



Life Matters Journal

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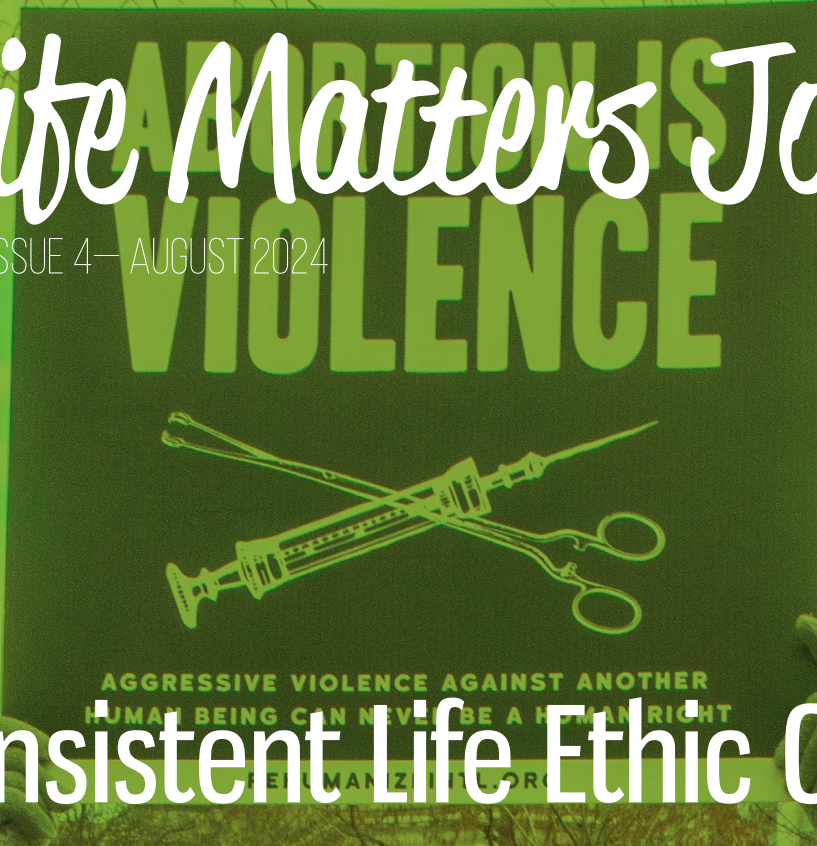
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

In terms of world events, a month can sometimes seem like a year, and this has certainly been one of those months. In just a few weeks we've had a dramatic upheaval in both major political parties, a last-minute candidate switch in one and an assassination attempt in the other. We've seen increasing escalation in the massacre in Gaza, which threatens total war in the Middle East.

The work of *Life Matters Journal* and Rehumanize International matters now more than ever. As we begin to turn the page and enter a new era of dehumanization, let us commit to an ever increasing fidelity to creative nonviolence. We should take the opportunity to let these tumultuous times enlarge our hearts and minds rather than cause them to recede.

Peace,

Jack Champagne



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This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether that violence is 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, halfway 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 ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer

The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the Consistent Life Ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

Life Matters Journal

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On Political Violence

By Jack Champagne

On the occasion of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X famously offered his remarks on the event, describing it as “the devil’s chickens coming home to roost.” The metaphor was as straightforward as it was jarring to a national audience: chickens have a finely-tuned homing instinct, and will always return to their own pens when sent out. In using this analogy, Malcolm declared that Kennedy’s death at the hands of a sniper was merely the inevitable result of the violence perpetrated by the American government in Southeast Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, as well as the violence the American government allowed to happen throughout the former Confederacy. Moreover, according to Malcolm X, this was not a cause for mourning, but rather celebration. “Now, being an old farm boy myself, chickens coming home to roost never made me sad. In fact, it’s only made me glad.”

