Meetup at the March for Life, and we hope to see you in the coming year!

For peace and all life,



Aimee Murphy
Executive Editor

Have a letter for the editors here at Life Matters Journal? Please write us at info@lifemattersjournal.org to let us know what you think.

Just put in the subject line "Letter" and we will post it in our next issue along with our responses.

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CURRENT EVENTS AND CONSISTENT LIFE

NORTH DAKOTA'S PRO-LIFE LAWS

by Lauren Enriquez

Why would a heartbeat not be considered life? It makes so much sense. These are the simple words of Rep. Bette Grande (R-Fargo), a North Dakota legislator who aligns common sense with legislation. This combination of logic and law tends to be avoided by the pro-abortion counterpart, as a quote from Elissa Berger of the ACLU attests: *[W]e should be able to agree that this personal decision is best made by a woman and her family, not politicians.*

This overused soundbite from the abortion lobby affirms the disconnect between common sense and legislation: does abortion affect one life or two? Two. So shouldn't the abortion decision take into consideration both of the lives affected by it?

As a result of the hard work of commonsense legislators like Rep. Grande, North Dakota has installed



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legislation that protects pre-born children whose fetal heartbeat can be detected. This means that the right to life of pre-born children as young as – wait for it – *five or six weeks’ gestation* are now protected by North Dakota state law.

There is still work to be done, of course: pro-lifers won’t rest until all life is protected by law. But this breakthrough in North Dakota is certainly laudable progress, and it may serve as a catalyst for the more stringent laws needed to protect life beginning at fertilization.

As if this were not cause enough for celebration, North Dakota’s heartbeat legislation passed in the Senate on Friday alongside *another* phenomenal bill that will add unprecedented protections to genetically unique pre-born children, such as those with Down syndrome. The bill, also sponsored by Rep. Grande, is similar to bans on sex-selection abortion. It prevents pre-born children from receiving a death sentence based solely on an undesirable abnormality.

Rep. Grande does not mince words when addressing the rekindled phenomenon of eliminating genetically “abnormal” children arbitrarily. In a poignant but accurate comparison, she observed:

It takes you back to Hitler, and we know where that went. He started going after those with abnormalities, and I think it’s an absurdity we would go back to that kind of thing.

These two piece of legislation will make their last stop at Governor Dalrymple’s desk. The leader has indicated that he will sign the bills into law. We hope and pray for that day, and we applaud North Dakota for its daring efforts in the face of opposition.

This piece was originally published on LiveAction’s blog and is published here with permissions from the author.

CHOICE: TEXAS: A VIDEO GAME ABOUT ABORTION *by Cassy Fiano*

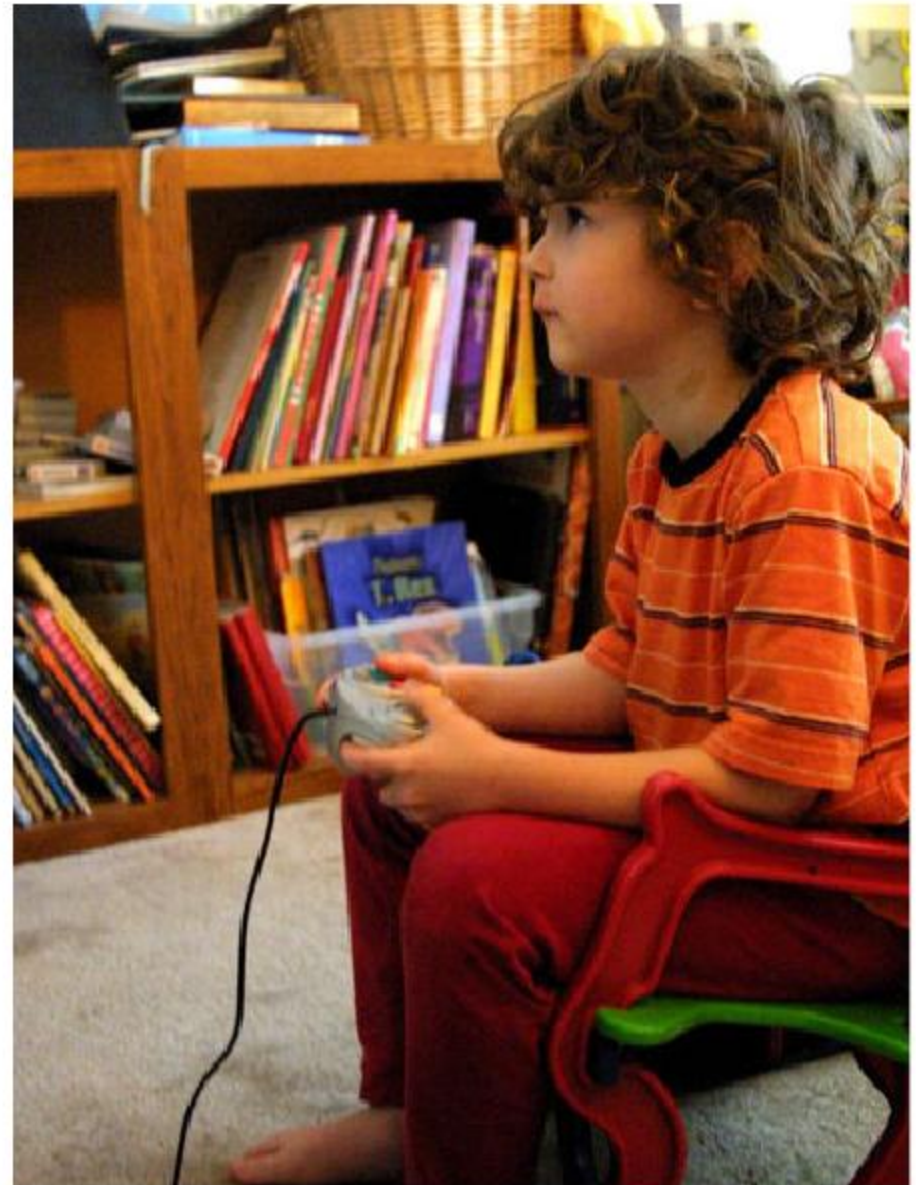


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Abortion advocates were outraged when Texas legislators decided to advance a law restricting abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy and ensuring that clinics could not be turned into Gosnell-esque butcher shops. Calling it “Battleground Texas,” they descended onto the state in droves, led by the likes of Cecile Richards and Planned Parenthood. They managed to interrupt the democratic process by shouting down the vote. Governor Rick Perry called a special session, though, and the bill was ultimately passed.

In response to the bill’s passage, two pro-abortion women had an idea to show the world how terrible the new law would be for women. Carly Kocurek

PTSD & MILITARY SUICIDES

by Benjamin Wirtz

and Allyson Whipple decided to design a video game called *Choice: Texas*, because abortion makes for terrific entertainment, or something. The game, which Whipple and Kocurek are currently still developing, would feature different women in different scenarios who would have to navigate the restrictions in Texas in order to show just how difficult it is to get an abortion there. The restrictions that Whipple and Kocurek are so outraged over include the newly passed law, which requires that clinics be clean, safe, and well-regulated and outlaws abortion after 20 weeks. They're also upset over things such as parental consent laws, mandatory waiting periods, and ultrasounds before abortions.

Choice: Texas will allow players to act out scenarios such as being a pregnant high school student, a married mother struggling to make ends meet, or a 19-year-old bartender who lives with her parents, all of whom "need" an abortion. And, in an insane show of moral gymnastics, it's abortion that is the hero of the game. Video games usually feature heroic characters battling villains in order to save lives; this game is the exact opposite. This video game has abortionists as the heroes, gallantly saving the day by taking innocent lives. Will these women in crisis pregnancies also be given the option of resources to keep their children--or worse, put them up for adoption, the ultimate pro-abortion sin?

In reality, abortion isn't a game, and it can have disastrous and long-term consequences for women who choose it. But *Choice: Texas* is trivializing abortion and its consequences, through a video game glorifying a decision that involves killing a child for personal convenience.



photo by Beverly & Pack, some rights reserved.

There has been an increase in suicides of military personnel in recent years. It has become quite a major issue. In fact, more veterans die from suicide than combat. Some statistics say that it is at least 22 per day who have taken their own lives and the number could in fact be even higher than that. [1] The big question is, why is this happening? The most frequently attributed explanation to the problem is posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD for short. i ii [2] [3] The condition has actually been known by several names at various times, "shell shock" was another common name it used to go by. Earlier this year the actor Patrick Stewart has described his father's struggle with it as a veteran and how it lead him to be a abusive; in that case it manifested itself as a problem to his family and was made worse by the fact that no one believed it. iii iv [4] [5] These veterans are not getting the help they need. They come back and are so often ignored. The root of the problem though is that we have been sending them so many places and even over deploying them. In fact, sending them to wars that we should never have gotten involved in in the

first place is where it really starts.

However, PTSD may not be the only issue. For one thing, not all suicides were from combat experience. There are a number of factors to consider such as age. Most of the military suicides are under the age of 30 and that age range has a higher level of suicide in general. Couple this with the fact that life in the military is stressful even without being involved in active combat and you have yourself some real problems if not dealt with properly. There are so many factors to consider that it could complicate the issue. [6] The best solution, however, would be to reduce the likelihood that they would be put in such a situation to begin with. Preventing the tendency toward suicide starts with preventing the underlying issue and that is the real key.

The overall point is that these veterans have been badly neglected and need psychological attention when the signs start to manifest. Part of the problem is an issue of social stigma for the soldier, as seeking help can be seen as a sign of weakness to their peers.


While the military has been trying to change this attitude, old habits die hard. The culture needs to change to a more caring and understanding environment. The civilian and military culture needs to become more understanding. It's not an issue that can necessarily be solved easily but when all the factors are considered it may help to find a way to reduce this horrible trend. This trend also reflects yet another negative effect of our foreign interventions. Our military does serve a necessary purpose for defense, but the wars of the past few decades have gone beyond defense. So perhaps, if we weren't so involved in foreign wars, we wouldn't have quite the suicide epidemic that we have now. We should have less intervention overseas and more compassion for those at home who need it the most.

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ESSAYS

SUPPORTING NON-VIOLENCE IN SYRIA

by Stephen Zunes

The worsening violence and repression in Syria has left many analysts and policy-makers in the United States and other western countries scrambling to think of ways our governments could help end the bloodshed and support those seeking to dislodge the Assad regime. The desperate desire to “do something” has led a growing number of people to advocate for increased military aid to armed insurgents or even direct military intervention, as the French government has said it will consider doing unilaterally.

While understandable, to support the armed opposition would likely exacerbate the Syrian people’s suffering and appear to validate the tragic miscalculation by parts of the Syrian opposition to supplant their bold and impressive nonviolent civil insurrection with an armed insurgency.

The Assad regime proved itself to be utterly ruthless in its suppression of the nonviolent pro-democracy struggle in 2011. However, it is important to stress that this ruthlessness was not the primary reason the movement failed to generate sufficient momentum to oust Bashar al-Assad.