This was a bold statement to make during a period of national mourning, setting off a firestorm of controversy and permanently ruining Malcolm’s relationship with his erstwhile mentor Elijah Muhammad. However, it is worth noting that it was not the first time that Malcolm X had made a statement to that effect. About a year prior, Malcolm described the Air France Flight 007 Crash of 1962 as “beautiful” and “an answer to prayers” because it contained over 100 natives of Atlanta, Georgia, a segregated city. This did stir up controversy, but to nowhere near the extent of the Kennedy statement. It would get him the attention of *Playboy Magazine*, who asked him to defend the statement, to which Malcolm said: “Sir, as I see the law of justice, it says as you sow, so shall you reap. The white man has revealed as the rope snapped black men’s necks. He has revealed around the lynching fire. It’s only right for the black man’s true God, Allah, to defend us — and for us to be joyous because our God manifests his ability to inflict pain on our enemy.”

This was, of course, a statement of Malcolm’s religious beliefs as they stood at the time, but it also speaks to a natural and inevitable human response to injustice and oppression. Malcolm X tended to characterize what were often random tragic events as a form of divine retributive justice, and would always contextualize his statements accordingly. With respect to the Air France statement, he referred to a police raid on one of the Muslim temples he had founded, which resulted in the

brutal, violent attack on seven unarmed men, one of whom was killed and another paralyzed for life. With respect to the Kennedy assassination, Malcolm referred to both the CIA-initiated assassination of Vietnamese president Ngo Diem Dinh and to the killings and beatings inflicted by civil rights activists in Birmingham. Malcolm X preached not from schadenfreude, but rather from profound frustrations at systematic violence perpetrated against people who often seemed powerless to strike back. More than mere frustration, however, Malcolm was giving an object lesson in the hypocrisy of public condemnations of violence. Why, the unspoken question went, is it ok to tolerate or celebrate the use of violence for political purposes

Why, the unspoken question went, is it ok to tolerate or celebrate the use of violence for political purposes abroad or to maintain “order” in the Jim Crow South, but not elsewhere?

abroad or to maintain “order” in the Jim Crow South, but not elsewhere? Martin Luther King Jr., an apostle of nonviolence himself, recognized how the sense of powerlessness in the face of manifest injustice and the self-serving hypocrisy of those in power can lead not only to the celebration of violence, but to violent outbursts themselves. Visiting the aftermath of the Watts Uprising of 1965 alongside his mentor Bayard Rustin, Dr. King remarked: “The economic deprivation, racial isolation, inadequate housing, and general despair of

thousands of Negroes teeming in Northern and Western ghettos are the ready seeds which gave birth to tragic expressions of violence. By acts of commission and omission none of us in this great country has done enough to remove injustice. I therefore humbly suggest that all of us accept our share of responsibility for these past days of anguish.”

On July 13th, 2024, a sniper took aim and fired several shots at Donald J. Trump at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. The gunman, a 20-year-old Pennsylvania resident, was shot dead but not before coming within millimeters of instantly killing the former president. Instead, he killed one of the attendees, who was killed while shielding his family from the stray gunfire. At the time of writing, no one knows what motivated young Thomas Crooks. Errant pieces of information about his life are at this point too scant and innocuous to form a coherent narrative about the whats and whys. But it was only a short amount of time before reactions to the event flurried about. Former President Barack Obama declared “there is absolutely no place for political violence in our democracy.” Current President Joe Biden said “violence has never been the answer.” Progressive senator

Bernie Sanders said “American democracy must be a clash of ideas, not political violence.” Beyond the denunciations of political violence by leaders across the country, there were the inevitable attempts to assign blame. Some linked the event to the worsening proliferation of gun violence in America, some said increasing political polarization was to blame. Some said Trump opponents were at fault for declaring that Trump was an existential threat to democracy who must be stopped at all costs, some said Trump and his supporters were at fault for normalizing violence in American political life.

Perhaps the most noteworthy thing about the commentary on the assassination attempt, however, was the swift and incisive counter-reaction. Critics of Biden and Obama’s foreign policy immediately seized upon their language. Contra Obama, the death toll of his authorization of the predator drone program was touted; contra Biden, the fact that he continues to countenance an unconscionable civilian death toll in Palestine while continuing to arm and fund the Israeli military effort. Others took issue with the notion that we should perceive political violence as unusual or aberrant. Ariel Gold of the Fellowship of Reconciliation took issue with Biden’s statement that “[w]e can’t allow this violence to be normalized,” pointing to the surfeit of politically motivated shootings in Pittsburgh, Charlottesville, and elsewhere.

Donald Trump is a polarizing figure for a wide variety of reasons. The combination of Joe Biden’s flagging poll numbers and Trump’s links to the so-called Presidential Transition Project of the highly influential Heritage Foundation have led to an outpouring of emotion regarding the possibilities of a second Trump presidency. In some ways this is beside the point; a sincere condemnation of political violence would hold regardless of the political views of the target. In other ways, however, it is impossible to understand the decidedly fractured response to the assassination attempt without reference to what Trump stands for. There is certainly cause for pathos in the platform Trump runs on, from the dehumanizing language used for immigrants and citizens of foreign governments, to the valorization of carceral violence, to the promises to increase the militarization of American foreign policy, to the usage of “woke,” “CRT,” and “gender indoctrination” as boogeyman words. Moreover, Trump’s conduct in his previous term in office, perceived as emboldening and encouraging racial and gender violence, is cause for concern for those who have justified fears of being on the receiving end of such violence. Frustrations at the lack of a meaningful, effective political alternative to a man who represents all of the above may in fact cause a person of good will to celebrate the assassination attempt and lament only its failure.

It is important and necessary to recognize that violence is endemic to American politics, and any insistence otherwise, that “there is no place in America for political violence,” is simply not true. It is important and necessary to recognize, highlight, and denounce the hypocrisy of political leaders who condemn political violence in one context and promote and celebrate it in another context. It is important and necessary to recognize that celebrations of political violence by the powerless against the powerful is a natural and inevitable reaction against oppression. It is important and necessary to do all of these things, while still unequivocally condemning political violence.

The late, great Reverend Jim Lawson, in his final book *Revolutionary Nonviolence*, identified violence as “the use of power to harass, intimidate, injure, shackle, kill, or destroy a person or persons.” This definition rightly includes, along with interpersonal physical violence, abuses of political power, the use of dehumanizing rhetoric, the denial of fundamental human rights, and noxious ideologies such as racism, sexism, and militarism. It is this definition that allows Rev. Lawson’s philosophy of nonviolence to take on its revolutionary character: it is “the use of power to try to resolve conflicts, injuries, and issues in order to heal and uplift, to solidify community, and to help people take power into their own hands and use their power creatively.” His condemnation of violence, beyond the immorality of treating any person, regardless of who they are, as less than human, is simple: it is ineffective.

The ineffectiveness of violence as a tool for positive social change is clear enough from the assassination attempt against Donald Trump on the 13th of July. Whatever the gunman had hoped to accomplish, all he actually managed to accomplish was wasting his own life and that of a random bystander, foiled merely by a chance turning of his target’s head. This is simply unavoidable; even a trained shooter firing wantonly into a crowd cannot guarantee that he will hit his intended target and only his intended target. And even if he had managed to kill Trump, Crooks would not have killed what Trump represents. Trump’s death would have left the Republican Party Platform and the Presidential Transition Plan intact, only changing who would be responsible for implementing it. To recognize that violence is systemic is to recognize that the death of any person or group of individuals is not sufficient to work against it. He would have simply killed a human being senselessly, and probably still paid for the act with his life. More importantly, however, the would-be assassin hasn’t actually empowered anyone. No one is better off, no one is in a stronger stance against the reality of violence in America because of what Thomas Crooks has done. The same is ultimately true of self-righteous, conditional condemnations of political violence. Denying the reality of violence in American society disempowers its victims and makes violent outbursts — however ineffective they may be — inevitable. We do not know and may not ever know if this was the case for Thomas Crooks, but the all-too-familiar logic that one’s political views are best expressed through the barrel of a gun is not unique to him.

Lawson, Dr. King, and Mahatma Gandhi all systematized their philosophy of nonviolence differently, but it always begins with the same step: focus, an awareness of what the problem is, and how to solve it. The problems of American life cannot be reduced to the person of Donald Trump or the person of Thomas Crooks. Myth-making in the service of the ideal of American democracy by scapegoating Crooks as the exception is not the answer to anything that ails us as a society, but neither is wistful dreaming of a world in which Crooks’ aim was slightly better. Both are distractions from the fundamental truth that the disorder at the root of both the violence that maintains the American system and the violence that led Crooks to take to the roof with his gun are the same. As long as the politics of dehumanization is normalized in American society, the insistence that “there is absolutely no place for political violence in our democracy” will ring hollow.