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From apartheid South Africa to Suharto's Indonesia to Pinochet's Chile, extremely repressive regimes have been brought down through largely nonviolent civil insurrections. In some cases, as with Marcos in the Philippines, Honnecker in East Germany, and Ben Ali in Tunisia, dictators have ordered their troops to fire into crowds of many thousands of people, only to have their soldiers refuse. In some other countries, such as Iran under the Shah and Mali under General Toure, many hundreds of nonviolent protesters were gunned down, but rather than cower the opposition into submission, they returned in even larger numbers and eventually forced these dictators to step down.

Historically, when a nonviolent movement shifts to violence, it is a result of frustration, anger, or the feeling of hopelessness. Rarely is it done as a clear strategic choice. Indeed, if the opposition movement were organizing its resistance in a strategic way, with a logical sequencing of tactics and a familiarity with the history and dynamics of popular unarmed civil insurrection, they would recognize that it is usually a devastating mistake to shift to violence. Rather than hasten the downfall of the dictator, successful armed revolutions have historically taken more than eight years to defeat a regime, while unarmed civil insurrections have averaged around two years before victory. Unfortunately, the fragmentation of Syrian civil society combined with the hardness of the security apparatus has made it challenging to maintain a resilient movement. Whether a movement is violent or nonviolent, improvisation is not enough when dealing with a regime that readily instills fears as in Syria.

Indeed, the failure of the opposition movement to overthrow the regime in its initial months, when it was primarily nonviolent, does not prove that nonviolence "doesn't work" any more than the failure of a violent movement to overthrow a regime subsequently proves that violence "doesn't work." Whether or not a movement is primarily violent or nonviolent, what is important is whether it employs strategies and tactics that can maximize its chances of success.

Another factor is that, unlike the Ben Ali regime in

Tunisia, the Mubarak regime in Egypt, the Saleh regime in Yemen, or the Qaddafi regime in Libya, Syria is not a case of a regime whose power rests in the hands of a single dictator and the relatively small segment of the population that benefits from their association with the dictator. The Syrian regime still has a social base. A fairly large minority of Syrians -- consisting of Alawites, Christians and members of other minority communities, Baath Party loyalists and government employees, the professional armed forces and security services, and the (largely Sunni) crony capitalist class that the regime has nurtured -- still cling to the regime. There are certainly dissidents and "latent double thinkers" within all of these sectors. Yet regime loyalists are a large enough segment of the population so that no struggle -- whether violent or nonviolent -- will win without cascading defections.

The Baath Party has ruled Syria for most of the past 50 years, before even the 30-year reign of Assad's father. Military officers and party apparatchiks have developed their own power base. Dictatorships that rest primarily on the power of just one man are generally more vulnerable in the face of popular revolt than are oligarchical systems in which a broader network of elite interests has a stake in the system. Just as the oligarchy which ruled El Salvador in the 1980s proved to be far more resistant to overthrow by a popular armed revolution than the singular rule of Anastasia Somoza in neighboring Nicaragua, it is not surprising that Syria's ruling group has been more resilient relative to the personalist dictatorships toppled in the wave of largely nonviolent insurrections in neighboring Arab countries which climaxed last year.

What this means is that, whatever the method of struggle in Syria, it was always likely to have been a protracted one. Armed struggle is not a quick fix. Whether a popular struggle against an autocratic regime succeeds depends not on the popularity of the cause or even the repression of state security forces, but on whether those engaged in resistance understand the basis of the real power of the regime and develop a strategy that can neutralize its strengths and exploit its vulnerabilities.

Nonviolent struggle, like armed struggle, will succeed only if the resistance uses effective strategies and tactics. A guerrilla army cannot expect instant success through a frontal assault on the capital. They know they need to initially engage in small low-risk operations, such as hit and run attacks, and take the time to mobilize their base in peripheral areas before they have a chance of defeating the well-armed military forces of the state. Similarly, it may not make sense for a nonviolent movement to rely primarily on the tactic of massive street demonstrations in the early phases of a movement, but diversify their tactics, understand and apply their own strengths, and exploit opportunities to mobilize support and increase the pressure on the regime.

Despite the ruling Baath Party's nominally socialist ideology, the uprising in Syria has a much stronger working-class base than most of the other Arab uprisings. Strikes and boycotts have been used only sporadically in Syria, but they have been enough to demonstrate the potential of undermining the loyalty of the crony capitalists who benefit from their close relationship to the regime. Indeed, this is what proved to be decisive in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. For a revolution against a heavily armed and deeply entrenched dictator to succeed, the opposition movement needs to mobilize a large percentage of the population on its side, as took place in Tunisia and Egypt. The Syrian resistance needs to act in ways to make the regime come across as illegitimate and traitorous, while making itself look virtuous and patriotic.

There is little question that the Assad regime feared the ability of the nonviolent opposition to neutralize the power of the state through the power of civil resistance more than it has armed groups that are attacking state power where it is strongest -- through the force of arms. They recognized that an armed resistance would reinforce the regime's unity and divide the opposition. That is why the regime has so consistently tried to provoke the pro-democracy forces into violence. It claimed that the opposition was composed of terrorists and armed thugs even during the early months of the struggle, when it was almost completely



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nonviolent, recognizing that the Syrian people were far more likely to support a regime challenged by an armed insurgency than through a largely nonviolent civil insurrection.

Encouraging defections from the government's side is essential. Defections by security forces -- critically important in ousting a military-backed regime -- are far more likely when they are ordered to gun down unarmed protesters than when they are being shot at. Defection, however, is rarely a physical act of soldiers spontaneously throwing down their arms, crossing the battlefield and joining the other side. Not everyone can do that. Sometimes defections come in the form of bureaucrats or officers degrading the effectiveness of the regime through quiet acts of noncooperation, such as failing to carry out orders, causing key paperwork to disappear, deleting computer files, or leaking information to the other side.

In turning to armed resistance, what was once a political struggle becomes an existential struggle, and therefore more difficult to win people to your side. One's loyalty to the regime may depend in large part on how they perceive the alternative. They need to decide whether the goal of the opposition is to create an inclusive Syria in which all political factions and sectarian communities will play a part or whether they instead simply seek to destroy their perceived opponents. The chances of bringing down Assad will be

greatly enhanced if Syrians are forced to choose not between two savage forces, but between a repressive regime and more inclusive representative movement.

An unarmed civil insurrection which resists the temptation to fight back with violence gives those who may be in a position to defect real hope that they would be welcomed in joining the opposition in building a more democratic and pluralistic system in which they could have a part. By contrast, facing an armed movement -- particularly one which has engaged in acts of terrorism and targets minority communities and other alleged supporters of the government -- gives rise to fears that they will be persecuted or even executed if the opposition wins, and will therefore fight even harder. In short, armed struggle hardens rather than weakens the resolve and unity of repressive regimes.

The most critical limitation of armed struggle is that its occurrence can significantly decrease the number of participants in a movement or popular opposition since most citizens are unwilling to put their own lives at risk. Another significant limitation is that armed struggle plays to the strength of an authoritarian regime, which commands the arena of military force. When the armed wing of the insurgency initially came to predominate in Syria toward the end of 2011, there was still a fair amount of nonviolent resistance as well. As late as April 12, the initial day of the United Nations-brokered cease-fire (and the only day it effectively held), the largest demonstrations since before the launch of the armed struggle happened. However, armed opposition elements feared the cease-fire might simply give the regime time to stall, enact some reforms, and reinforce its standing, and immediately resume fighting. This gave the regime the excuse to engage in some of the worst massacres to date and the cease-fire completely collapsed.

As the New York Times noted, "The Assad regime probably likes the fact that the opposition has embraced armed struggle. This solidifies its support among its core constituency -- the Alawites, who represent about 10 percent of the population-- as well as other minorities ... The regime can argue it has to hit back hard, otherwise it will be massacred."

Indeed, when the regime in the early months of the struggle last year insisted that the diverse, peaceful pro-democracy protesters were "terrorists," "Islamist extremists," "foreigner-backed," and included "foreign infiltrators," they were appropriately ridiculed, which served to further delegitimize the regime. Since the turn to armed struggle, however, some elements of the resistance do indeed match those descriptions.

When the armed resistance escalated dramatically in 2012 after the failure of the cease-fire late in the spring and into the summer, it proved deleterious to the civil insurrection and dramatically increased the death toll. From May to August, the monthly death toll rose from 1322 to 5039 while the number of Friday demonstrations declined from 834 to 355. Subsequently, the weekly total has been well under 300. Indeed, despite claiming to defend the civilian population from the regime's armed forces, they have only succeeded in fearfully increasing the civilian death toll.

A large fraction of former nonviolent protesters have since embraced the armed struggle and, given the horrific repression the opposition has faced from the brutal regime, it would be difficult for observers in the West to pass moral judgment on individuals who have made that choice. However, for those of us who want to see the Assad regime replaced with a true democratic government, there are plenty of reasons to question that choice on strategic grounds. And there are many Syrians still involved in the nonviolent struggle who agree.

According to pro-democracy activist Haythan Manna, the turn to armed struggle has resulted in the fragmentation of opposition groups and has served to "undermine the broad popular support necessary to transform the uprising into a democratic revolution. It made the integration of competing demands -- rural v. urban, secular v. Islamist, old opposition v. revolutionary youth -- much more difficult." He also noted how the militarization of the resistance has "led to a decline in the mobilization of large segments of the population, especially amongst minorities and those living in the big cities, and in the activists' peaceful

civil movement.” He also notes how the armed struggle has increased the influence of hardline Islamists, noting, “The political discourse has become sectarian; there has been a Salafization of religiously conservative sectors.”

Another problem with armed struggle historically is that it can lead what were independent indigenous movements to become dependent upon foreign powers who supply them with arms, as happened to various popular leftwing nationalist movements in the Global South during the Cold War which ended up embracing Soviet-style Communism and adopting Moscow’s foreign policy prerogatives. While the initial pro-democracy movement explicitly rejected sectarianism, the Wahhabi-led regimes of Saudi Arabia and Qatar saw the challenge to Assad, an Alawite, as a means of breaking the so-called “Shiite crescent” stretching from Iran through Iraq to southern Lebanon. These autocratic Sunni monarchies clearly do not have a democratic agenda, yet -- thanks to the armed struggle -- they have developed significant influence. Gulf-based networks like Wisal and Safapushed the Salafi line that the Syrian revolution should be seen not as a diverse pro-democracy struggle, but part of a global “jihad.”

As a result of all this, there are serious questions as to whether it is appropriate for the United States and other foreign powers to support the armed resistance. Providing military support to a disorganized and fragmented armed resistance movement means more people getting killed; it does not necessarily create a disciplined fighting force capable of defeating a well-armed regime, much less establishing a stable democratic order. Even more problematic would be direct military intervention.

Empirical studies have repeatedly demonstrated that international military interventions in cases of severe repression actually exacerbate violence in the short term and can only reduce violence in the longer term if the intervention is impartial or neutral. For example, the wholesale ethnic cleansing in Kosovo by Serbian forces in 1999 began only after the launching

of NATO air strikes. Other studies demonstrate that foreign military interventions actually increase the duration of civil wars, making the conflicts longer and bloodier, and the regional consequences more serious, than if there were no intervention. In addition, military intervention would likely trigger a “gloves off” mentality that could dramatically escalate the violence on both sides.

There is also the problem that the intentions of Western governments, particularly the United States, are highly suspect in the eyes of the Syrians. U.S. military intervention would simply play into the hands of the regime in Damascus, which has decades of experience manipulating the Syrian people’s strong sense of nationalism to its benefit. The regime can point out that the United States is the world’s primary military supplier to the region’s remaining dictatorships and is using the “promotion of democracy” as an excuse to overthrow a government that happens to oppose Washington’s designs on the region.

And, facing a Syrian political media sphere rooted in Arab nationalism, socialism, and anti-imperialism, Western intervention could unwittingly trigger the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of Syrians -- perhaps even those otherwise opposed to the regime -- to resist foreign invaders. Hundreds of Syrians have quit the Baath party and government positions in protest of the killings of nonviolent protesters, but few defections could be expected if Americans and Europeans attacked their country.

Furthermore, given that there are now heavily-armed Islamist extremists and others involved in the resistance, there is no guarantee that Assad’s overthrow would actually bring peace. U.S. occupation forces in Iraq soon found themselves caught in the middle of a bloody sectarian conflict and quickly learned that some of Saddam’s biggest foes were also quite willing to turn their guns on the “foreign infidels.”

The Obama administration is eager to see the Assad regime fall and the sooner the better. However, it recognizes that foreign intervention in Syria is a far

more complicated proposition than Libya. The population is more than three times bigger and the terrain far more challenging. As a result, the administration recognizes the need to find alternative means of supporting the resistance.

In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, the United States has provided communication equipment and other resources for what remains of the nonviolent opposition. In addition, the State Department's Office of Syrian Opposition Support (OSOS) has served as a point of contact between the international community and various nonviolent opposition networks inside Syria. The Obama administration appears to recognize that this approach -- which has the support of many moderate Syrians and democratic U.S. allies in Europe and elsewhere -- is the most realistic and effective means of supporting the resistance and a utilitarian alternative that avoids the pitfalls of doing nothing in the face of savage repression or becoming a party to horrific and protracted civil war.

Despite this, some critics mistakenly confuse this appropriately cautious approach with isolationism, pacifism, or naiveté. For example, Justin Vela, in an October 10 FP article, condescendingly claims the Obama administration is "fixated on the peaceful activists" and favorably quotes Syrian militants who deride these efforts as "useless." He goes on to dismiss OSOS advice to activists as "civil society workshops," with the implication that they are no different than those supported by the National Endowment for Democracy and other groups supporting middle class liberal constituencies in emerging democracies. In reality, what is being provided is basic information about how to organize and mobilize resistance efforts, which is sorely needed at all levels of the Syrian opposition.

In order for an unarmed civil insurrection to succeed, it is necessary to build a coalition representing broad-segments of society, requiring the kind of compromise and cooperation which can provide the basis for a pluralist democratic order in the future. As a result,

the majority of countries in which dictatorships are overthrown by nonviolent insurrections are able to establish stable democratic institutions and processes within a few years. By contrast, since armed struggles are centered on an elite vanguard with a strict military hierarchy and martial values, these patterns of leadership often continue once rebel military commanders become the new political leaders. Indeed, history has shown that dictatorships overthrown by armed revolutions are far more likely to become new dictatorships. Furthermore, there is also a high correlation with the method of struggle and political stability: countries in which the old regime was toppled through armed struggle are far more likely to experience civil war, coup d'états, and dangerous political volatility subsequently. This may be particularly true in light of the potentially explosive ethnic and sectarian mosaic of Syria.

In sum, opposition to U.S. support for the armed resistance in Syria has nothing to do with indifference, isolationism, or pacifism. Nor is it indicative of being any less horrified by the suffering of the Syrian people or any less desirous of the overthrow of Assad's brutal regime. With so much at stake, however, it is critical to not allow the understandably strong emotional reaction to the ongoing horror or a romanticized attachment to armed revolution serve as a substitute for strategic thinking in our support for and solidarity with the Syrian struggle for freedom.

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RE-THINKING THE DEATH PENALTY: RELIGIOUS & PRO-LIFE LEADERS VOICE SERIOUS QUESTIONS

by Heather Beaudoin

Concern about the death penalty in America is beginning to move through Evangelical and pro-life communities across the country. It's happening at churches in Texas, Florida, and Tennessee, across neighborhoods in Philadelphia, and even around the halls of power in Washington. Christian and pro-life pastors, activists, policymakers, and lobbyists are all expressing considerable doubt about how the death penalty system actually works. They are concerned about the fairness of the system, they have fears about the risk of executing the innocent, and they are coming to terms with capital punishment through their belief in a consistent life ethic.

I know what's happening firsthand, for a couple of reasons. First, as an Evangelical Christian, I hear discussions questioning the death penalty within my own faith community. Second, as a national advocacy coordinator for Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty, I hear these concerns being expressed everywhere I go around the nation. People of faith who believe in a right to life are, more than ever, fully embracing a culture of life, compelled by revelations that innocent people could be executed and the knowledge that hundreds have been freed from prisons due to wrongful convictions.

However, this shift goes beyond matters of faith. It is also being driven by the patent unfairness of the death penalty system. The case of a death row inmate in Texas is a perfect example. Duane Buck was sentenced to death in Houston after his prosecutor extracted testimony from a psychologist during the sentencing hearing that led jurors to believe Buck is more prone to violence because he is black. The same thing happened in five other Texas death penalty cases. The state attorney general at the time, current U.S. Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), acknowledged that reliance on testimony connecting race to dangerousness was unacceptable and vowed to pursue new, fair sentencing hearings in each case. To date, five of the six defendants have received the new hearings: all except for Duane Buck, who awaits execution in the near future unless this wrong is righted.

This type of blatant unfairness, an uneven application of the law, is deeply troubling to an increasing number of Evangelical leaders. The facts in the Buck case and the breakdown in the system that they illustrate have caused a broad mosaic of notable people to step forward to voice their concern. Those calling for a new sentencing hearing in the Buck case, so far, include Shane Claiborne, Christian author, activist, and co-founder of The Simple Way in Philadelphia;

Richard Cizik, President of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good; Joel Hunter, Senior Pastor of Northland, A Church Distributed; Noel Castellanos, Director of the Christian Community Development Association; Chris Seay, Pastor of Ecclesia Houston; and Brian McLaren, Christian author and activist. I know this is their position on the Buck case because each one of them told me personally.

As I indicated, this wave of concern about the death penalty is not limited to Evangelicals who work to protect life: other leading pro-life advocates are equally disturbed. One of the more well-known is activist and author Abby Johnson, who has endorsed the work of Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty. Johnson is widely known as being a former Planned Parenthood clinic director who resigned after witnessing an abortion on an ultrasound. She also had two abortions herself before the birth of her daughter, Grace. Today Abby Johnson is a top strategist with a pro-life organization that works in direct opposition to Planned Parenthood. “My own story is one of redemption,” Johnson said. “I vehemently oppose the death penalty because it perpetuates the illusion that certain individuals are beyond redemption.” Raised a Southern Baptist, a few years ago Johnson became a Roman Catholic. Her religious beliefs and life experiences have shaped her view of capital punishment profoundly. “Regardless of someone’s past actions, their life always has value. For all who are pro-life, we are called to oppose all threats to life from conception to natural death—including the death penalty.”

Joining these significant Evangelical and pro-life voices in raising questions about the death penalty is a pro-life Baptist who has captivated the imaginations and aspirations of millions of Americans: former Texas congressman and Republican presidential candidate Dr. Ron Paul. For years he has been expressing concerns about our criminal justice system and its basic lack of fairness and the need to limit government power, especially when it comes to matters of life and death. Recently Dr. Paul joined the growing ranks of leading conservative thinkers who are actively supporting my organization’s efforts. “I believe that support for the death penalty is inconsistent with



photo from AbbyJohnson.org page.

libertarianism and traditional conservatism,” Paul said. “So I am pleased with Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty’s efforts to form a coalition of libertarians and conservatives to work to end capital punishment.”

Given the realities of our current death penalty system, it is no surprise that Evangelical and pro-life leaders across the country are calling for its end. When we value life, we understand that even he or she who has committed the most terrible of acts is also created in the image of God. He alone should have the power to give life and to take it away. We know that redemption is real, it’s what our Lord and Savior does best. He is capable of transforming and restoring lives. Duane Buck is only one example of this. There is no question of his guilt. He took the lives of two individuals. But there is redemption in the story. Not only has Duane never received a disciplinary action during all of his time behind bars, he has been known to quell violence on death row. He has also become an incredibly faith-driven individual and has organized a group called Christian Brothers, which is a Bible study for those around him. He is even referred to as “Preacher Buck” since he ministers to so many. Ezekiel 33:11 says, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they would turn from their ways and live.” This is the heart of God.

REFLECTIONS ON THE WOMEN'S PEACE ENCAMPMENT

by Carol Crossed

Mark Hare is not the kind of person who strikes you as being aware that he played more than a minor role in changing the world. When I interviewed him for this article, he downplayed his role in the Women's Peace Encampment, which was established in the summer of 1983.

The encampment was in remote Seneca County, NY, a 55-minute drive from Rochester where I live. It was 51 acres of farmland that abutted the Seneca Army Depot, which Hare's research revealed, was the eastern seaboard's storage facility for nuclear weapons.

Two years before, Hare heard rumors that local people in neighboring small towns suspected the Depot was more than a training facility for military personnel. As a reporter for Rochester's City Newspaper, an alternative weekly, Hare spent two to three months researching army handbooks, interviewing military analysts at The Natural Resources Defense Council, and even touring the army depot. A mutual friend and peace activist, Mark Carver, lived in a tiny rural community and spurred Hare to publish his investigations.

While army personnel would not confirm or deny the charges, it appeared to be common knowledge among military investigators that the Seneca Army Depot

was one of two largest nuclear weapons storage sites in the United States and was the point of departure for nuclear weapons to Europe. Bunkers on the 11,000-acre property likely stored the neutron bomb.

Hare found information that escaped reporters for 25 years. It's not an understatement to say that the publication of his research was explosive. Letters to the Editor and talk show commentary flooded the airwaves.

What kinds of weapons were stored there? Was the depot a decoy facility hiding weapons of mass destruction on another east coast army base? What was the effectiveness of a policy of deterrence if the extent and even presence of these weapons were secret? What about the 1,400 jobs the depot provided for these rural people employed on the site?