“The Single Largest Humanitarian Crisis on the Planet”: Sudan’s Fall into the Abyss

By John Whitehead

Although the war between Ukraine and Russia has dominated the news, other countries have been suffering through their own violent conflicts in recent years. In this and other pieces, I highlight contemporary wars and other conflicts that are too often overlooked.

The civil war that broke out in Sudan in 2023 still rages in the summer of 2024. The conflict between rival Sudanese military factions has devastated the capital, Khartoum, and the western region of Darfur. Precisely how many people have been killed is unknown, but the death toll is likely very high. The war has also displaced millions and pushed many to the brink of famine. In June, US Agency for International Development Director Samantha Power called Sudan’s conflict “the single largest humanitarian crisis on the planet.”¹

Addressing this crisis requires countries to provide sufficient funding for international aid and aid agencies to have adequate access to those in need. Other countries and international organizations also need to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table in the hopes of brokering a ceasefire.

War on Many Fronts

After decades of dictatorship, the Sudanese have sought a path to a more democratic government in recent years. Democratization was derailed in 2021, however, by a military coup. Military rule turned into violent conflict in April 2023, when two rival military factions began fighting each other in Khartoum. The warring factions were the established Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel-Fattah al-Burhan, and a powerful paramilitary organization known as the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Lieutenant-General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo.²

Within Khartoum, the RSF gained the initial military advantage, but the SAF took back part of the city in February 2024. Today the city is divided between the two factions.³ The SAF has made the coastal city of Port Sudan the new temporary capital.⁴

The war has spread beyond Khartoum. In 2023, the RSF seized control of much of Darfur, home to about a quarter of Sudan’s population, capturing most Darfuran cities.⁵ The one major city they have not captured, El Fasher, home to roughly 1 million people, is currently under siege by the RSF.⁶ The RSF has also captured other areas in Sudan, including part of Gezira, a crucial agricultural region.⁷

Caught in the Crossfire

While the SAF and RSF have fought each other, ordinary Sudanese have paid the price. How many people have been killed in the war is unknown, but the number may be very high. The United Nations estimates nine million people have been displaced by the conflict, which makes Sudan the largest displacement crisis on earth.⁸ Many Khartoum residents have fled. Those remaining must survive a war zone.

According to Dr. Sohail Albushra, a state health official, half of Khartoum’s 50 hospitals were closed by June 2024. Many had been destroyed in the fighting. Hospitals still in operation struggled to keep up: at Al Nau hospital, near the frontlines, many patients have had to sleep two to a bed. Aliaa Hospital had to endure months of shelling; when electricity failed, surgeons performed operations by the light of mobile phones.⁹

Looting by the RSF and others has been widespread in the city. For example, a local businessman reported that one of his factories was raided by fighters who stole 8,000 motorbikes and rickshaws. Almost all the city's 1,060 bank branches have been robbed. Mohamed Eldaw, a banker, comments, "A city of this size, this wealth, and nothing remains?... It must be the biggest episode of looting in history."¹⁰

The situation in Darfur has been no better. The RSF has reportedly looted and destroyed civilian goods and humanitarian resources in the Darfurian cities they have seized.¹¹ Further, following their capture of a neighborhood in the city of El-Geneina in November 2023, the RSF reportedly massacred civilians: survivors spoke of men being rounded up and either shot or hacked to death with axes. The United Nations estimates 10,000-15,000 people have been killed in El-Geneina since the civil war began.¹²

The example of El-Geneina heightens fears about what will happen if El Fasher falls to the RSF. Since the current siege began in April 2024, more than 40 villages near the city have been burned, some deliberately destroyed by the RSF and others destroyed amid fighting between the RSF and SAF. Following the RSF seizure of part of eastern El Fasher, more than 20,000 buildings within the city have been damaged or destroyed. A major hospital run by Doctors Without Borders was forced by an RSF attack to shut down in June.¹³

Meanwhile, the SAF has been accused of harming civilians in El Fasher by indiscriminately bombing civilian areas with airstrikes and artillery. The SAF reportedly bombed an area next to a children's hospital in May.¹⁴

However, the greatest threat to the Sudanese right now is not bombs or bullets but hunger.