Most importantly, what was the risk from possible contamination? In 1982, Hare wrote about the Ginna Nuclear Power Plant incident in Central New York considered the most serious accident since Three Mile Island. But in comparison, Hare called it "a burp, a few puffs of radioactive steam." Ginna's radiation was minute compared to a possible accident from the underground neutron bomb stored only 40 miles

away. In addition to the landmines and handheld nuclear devices, fuel leakages and the dispersal of deadly radioactive materials—tritium, uranium, and plutonium—had the potential detonation power of 30 times Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Women respond

New York women's traditional preference for non-violent solutions to human problems goes as far back as 1590 when women of the Iroquois Confederacy gathered in Seneca to demand an end to wars among Native American nations. This kind of courageous peace-making was continued by suffrage leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, only 20 miles away, and called for voting rights for women. The inaugural edition of *The Revolution*, the newspaper of Rochester's own Susan B. Anthony, condemned "standing armies." Harriet Tubman's home, 30 miles from the Seneca Army Depot, was a stop on the Underground Railroad.

On the national level, suffragists from 12 countries came together in 1915 to oppose World War I and birthed the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF), headed by Jane Addams. Other women, such as the Austrian Hildegard Goss-Meyer, extended that work into World War II and began the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Helen Caldicott from Australia began Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament. Ireland's Mairead Corrigan Maguire led peace contingents to the United Nations.

I was a member of Rochester's chapter of WILPF and my family had to look at a poster that hung in our breakfast room: One Nuclear bomb could ruin your whole day. Our children helped to raise funds for the encampment. We ran a sale of the contents of an old school that my husband was converting into affordable housing in Rochester, NY. They priced desks, detached chalkboards, and crawled through spaces in the school cafeteria carrying out dishes. It prepared them for what was to come when they accompanied me on occasion to the encampment where we slept in tents and organized protests.

Within months, women from over 10 countries descended on the half-mile square space in Seneca County. Posters calling for peace in German, Danish, and Dutch were not uncommon. At its height, as many as 250 women and children were encamped. We organized into teams: housekeeping, childcare, literature distribution, strategic planning, cooking, etc.

The encampment at the Seneca Army Depot was seen as a continuation of the Greenham Common Peace Camp in England. Greenham was one of 100 air force bases in England and the focus of opposition to the planned deployment of 96 cruise missiles, probably to Europe. It began as a 40-woman, 120-mile march from Wales to the air force base. One-and-a-half years later, as many as thirty thousand assembled and called themselves Women for Life on Earth.

Greenham Common was a mixed gender camp for the first three months. However, as time progressed,



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the men found it difficult to remain non-violent. They saw their women friends being treated badly at the hands of police. The women felt the men were over-protective. Men continued to play a supportive role in fund-raising, childcare, and transportation, but they no longer slept or participated in actions at the camp.

The peace, community, and matriarchal nature of the WPE at Seneca was designed to be a stark next-door contrast to the patriarchal structure of the military. Children, whole foods, creative storytelling, cooperative nurturing, and singing songs of hope were a blatant dissimilarity to armored vehicles and uniformed guards standing in attention. Also the backdrop of decision-making by consensus at the peace camp stood against hierarchical military authority.

Feminism and non-violent practice

An article from the WPE manual proclaims the principle of non-violence as “profoundly simple”: the committed belief in the ultimate value of every person. Feminism makes the same claim. As Francine Cardman says, it is a movement “that seeks to end domination and subordination in human relationships and to bring about justice, freedom, and mutuality in all areas of life.”

Unearthing my notes on affinity group discussion, I see scratched in the margins the names of women who said something profound and I wanted to always remember:

- Non-violence holds life to be the highest value—life in its full wonder. Killing people, hunger, poverty, and the lack of meaningful work, all are forms of violence.
- We oppose the power to do that leads people to dominate, control another, deny the existence of another, or consider the existence of another only in terms of one's own self-interest. Non-violence, however, is the power to be.
- We support being creative in the face of domination and exercising inner-strength and emotional energy from community. We developing alternative strategies to killing when faced our personal or national insecurities.

The theme of being “other”-centered was the garment

we wore, as opposed to being “self”-centered. Non-violence was not about protecting ourselves. This was about the abhorrence of killing others. We were reminded of Gandhi's teaching: “Truth is in the dying, not in the killing.”

Operating the camp by consensus was strained, however, when one woman made a sign about a woman's right to abort her child. Another woman whom I immediately befriended felt that other-centeredness disallowed taking the child's life. We were women, and therefore had to go beyond patriarchal solutions of power and domination in solving human problems—the power to be, not the power to do, remember? We wanted to protect children from dying in war, not fight for the right to destroy children before birth.

On the long walk to the protest site, she told me about the writings of Juli Loesch Wiley and Rachel MacNair.

In these years hence, some women's concept of non-violence has devolved from wanting no one to die in war, into fighting for the rights of women and gays to kill in war. This represents a drastic shift away from the rights of the human community to live vs. the rights of the individual to kill.

Aftermath

While still reluctant to give himself much credit, Hare can breathe a little easier now that the Depot is out of the hands of the military. The Women's Peace Encampment closed in mid '90s and the final shipment of dismantled nuclear material vacated the Seneca Army Depot in 2002. Since then, it houses a correctional facility and a police training camp, not exactly a garden of bread and roses.

Commercial airlines were given permission to fly over the Depot shortly thereafter. The panorama from the air showed eerie igloo-like storage structures lined up in rows, like tents on a desert scape.

But my favorite view is passing along the Seneca County back roads and catching a glimpse of one of the graceful albino deer staring out from the depot chain fence. Really. There are albino deer there.

NEW VOICE TO AN ANCIENT WITNESS: POPE FRANCIS'S PLEA FOR PEACE

by Julia Smucker

The pope's weekly Angelus message, named for the prayer it accompanies, is generally a routine occurrence akin to a Sunday homily. On September 1st, however, Pope Francis chose this venue to make an important announcement: the proclamation of Saturday, September 7th, 2013 as "a day of fasting and prayer for peace in Syria, the Middle East, and throughout the world." Not only Catholics but people around the world of all faiths were encouraged to participate "in whatever way they can"—and participate they did. As many of us prayed and fasted from our homes and many Catholic dioceses held special prayer services in response to the pope's call, a throng of people filled St. Peter's Square for the four-hour prayer vigil over which Pope Francis himself presided, in his words "invoking God's great gift of peace upon the beloved nation of Syria and upon each situation of conflict and violence around the world."¹

Both the announcement and the observance of that day made a powerful statement. At the vigil in Rome, the message was deepened by the potent language of liturgy, which often expresses itself in symbolic action. Perhaps most pointedly, five pairs of incense-bearers fulfilled this role at different points throughout the liturgy, coming from Syria, Egypt, the Holy Land, Russia, and the United States: all places with a stake in the Syrian conflict. Far more than a mere touchy-feely "let's all get along" moment, this action by Catholics from enemy nations spoke volumes

about the *catholicity*—that is, the universality by which the Catholic Church derives its name—that is greater than nationalism.

It was from the perspective of this catholicity that Pope Francis entreated all involved "not to close themselves in solely on their own interests, but rather to look at each other as brothers and decisively and courageously to follow the path of encounter and negotiation, and so overcome blind conflict." And this call to think beyond self-interest and national interest was accompanied by a broad denunciation of violence as a means of resolving conflict, as the pope declared, "Never has the use of violence brought peace in its wake. War begets war, violence begets violence." These sentiments were reinforced by the Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Bishop Mario Toso, who further commented on the futility of the unending spiral of violence, urging Catholics around the world to call for diplomatic solutions, the day after the pope's announcement.² Pope Francis has reiterated his appeal for peace, both in Syria and more generally in all areas of conflict, several times since then: in his homily at the vigil itself,³ in his Sunday Angelus message the following day,⁴ and more recently in his audience with the Sant'Egidio community in Rome,⁵ each time emphasizing a deeper, nonviolent "war against evil" as the answer to the persistent cycle of violence that he continues to denounce with equal persistence.

By denouncing the cycle of violence, Pope Francis is continuing a trajectory set and followed by several of his predecessors, strengthening the Catholic Church's commitment to the dignity of human life from conception to natural death. Because of its belief in universal human dignity, Catholic teaching maintains a presumption against taking life, and even the exceptions it has allowed for have been gradually but steadily narrowing, especially as increasingly inhumane weapons technologies have been developed in the modern era.⁶ Francis has strongly reaffirmed this trajectory of ever-greater consistency in his church's commitment to life by voicing a firm "no to violence in all its forms," including the profoundly unnatural deaths caused by arms proliferation.

After all that has happened in church life and global politics, one lingering question remains: did the prayers work? Some may note that it was a few days following the worldwide day of fasting and prayer that a diplomatic resolution to the international crisis around Syria presented itself almost by accident. It would be fallacious to assume a direct causal relationship simply from the timing of these events, yet all events have consequences, and things cannot not be in some way different than they would have otherwise been. As for exactly what difference the prayers made amid a tangled web of other factors, it is impossible to say for sure. The pope's apostolic nuncio (an ecclesial delegate of sorts) in Damascus, Archbishop Mario Zenari, is convinced that both the tragic use of chemical weapons against civilians and the pope's prayer vigil contributed to the multilateral decision to destroy Syria's chemical weapons stockpile while avoiding a military intervention, calling this a double miracle.⁷ In any case, Pope Francis made it clear that the church's prayer was meant to be heard on earth as in heaven, saying in his initial announcement, "Humanity needs to see these gestures of peace and to hear words of hope and peace!"⁸ [Vatican Radio, "Pope: Angelus appeal for peace," September 1, 2013.] People of all faiths and of no faith can affirm that these prayers were indeed heard on earth, and while the events that followed are still too complicated for post hoc reasoning, the precarious diplomacy that somehow made its way through tense negotiations full of distrust on all sides may well have needed every factor that was in its favor to tip the scales toward the cause of peace.

It is important to remember that, while a larger-scale global crisis has been averted, the crisis situation in Syria and its environs is far from over. We must not allow our concern for those affected by the ongoing violence to fade away with the headlines. This is all the more reason the voice and action of an ancient church continue to be needed as a witness to the dignity of life, nonviolently defending and assisting the vulnerable in every situation.

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THE “MAKE IT HISTORY” CAMPAIGN

A FEMINIST ROOKIE IN THE PRO-LIFE RANKS

by Audrey Sample



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As someone who fiercely defends the preborn, I am sometimes stereotyped as being anti-women’s rights. Some might even go so far as to say I’m altogether anti-woman. That’s far from the case, though.

I consider myself an empowered, liberated young woman, someone who has strong (sometimes controversial) opinions but isn’t afraid to talk about them. My pro-life opinion on abortion doesn’t come from my upbringing, religion, or any man in my life. It comes from a place of deep compassion for women in desperate situations, from a place in my heart that longs for a world where we don’t call an act of violence on our own preborn children a “woman’s reproductive right.” I want to help create a culture that doesn’t force

women to choose between either carrying their children to term or having a career and education and then calls it liberation. I want to help create a culture where we offer nonviolent, supportive, and compassionate resources for women and their children (before and after birth).

It boggles my mind that in this day and age the average feminist is supportive of abortion “rights.” Feminism is about equality for everyone. Not “equal rights when it’s convenient.” True equality wouldn’t make women settle for less than they deserve. It upsets me to see pro-life advocates only addressing the issue in the context of religion or claiming that “legitimate rape” rarely results in pregnancy. I don’t think the

way to change hearts and minds is through alienating others. By finding common ground and connecting issues, we have a better shot at abolishing abortion one day.

I'm not against abortion simply because it "takes an innocent life." I'm against abortion because it takes a life. It's not wrong only because the child is innocent, it's wrong because she or he is human, and all life is worthy of protection regardless of any wrongdoing. I'm not here to pass judgments on someone for deciding to abort—I understand that women choose abortion when they feel they have no other choice. What I want is for women not to feel like they have to make that decision. I want resources and programs in place that empower women and encourage fathers to be supportive and present in their children's lives. I think that this is a vital step for the pro-life movement, and without it abortion will continue to feel like the only option.



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TRUE LIFE

I AM THE MAN WHO MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN

by Alex



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Here in Kauai the senses are overwhelming: the warm and gentle night air, the sounds of families playing, and the sweet smells of exotic flowers fill me with a sense of sublime happiness as the waves repeatedly embrace the shore in a song that conjures all the poetry of antiquity in my mind. Only a short while ago, a cousin of mine requested that I write an article on my secular pro-life stance, my improbable but all-too-human origin story. At the age of 23, I look just like anybody else, reclining on a poolside chair letting one toe swirl in the soft sands. I sit here, as the birds sing sweetly and the sun lazily settles into the horizon like warm butter, and wonder “What were the chances of me getting here?”

My origins (like those of anybody) start with my mother. At the age of 24, it was a strange and dichotomous time in her life. She was engaged, yet she knew her

relationship was crumbling and she had to break away. She was in college and popular among her friends and classmates, yet she was failing in her classes. This was the time in which I was conceived, and given her situation many other women would have aborted me--the Feminist Majority Foundation’s work with their campus coalition is pushing this agenda on college-aged women like my own mother at 24. But from the very moment she found out about my small, nearly invisible existence, she felt a profound sense of love for the developing human that was me.

My mom has told me countless times that my conception turned her life around, and gave her an overwhelming sense of purpose. I was brought home in a stocking after I was born around Christmas, and my mother’s world continued to change exponentially.

She rapidly graduated with stellar grades and began working for Macy's. This isn't to say we were well-off, by any means. My biological father left when I was 3, leaving my mom to provide for us both. We lived in a converted garage with a moldy, crumbling floor. I was well accustomed to the sight of a fridge that was near-empty, save for a block of cheese or loaf of bread donated by the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food and nutrition service to supplement the little food my mother could afford. For months at a time I stayed with my grandparents while my mother took classes at Macy's to become an executive, to build us both a happier, wealthier, healthier life somewhere greener and safer in the world.

She rapidly went on to become an executive: she was still in her twenties and managing over 17 stores. We moved to a better area, to a lovely house, and she married a great guy who adopted me as his son. No, not every woman in near poverty and failing in school can raise a child and climb the corporate ladder in a few short years--I'm no fool. Nevertheless, I feel blessed that she was able to see the truth: that I was a person from the beginning, a person whose future was worth fighting for.

More than any conviction about there being a God or afterlife, I believe—based on scientific facts and humanistic principles—that once a child has been conceived he or she has a right to be born. I first began to adopt this view when I began researching various famous atheists, including the late Christopher Hitchens (who was very much against abortion); following an organization called Secular Pro-Life on Facebook; and critically looking at my own origins. What frightens me is that while some truly noble and humane causes such as gay rights and racial equality bear the righteous roar of the masses (and SHOULD, good on them!), the right of a preborn human to life is—bizarrely—one spoken so often in whispers. This situation is made even worse by people who either pervert the pro-life cause by using misinformation and slander or squander the truth by using shady or violent tactics. How is it that when we as a society can fight for the equality of some select groups, far too few take up arms to



Photo by Matthew Rutledge, some rights reserved.

protect the preborn (whether black, white, straight, gay, autistic, dyslexic, etc.) who surely deserve it as well?

Perhaps the blame partially rests on my generation. I remember that in high school a friend of mine, a progressive, intelligent young man who contacted me on Facebook chat, complained that he was given the impossible position of being pro-life in his debate class and could think only of unusable religious talking points. Within moments I gave him a wealth of arguments, sources, and articles, all entirely secular in nature. He asked in bewilderment how I found them; I told him I simply put what he was looking for into the Google query bar and hit "search." He hadn't even tried. Think about this for a moment: this smart, charismatic, progressive young man preferred sitting there in bored agony for I-don't-know-how-long rather than actually considering the fact that there was a rational opposing viewpoint.

I live in the Bay Area and follow the news frequently (half of which is that posted on the Facebook newsfeed of my friends) and the fact I had only heard about the horrific Gosnell case through Secular Pro Life, and not through any other source, is one I found deeply disturbing. Some said it was a sort of Media Blackout, a thing I assumed only police states resorted to (and

yet, knowing American history, this is far from the first time). But not now, not under this progressive, freedom-of-speech-loving presidency, right? Could it be that the free-thinking, progressive society I thought I lived in is only open-minded towards certain political agendas? Could it be that some of the self-righteous articles I see friends post about progressive issues aren't as factual or as neutral and balanced as they seem to be? I mean, there's the strange fact that even here in the Bay Area, there is openness towards diversity, but not necessarily a diversity of opinion.

Now, as a man, I know next to nothing about what women go through in their lives, yet I am convinced that the world is a far, far harsher and more dangerous place for them than it is or ever has been for men. Naturally, in the name of fairness, I can understand why people choose their pro-choice stance to protect women. These are clearly people who have moral goals in mind, even if they must ignore science or do mental gymnastics to get there. After all, freedom is a good, right? I am also no scientist or statistician but I've known many people who have been adopted and were grateful to their absent mothers who chose to carry them those nine long months and bear them in the bloody, painful exodus that is birth. Birth is not comfortable; even as a man, I can see that is blatantly obvious. It's far from strange for the average person in our society, in the name of freedom and comfort, to prioritize material happiness over moral good, but it's also very common to not entirely be aware of the gravity of the choices being made.

Consider this for a moment: when's the last time you purchased something big that you could survive without? How much was it? Do you use it on a daily basis? Did your upgrade to the latest smartphone make a world of difference and bring you happiness? We all buy these things, but rarely are we conscious of the fact that every dollar, every penny spent on something we don't need is money we could donate to some more worthy cause. Hell, come to think of it, I'm on vacation in Hawaii. Rarely do we think about the fact that we often prioritize our own temporary material happiness over the survival of somebody far away because we cannot see her or him.

But much like Dr. Seuss said in *Horton Hears a Who*, "a person's a person no matter how small," and when science says the person inside of your womb or your girlfriend's womb is a human being, what sort of price is their life (one directly related to you, of your own blood, rather than somebody across the globe) worth when weighed against your comfort? This isn't a struggle for life in a faraway land among strangers (who of course do deserve help, by all means), this is a challenge inside of your very intimate life, one concerning family. Nine months of pregnancy plus thousands of dollars of medical fees plus the pain of childbirth adds up to a whole lot of pain and discomfort. But what, I ask, is the pain of ending a human life, of a family member's life, no less? I'm not a soldier, I'm not a headsman, and I have certainly never had an abortion (I'm a guy, remember?). But I know a certain few women who have paid that price, some of whom speak of it plainly, others in regret, and still others who don't speak of it at all.



Photo by spaceodyssey, some rights reserved.

If you don't believe that a human being at the fetal stage deserves the same rights as every other born human being, can you imagine what amount of information would need to be shown to you to change that opinion? The information is out there if you are merely willing to Google it just as you are willing to see friends preach to the choir on your newsfeed. But if no amount of information would ever change your mind, would that mean you hold parents' freedom to kill to protect their comfort higher in priority than a human being's right to live? Would that mean you hold the so-called right to abortion more convenient and valuable than a child's chance at happiness? Does that sound humane?

Life is a priceless thing; whether I'm in Hawaii or at home or even at the DMV, I'm pretty glad to be around. I live a good life--imperfect as any, but always fighting forwards, onwards, upwards. I'm pursuing the career of my dreams, and I'm having some measure of good luck with life in general. Actually, I'll retract that word "luck." I don't owe much to luck; I owe everything to the parent who realized I too was human. And now, as I finish writing this, the sun has set and the moon rises high in the clouds. A soft passing raincloud kisses my face with a warm mist, and I hear the sounds of local music nearby. I am glad, I am lucky, and I am proud that she grasped the reality of science, of ethics, of my own human worth: I had a right to live.