The Weapon of Hunger

The civil war has disrupted food production in Sudan and blocked access to food. Both the SAF and RSF have plundered farms and destroyed important farming infrastructure, including 75 percent of the region's flour-milling capacity. In the breadbasket region of Gezira, for example, the RSF plundered the areas they captured, taking farmers' crops and civilian goods, forcing many farmers to flee. The result of such disruptions has been much lower grain production during the 2023-2024 harvest, with production almost half of what it was the previous year.¹⁵

The war has also obstructed humanitarian aid from getting to people in need. Both sides try to direct international aid to the territory they control (for the SAF, largely northern and eastern Sudan; for the RSF, Darfur and areas in Gezira and elsewhere in central Sudan) and block it from reaching territory controlled by the other side. The SAF has an advantage in this respect as it is recognized by the United Nations as the legitimate government of Sudan: UN agencies are based in the SAF's temporary capital of Port Sudan and depend on the SAF's approval to travel elsewhere in the country.¹⁶

Both the SAF and RSF also extort money from aid workers, whether by requiring permits or requiring aid to be transported by trucks affiliated with their respective factions.¹⁷ Logistics is also a problem for aid workers: in Darfur, transporting aid must run a gauntlet of challenges, including fighting in areas such as El Fasher, checkpoints controlled by different armed factions, and poor

road conditions, something that will get worse in the summer rainy season.¹⁸

Sometimes factions will simply steal aid. As part of its looting of communities in Gezira, the RSF plundered a WFP compound that the UN reports contained food to feed 1.5 million people for a month.¹⁹

The Human Toll

The impact of these activities by the warring factions on Sudan's civilians has been predictable and terrible. In late June 2024, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the global organization responsible for declaring famine situations, estimated that 25.6 million Sudanese (over half the population) are in a food crisis. Of these Sudanese in crisis, 8.5 million are acutely malnourished or otherwise struggling to survive, and 755,000 people are in famine conditions. The IPC identified 14 areas across Sudan that are near famine, with the greatest famine threats being in Khartoum, Darfur, and Gezira.²⁰ In Darfur, the Islamic Relief aid organization reports that the war's disruptions of businesses have led to food prices doubling.²¹

Compounding Sudan's humanitarian crisis is the civil war's damage to the healthcare system. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 70-80 percent of Sudan's health facilities were not functioning in February 2024. About two-thirds of Sudanese lack access to healthcare.²²

UN organizations commented, in a statement released in late May 2024, that "Malnutrition and disease reinforce each other, with sick children becoming more easily malnourished and malnourished children becoming sick more easily... Sudan risks a lost generation."²³

Reuters has investigated the situation in Darfur, drawing on satellite images, photos and videos taken on the ground, interviews with people from the region, and other data. The investigation reveals a dramatic increase in the number of people dying from malnutrition and illness. Fourteen burial grounds in five communities across Darfur have grown rapidly in the first half of 2024 compared to the second half of 2023.²⁴

People forced from their homes into displaced persons (DP) camps are among those most at risk. Reuters' analysis of satellite images shows a cemetery on the southern edge of Kalma DP camp expanding 2.5 times faster in the first half of 2024 than it did in the second half of 2023. In the Zamzam DP camp, home to hundreds of thousands, a cemetery on the edge of the camp expanded roughly three times faster in the first half of 2024 than in the second half of 2023. Consistent with such findings, Doctors Without Borders found in early 2024 that among 46,000 children under five in the Zamzam camp nearly a third were acutely malnourished.²⁵

Nertiti, a town in central Darfur, has been a haven for people fleeing the fighting: the UN International Organization for Migration reports that Nertiti has doubled in size as more than 33,000 displaced people have arrived. The town is still vulnerable to the RSF, which has stolen the harvest and has made the passage of humanitarian aid more precarious by threatening travelers on the road.²⁶