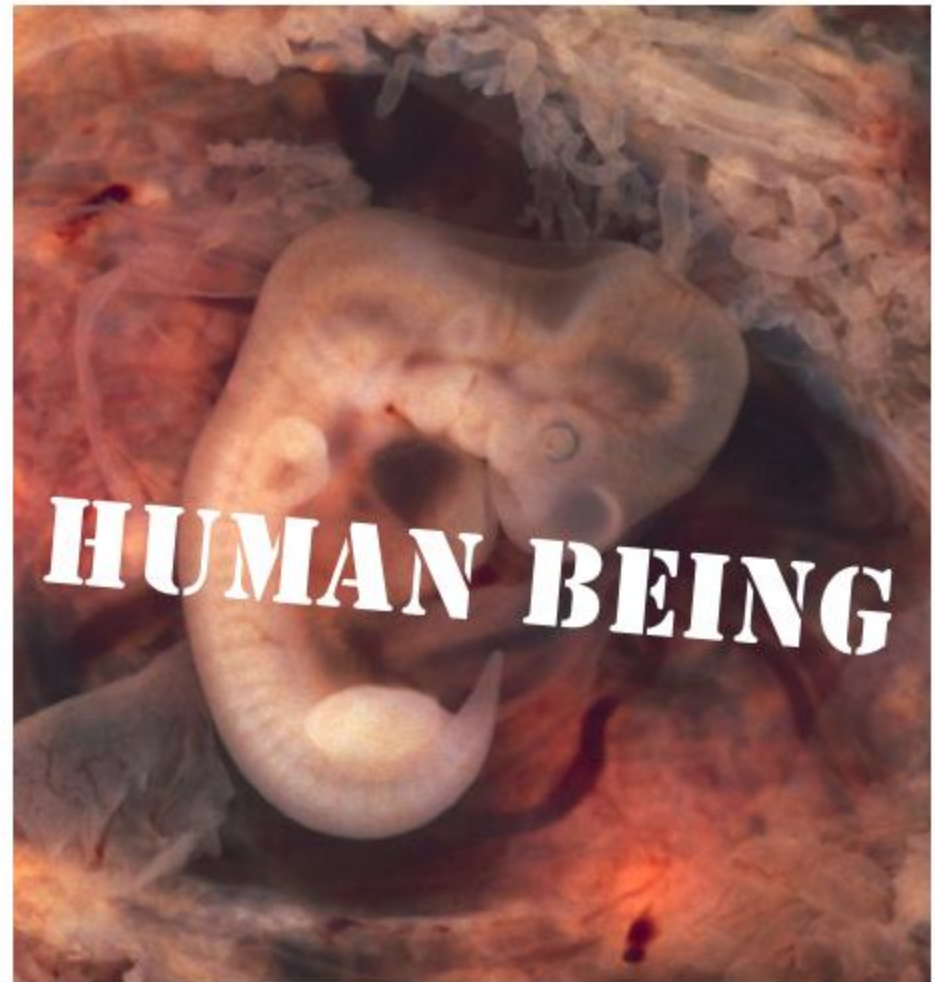


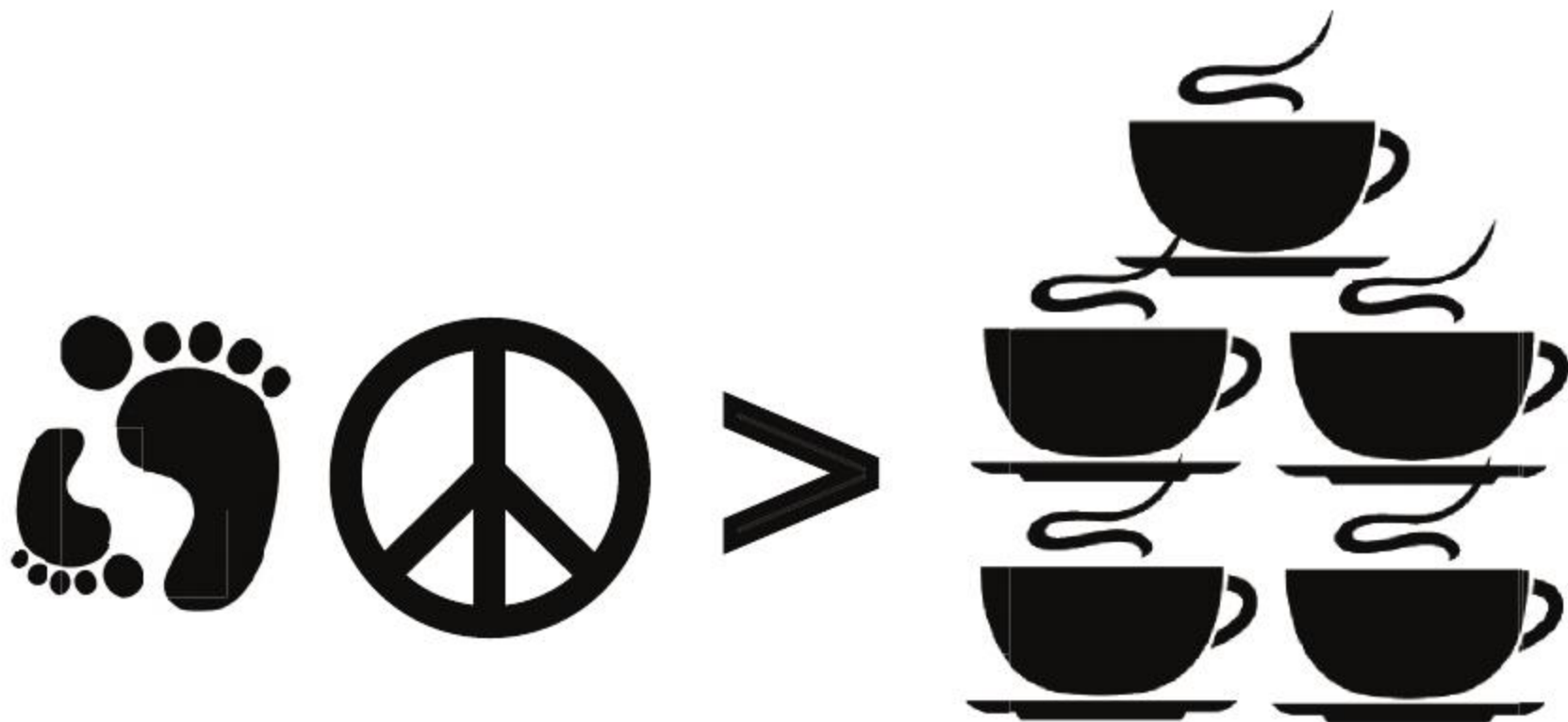
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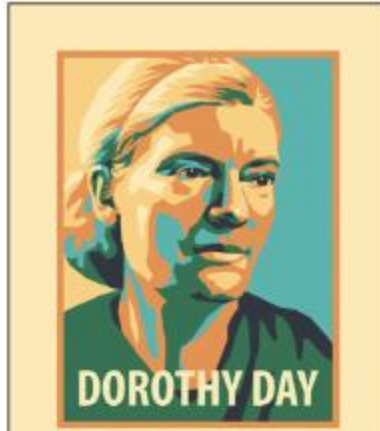
Father Daniel Berrigan, Consistent.

"One is called to live nonviolently, even if the change one seeks for seems impossible."

Born in Virginia, Minnesota on May 9, 1921, Daniel Berrigan has been a priest, a poet, a novelist, an activist. Along with his brother Philip, Berrigan was an outspoken opponent to American militarism, leading the national peace group, Clergy and Lay Concerned about Vietnam.

On October 1952, Father Berrigan marched with his brother during the civil rights movement at Selma in 1965. Together they influenced protests against the war in Vietnam, including the destruction of draft board files in 1968. For his various acts of civil disobedience, Father Berrigan has spent more than six years of his life in prison.

"We spoke out, committed civil disobedience, and went to jail because the government senselessly and purposefully opens weapons costing billions to build and billions to improve—weapons which become more useless."



Dorothy Day, Consistent.

"The greatest challenge of the day is how to bring about a revolution of the heart; a revolution which has to start with each one of us."

Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1907, Dorothy Day was an American journalist, a powerful social activist and a devout Catholic. With fellow activist Peter Maurin, Day helped establish the Catholic Worker, a pacifist movement that continues to combine direct aid to the poor and homeless.



Dr. Catherine Meeks, Consistent.

Catherine Meeks is a strategist with a purpose.

Born in 1946 in segregated Arkansas, Ms. Meeks has spent a lifetime working on issues of racial housing and the protection of life. The daughter of a sharecropper and a teacher, Catherine grew up hearing her father talk about a 13-year-old brother who died from a heart ailment before she was born—related violence at a white hospital. "I grew up in that kind of atmosphere of: 'The world is really hostile toward us because we're black and poor.'"

For more than 30 years, Catherine has advocated wellness and social justice, giving voice to those living on the margins of society and promoting a healthy racial and class worldview.



Gandhi, Consistent.

Mahatma Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, and became the international symbol of the power of nonviolence. Gandhi was the most revered political and ideological leader in India during that nation's struggle for independence. His leadership of national civil disobedience led ultimately to India's separation from Great Britain, and



Reverend Johnny Hunter, Consistent.

Dr. Johnny W. Hunter nearly died at birth. After others had given up on the newborn, an elderly midwife refused to let him die. She later told him that he was born for a reason.

Reverend Hunter believes he lives for the women-in-protect life. With more than 30 years in the ministry, Dr. Hunter is the President of Global Life & Family Ministries (GLFM), a ministry dedicated to promoting traditional family values, racial harmony, and the survival of children around the world.

Dr. Hunter is an ordained minister, a co-founder of the National Community Church on Capitol Hill, Washington, DC, and the Pastor Emeritus of Church of The Living Water, Buffalo, NY. He is a nationally respected speaker and civil rights advocate, and founded the Life Education and Resource Network (LEARN, Inc.), a broad coalition of Christian parents, pro-family advocates. LEARN is a prominent African-American evangelical pro-life ministry in the United States.



Rose Evans, Consistent.

Rose Evans was born in San Francisco in 1938, when the still lives, not far from the Pacific Ocean. Rose grew up in a loving family, with a Scottish father and a Canadian mother. She grew up without any particular religion, but in college was drawn to a relationship with Jesus, and with several friends was baptized in the Episcopal Church.

Rose Evans has been an activist for peace and life for more than 40 years. She is the oldest member of the Board of Consistent Life.

Rose was happily married to Matthew Evans, a university professor—and they raised four children together. When her youngest child was ten, Rose went back to college and got an M.A. in Education of Exceptional Children. Her work in special education helped to inspire her activism in life issues.



Reverend Patrick Mahoney, Consistent.

Patrick E. Mahoney is a nationally known Christian social and political activist, and an ordained minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church. He is director of the Christian Defense Coalition, a "national ministry committed to challenging the body of Christ to live out their faith in the public square."

Born in New Jersey, Rev. Mahoney attended the University of Dayton and the Faith School of Theology in Miami. His early ministerial experiences in New York City led him to embrace a commitment to expanding the role of the church in addressing society's wrongs. He began to develop and mature social programs, and has worked tirelessly on pro-life causes, homelessness, hunger, racism and other pressing issues of social justice from a Christ-centered biblical perspective.

In 1992, Mahoney brought his family to Washington, DC, where he



Fannie Lou Hamer, Consistent.

Fannie Lou Hamer was a courageous civil rights leader and a passionate activist for voting rights in America. Her legacy remains today.

Born in 1917, Hamer played a major role in organizing the Mississippi Freedom Summer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Coming up poor in segregated Mississippi, Hamer developed her passion for social justice—and was known for her outspoken rhetoric. In the early 1960s she joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and began work on registering voters in the deep south. Despite arrests and beatings, she maintained her courage, eventually helping to form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.



Sister Helen Prejean, Consistent.

In 1982 a blind asked Sister Helen Prejean if she would correspond with convicted murderer Elmo Patrick Serrano, located in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. This began a journey recounted in her book *Dead Man Walking*—that continues today in her endless work to abolish the death penalty.

A Catholic nun since 1957, Sister Helen endorses the consistent ethic of life. She works toward the recognition that every life has dignity—not only the innocent, but also the guilty—and she rejects all violence, from conception to natural death.

"I would morally opposed to killing, war, executions, killing of the old and disabled, the killing of children, unborn and born... I believe that all of life is sacred and must be protected, especially in the vulnerable stages at the beginning of life and at its end."

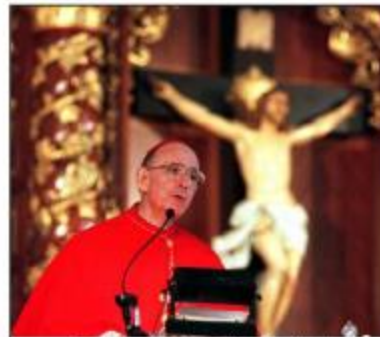


Martin Sheen, Consistent.

Martin Sheen is an actor. He is best known for his performances as Captain Willard in the film *Apocalypse Now*, Confederate General Robert E. Lee in *Gettysburg*, and President Josiah Bartlet in the popular television series *The West Wing*. Mr. Sheen has worked with some of the world's most noted directors, including Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, Oliver Stone, Francis Ford Coppola, Richard Attenborough, Terrence Malick and Mike Nichols.

Martin Sheen also believes in the consistent life ethic. He rejects all violence, from abortion to war.

Inspired by a deep Catholic faith, Sheen has put his beliefs in action for almost 50 years. He supported Cesar Chavez during the early days of the farm-worker movement in California, and has worked tirelessly on behalf of a variety of peace and justice causes. He has spoken out about political oppression in Central America, marched on Congress on violence, fought against the Selwicks death squads, and supported the closing of nuclear test sites. He has been awarded on a number of occasions for nonviolent civil disobedience.



Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Consistent.

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin (1928-1996) has been widely credited with advancing the Consistent Life Ethic. Originally called the *Sacrosanct Covenant*, Bernardin drew from New Testament principles in rejecting all forms of violence as inconsistent with Catholic teaching.

Bernardin was an outspoken critic of nuclear war and abortion, but he soon expanded his vision to include all kinds of violence. "The spectrum of life runs across the issues of genetics, abortion, capital punishment, nuclear warfare and the care of the terminally ill," wrote Bernardin in a famous speech at Fordham University. He began to define a new moral theology for Catholics that respected all life, from conception to natural death.

Cardinal Bernardin told an audience in Portland, Oregon: "When human life is considered 'cheap' or easily expendable in some way, eventually nothing is held to be sacred and all lives are in jeopardy."



Aimee Bedoy Murphy, Consistent.

Aimee Murphy was born in 1989. She's young, she's a leader, and she's the Executive Director of the Student Journal, the leading student life ethic magazine. Aimee was a teenage when a personal conviction led her to the cause against abortion, and she came to support and defend the consistent life ethic during her time in university.

During her undergraduate studies, Aimee worked to successfully change the pro-life organization on her college campus to one that centered on equal respect for the dignity of human life. She helped to facilitate change in the pro-life dialogue on many college campuses. As someone whose faith began in anti-abortion work, Aimee believes that "making the pro-life movement more accessible connects directly to the level of consistency in the ethic of its members."

Through her work with Life Matters Journal, Aimee intends to reach people all over the globe with the consistent message of human worth. The journal's mission statement includes her words: "We must realize that the most important issue of



Shane Claiborne, Consistent.

You'll find Shane Claiborne on the streets of Philadelphia, bringing his radical Christianity to the poor and disenfranchised, ministering to people in need and serving as a radical voice in the church.

Born in Tennessee, Claiborne is one of the founding members of The Simple Way in Philadelphia, "a sort of subversive church, creating to spread the vision of 'Living Good, Loving People, and Following Jesus' in our neighborhoods and inner world." This community was featured on the cover of *Christianity Today* magazine as a pioneer of the New Monasticism movement.

Shane studied at Eastern University, Whitman College and Princeton Theological Seminary. He is now a part of The Alternative Seminary. Claiborne has interned at Willow Creek Community Church and spent time with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India. Shane has been a part of peace delega-

Why not a consistent voice?

These are just a few of the individuals who have spoken out with a clear, unwavering voice for peace and life—rejecting all violence. **Consistent Life** is a network of 200 groups and many individuals which furthers the consistent life ethic through exhibits at conferences, advertisements, a weekly e-newsletter, a presence on social media and community speakers. We need both a network such as Consistent Life and a quality journal like *Life Matters Journal* to spread the idea of respecting the dignity and worth of each human life.

What can you do to make the world a less violent place? Will you help us?

We are committed to the protection of life, which is threatened in today's world by war, a bortion, poverty, racism, capital punishment and euthanasia. We believe that these issues are linked under a 'consistent ethic of life'. We challenge those working on all or some of these issues to maintain a cooperative spirit of peace, reconciliation, and respect in protecting the unprotected.



<http://www.consistent-life.org/join.html>

MEDIA REVIEWS AND CONSISTENT LIFE

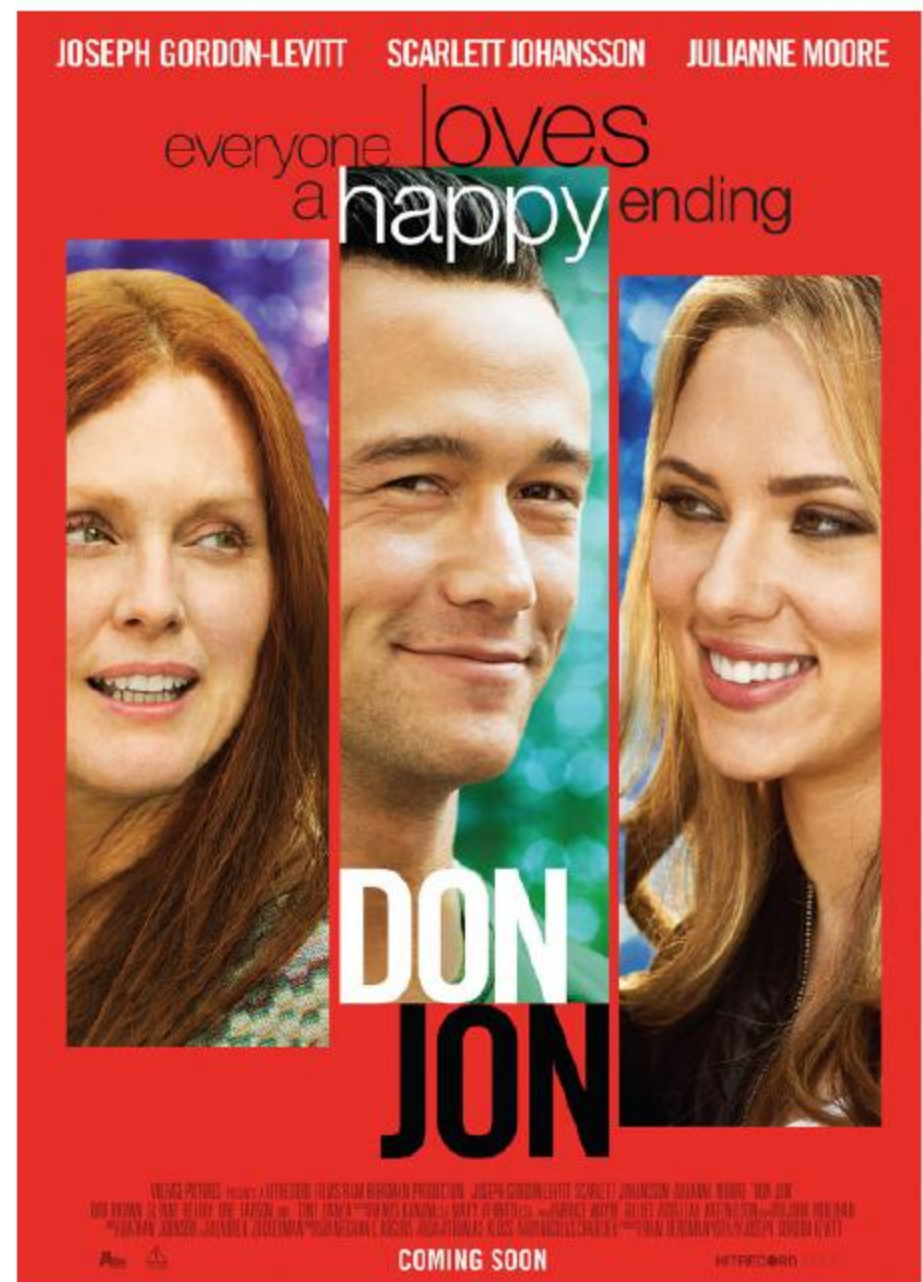
DON JON CAN TEACH A THING OR TWO

by Lilianna Meldrum Serbicki

WARNING: This film contains explicitly sexual scenes. Please watch responsibly.

Joseph Gordon-Levitt's first foray into directing, "Don Jon," has received a mixed critical response. Some have found it inspiring; some believe it unfairly stereotypes men, women, or both; and some (entirely missing the intended point of the film) categorize it merely as a "funny sex comedy."

Gordon-Levitt's swaggering, sexually charged character Don Jon begins the movie by bluntly describing his life, and his porn habits, in detail. He emphasizes that "there's only a few things I really care about in life. My body. My pad. My ride. My family. My church. My boys. My girls. My porn." The rhythmic, choppy nature of this and many other lines of dialogue echoes the impatient pace of Jon's life. He seeks pleasure and entertainment in small, controllable doses. Jon speaks possessively of everything he values in life; their only importance is in relation to him: my, my, my. The use of the word "things" is also repeated throughout the movie; another important recurring line is his declaration that Barbara Sugarman, the love



interest played by Scarlett Johansson, is “the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen in my life.” Ironically, many other characters in the film find that line to be romantic; the objectifying word is ignored because it is obscured by the praise.

However, Jon is not the only imperfect character; everyone in this film portrays some element of a flawed human nature. Barbara manipulates Jon in order to try to make him into the perfect romantic hero who, in her eyes, would give “up everything for her,” just like the pretty romantic leads she sees in the movies she loves. Gordon-Levitt is not implying that sacrifice is a bad thing; however, both of these characters want any “sacrifice” to *only* be performed by the other party. In one scene, Jon is talking about cleaning his apartment – something he takes pride in – and Barbara interrupts him, irritated:

Barbara: Don’t talk about vacuuming in front of me, come on!

Jon: Why, what’s wrong?

Barbara: Why? Because it’s not sexy, that’s why!

Both Jon and Barbara value each other as objects; they want to ignore any element of the Other that does not fit into their carefully controlled idea of “sexiness.” One of the main criticisms this movie has faced is that it unfairly stereotypes men and women. However, Gordon-Levitt is not criticizing what he sees as actual archetypes of “male” or “female”; he is criticizing the superficial pop culture definitions of “masculinity” and “femininity” that Barbara and Jon are trying to fit into.

However, these are not the only perspectives presented in the film. One of the most important scenes occurs when Jon is talking to Esther, a woman in the night class he is taking, about porn vs. sex. Esther is surprised that a “good looking guy” like him has to resort to porn at all; how can he have trouble finding women? But no, Jon insists that porn is better



because, for a few minutes, it makes “all the bull**** disappear.” This is sharply contrasted with his experience with actual sex, in which he is constantly calculating, constantly wondering: how could this be better? To Jon, this seems perfectly logical. However, Esther maintains that “losing yourself” can occur in actual sex if he stops being so “one-sided”; she says that “if you wanna lose yourself, you have to lose yourself in another person. It’s a two way thing.”

The idea of vulnerability and emotional, physical openness seems bizarre and impossible to Jon. He seems to wonder, why would anyone want to do that? However, in a series of incremental life decisions, he tries to remove his self-inflicted blinders and actually experience others as three-dimensional human beings. Jon finds this terrifying, difficult, frustrating, and exhausting. His life is not going to be “easy” just because he begins respecting others. However, he also ultimately finds it fills him with an exhilaration that is not carefully controlled, monitored, and measured. Ironically, until Jon begins to let go of his careful plan to maintain the maximum amount of “pleasure” in his life, he is not actually able to truly enjoy himself or find peace.

One of the most fascinating parallels drawn in the film is between Jon’s attitude toward religion and his attitude toward human relationships. Jon, a Catholic,

goes to church every Sunday with his parents and sister. We see his family stare, glassy-eyed, throughout Mass; his sister texts furiously the entire time. We see a montage of stained glass windows, the Communion line, and the confessional that parallels, in its tone, the porn-related montages we see at the beginning of the film. Jon approaches his relationship with God the same way he approaches his relationship with women. He checks the boxes, dead-eyed, to get what he wants out of the relationship; he makes no attempt to interact at a deeper level, and his spiritual life is shallow and numb.

My main critique of the film is that the relationship in which Jon finds himself at the end of the story seems somewhat contrived. However, despite that, this film contains wonderfully smart commentary on an important, topical issue. It truly does attempt to portray, in a very blunt and human way, the painful consequences of objectifying others – and the liberating effects of trying to encounter others as three-dimensional, authentic human beings. I am very intrigued to see where Gordon-Levitt will go from here as a filmmaker.

WORKS CITED

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A GLOBE-TROTTING DETECTIVE STORY: *DIRTY WARS* by John Whitehead



Dirty Wars, the documentary film counterpart to the book of the same name, begins its investigation of the secretive world of U.S. counterterrorism operations with a disturbing episode set in Afghanistan. The book's author, Jeremy Scahill, was working as a war correspondent in Afghanistan when he looked beyond the limited flow of information provided by the American and allied military authorities to report on the killing of Mohammed Daoud, an Afghan police officer, and others—including two pregnant women—in the town of Gardez. The killing appeared to be the work of American forces, and, after initial evasions, the United States eventually acknowledged and apologized for the operation. Investigating the Gardez incident led Scahill, who currently writes for *The Nation* and narrates the documentary, to the agency responsible for the killings: the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), a secretive branch of the military that carries out certain covert operations.

This discovery is the first chapter in a globe-trotting detective story as Scahill travels beyond Afghanistan to Yemen and Somalia, as well as back to the United States, and interviews various people inside and outside the U.S. government in an effort to find out more about JSOC and its activities. He focuses on JSOC's killing of various alleged enemies of the United States, particularly the U.S.-born Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, whose father Scahill interviews. Awlaki, who had initially condemned the September 11th terrorist attacks and seemed the epitome of America-friendly Islam, was apparently embittered by the 2003 invasion of Iraq and other abuses of Muslims by the U.S. government—as well as by his own U.S.-supported imprisonment in Yemen—and turned to advocating violence against the United States. He subsequently was marked for death by American authorities and was killed by drone strike in Yemen in 2011. Shortly after Awlaki's death, his teenage son, Abdulrahman, was killed in another drone strike. Both killings receive significant attention in *Dirty Wars* (although the treatment of Abdulrahman al-Awlaki's death is questionable: while the killing might have been an accident, the documentary implies deliberate targeting of the teenager).

Other topics covered are a 2009 military strike in Yemen that Scahill maintains was the United States' work and American use of Somali warlords to combat al Qaeda and al Qaeda-affiliated groups. Those interviewed in *Dirty Wars* include U.S. political and military officials such as Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR); General Hugh Shelton, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; two Somali warlords (one of whom memorably described Americans as “war masters”); various inhabitants of Afghanistan and Yemen; and a mysterious unnamed source who supposedly has inside knowledge of JSOC and appears only in shadow, his voice electronically distorted to disguise his identity.

As an investigation and analysis of JSOC operations, and U.S. foreign policy in general, *Dirty Wars* has definite limitations. Narration and snippets of interviews

cannot convey as much information as a printed page and checking the sources of Scahill's various claims is impossible. The documentary also raises questions of how much footage captures spontaneous real-life activities and how much was staged: sequences of Scahill surreptitiously going to meet his unnamed source at different locations were presumably recreated for the film. Also, as one of the panelists at a post-screening discussion I attended commented, the film can be faulted for adopting the most negative interpretations of American actions. As a work of cinema, *Dirty Wars* does not hold too many surprises, either. Rick Rowley, the film's director, cinematographer, and (with David Riker) co-editor, follows conventions that will be familiar to viewers of documentary exposés and espionage thrillers: talking heads interspersed with footage of Scahill walking or driving through various exotic locations, all filmed in bleached colors cinema vérité-style and underscored with ominous or melancholy music.

Nevertheless, *Dirty Wars* is worth seeing. Its value lies in drawing attention to lethal U.S. counterterrorism operations in an accessible, absorbing way using a popular medium. Also, it provides what movies can deliver very effectively: emotional impact. When Scahill interviews Nasser al-Awlaki, the father and grandfather of Anwar and Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, for example, and the filmmakers show photos and video footage of these men, they make the costs of U.S. policy vivid and moving. No one interested in the methods by which the United States is fighting terrorism today should rely only on the material presented in *Dirty Wars*. If seeing the film can inspire people to read the book, learn more about targeted killings and covert operations, and ask questions about the justifications for American actions, however, *Dirty Wars* will have accomplished something very important.

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BUTTERFLIES

A SHORT STORY

by Kelsey Hazzard



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Six-year-old Cassie Mitchell stepped off of the school bus wearing a t-shirt with a silk-screened monarch butterfly on the front, purple sandals with butterflies on the sides, and her favorite denim jeans with butterfly outlines stitched into the pockets. She carried a butterfly backpack filled with butterfly notebooks, and her pigtails were secured with butterfly hair clips.

“The Obsession,” as her parents called it, was probably harmless enough. It’s normal, other parents assured them, for first graders to fixate. She’d grow out of it. And at least she had picked something harmless, instead of developing a passion for violent video games or something like that.

Even so, they worried a bit. Cassie devoured books about butterflies, could identify the species of any butterfly she saw, and declared that she wanted to be

“a lepidopterist” when she grew up. Was that normal?

Cassie walked the short block from the bus stop to her house, where her mother was outside gardening. Her mother, Allison, didn’t see her coming. Cassie quietly snuck up behind her, planning to scare her.

So Cassie had a perfect view when her mother pointed the can of Raid at the tiger swallowtail caterpillar and squeezed the trigger.

Cassie screamed in horror, right in her mother’s ear. Allison jumped.

“Cassie!” she scolded. “Cassie, that’s not funny!”

But now Cassie was crying. “You killed it! You killed the caterpillar!”

Allison quickly assessed the situation. There was really nothing to do but lie.

“Honey, what caterpillar?”

Cassie pointed to the caterpillar, now writhing on the ground in its final moments.

“Cassie, silly goose, that’s bird poop!” her mother exclaimed with far too much cheer.

“That’s its *camouflage*, Mommy! It’s a tiger swallowtail! You know I love butterflies more than anything—*how could you?*”

“A tiger swallowtail butterfly?” Allison asked. “Butterflies have wings and are pretty. That’s just an ugly old worm.”

“No, it’s a *baby* tiger swallowtail! And you killed it!” Cassie was near tears.

Allison’s patience was exhausted. “Okay look. These caterpillars are eating up our sassafras and our front yard looks bad and Mrs. Bailey from the homeowner’s association is starting to complain. I spend a lot of money to keep this house looking nice and I have to keep it safe from pests.”

“Mommy, I’ll take care of it!” Cassie pleaded. “I’ve saved up money in my piggy bank. You can let the caterpillars eat this plant and I’ll buy you a new plant, I promise!”

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous.”

For a brief moment, they stared each other in the eyes. Then Cassie turned away and ran inside.

She ran down the hallway and didn’t stop until she reached her bedroom, slammed the door, and sat on her bed. Her lungs filled with the righteous indignation that is uniquely felt by sensitive, gifted children forced to live at the whims of stupid adults. She never wanted to see or talk to her mother ever again. She realized that her mother would cook dinner that night and Cassie would have to eat it, which was



Photo by Christopher Meredith, some rights reserved

unbearably frustrating. She buried her face in her pillow and thought about running away.

Downstairs, Allison sighed. Nothing had ever come easy for her, least of all parenting. She had been raised in an apartment in a bad part of town. She had worked so hard to give her daughter a picturesque childhood home, and Cassie was just too young to understand. Allison had done everything right, and yet her origins continually nagged at her. She sensed her neighbors’ sideways glances at her, the only renter on a street full of homeowners. Or perhaps it was the lack of a ring that elicited their judgment.

Allison had finished up in the yard and was placing her tools in the garage when her boyfriend Rob arrived.

“Where’s Cassie?” he asked. Allison just nodded toward Cassie’s bedroom.

“So,” he asked, “did you...?”

Allison nodded. “The clinic confirmed it. Six weeks.” She sighed. “Cassie is such a handful. Can we really have another one?”

“Well, you know I’ll support whatever you decide.”

Kelsey Hazzard is the founder and president of Secular Pro-Life. She is also the author of the pro-life novella Cultivating Weeds, available through Amazon.com. She is a proud University of Miami Hurricane (B.A. 2009) and University of Virginia Cavalier (J.D. 2012). She welcomes comments and questions at info@secularprolife.org.

WHEN HUMANS ARE PROBLEMATIC

by Nicholas Neal



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It's an incredibly surreal feeling to see someone you knew from high school being charged with murder. It's a feeling I imagine most of the twenty-somethings in my town of Effingham felt when we saw the sad conclusion to the story of Willow Long.

In less than 48 hours, after over 300 volunteers from the community searching the Watson area for seven-year-old Willow Long, her body was found in a plastic bag near a pond. Later, her twenty-two year old uncle, Justin Deryke, was arrested and charged with first degree murder. As the case unfolded it was discovered that the reason behind the murder was that Willow Long had fallen into a brush pile causing her neck to be impaled. She was reportedly twitching in pain. Deryke then stabbed her to death in order to "put her out of her misery." Afterwards he hid her body,

apparently scared about the eventual punishment for his actions.

One must wonder, "Why didn't Deryke take her to a hospital?" That, of course, is the real injustice of the case. Deryke did not seem to have killed her out of malice; he killed her in order to solve a problem. Willow was in pain, and instead of trying to solve that problem with an attempt to save her life, he opted for the certitude of ending it.

A contrasting solution was the volunteer search party that looked for Willow, trying to safely return her home. They had a problem as well, but instead of seeking a life-taking solution, they sought a life-affirming one, even though it meant going through more trouble. Even though it meant not having certain solutions. They cared about Willow and that informed

the means by which tried to solve their problem.

The lesson of this case is a very human one that extends beyond Effingham. It is about the means that we use to solve the problems inherent in this world. Perhaps we can learn that in the face of other problems—chemical weapons, exacting justice upon a murderer, dealing with an unwanted pregnancy—we should seek the life-affirming solution even if it is less certain.



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