A local humanitarian worker in Nertiti told Reuters that people are eating tree leaves or digging up ant nests in search of bread crumbs. "Famine is already here," he said.²⁷

A community leader in the Kalma DP camp similarly said that fear of the RSF is keeping people in the camp. “We are trapped here and we will die of hunger,” he said.²⁸

Future Steps

The most immediate need is to get humanitarian aid to the Sudanese. One possible step would be for UN agencies to relocate the headquarters for their Sudan operations to another nation, to gain greater independence from the SAF (while still maintaining a presence in Port Sudan). From this new location, the agencies could coordinate the transfer of aid into Sudan from neighboring countries such as Chad or South Sudan. This approach may allow greater access to RSF-controlled territory.²⁹ Consider contacting the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to urge them to adopt such an approach.³⁰

The United States and other nations should fully fund UN humanitarian aid efforts in Sudan. Private donors may wish to give to nongovernmental aid organizations working in Sudan such as the Sudan Relief Fund, Action Against Hunger, Catholic Relief Services, Islamic Relief USA, or other groups working to address the crisis.³¹

Beyond immediate humanitarian needs, the civil war needs to end. Other countries, including the United States, as well as regional organizations such as the African Union, should intensify diplomatic efforts in Sudan.

Diplomacy should aim to broker a cease-fire between the SAF and RSF, which should include lifting the siege of El Fasher, and to end obstruction of the transport of aid throughout Sudan. Following a cease-fire, the goal should be to create a power-sharing arrangement between the factions that might allow for something like stability to return to Sudan.

American citizens should consider contacting President Biden, by phone, at 202-456-1111, or email; Secretary of State Antony Blinken, US Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, and their representatives in the House and Senate to urge them to support both diplomacy to achieve a cease-fire and full funding of UN humanitarian aid efforts for Sudan.³² They might also wish to sign a petition calling for such policies.³³

You can also continue to inform yourself on the Sudan situation, through other commentary on the crisis and how to respond to it.³⁴

The Sudanese people have fallen into a humanitarian abyss. They urgently need our help.

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What Pro-Life Advocates Can Learn from Listening to Women's Abortion Stories

By Grattan Brown, STD

When the US Supreme Court published its decision in *Dobbs vs Jackson Women's Health Center* in June 2022, pro-choice advocates' misinformation about pregnant women's access to emergency care spread quickly, uncritically, and widely in the media.

We heard shocking stories of women suffering from complications and being wrongly denied care out of confusion about ethics and state law. So I launched a project called Pro-Life Professional Insight to collect and publish stories from pro-life medical professionals, who illustrate how they save women's lives without elective abortion.¹

One of the first stories in the project reminded me that if I were going to think deeply about the problem of abortion, I should also listen to the stories of women who have had them.²

That story tells of a high school student named Ashley whose boyfriend said he would support her if she ever got pregnant. She did, and he didn't. Instead, he told her to get an abortion and gave her the money to do it. He said that if she didn't, her parents would not understand and would kick her out of the house, she would have to quit school and she would never fulfill her dreams.

So, Ashley went to the abortion clinic and took the first pill. She immediately regretted it, tried all alone for a day to figure out what to do, and then went to her mom. Her mom was supportive and loving and took her to a nearby crisis pregnancy center, who sent her to my co-author in the story, Dr. Matthew Harrison. It was 2006, and the first time he had ever seen the abortion pill in action, so he had to figure out what to do. He gave her progesterone; it saved the baby, and his experience became an early example of what is now known as the Abortion Pill Reversal Protocol.

I know there are millions of Ashley's out there and that most of them go through with their abortions. Their stories are easy to find. Planned Parenthood websites post lots of them. There are projects like the 1 in 3 Campaign, but I have learned the most from a podcast called *The Abortion Diary*.

I do not agree with the pro-choice goals of *The Abortion Diary* or the pro-choice views of nearly all the 170 women interviewed. But the project's director and the women interviewed deserve a lot of credit for telling their stories with detail and honesty and for not worrying that some pro-life advocates might propagandize, or that some pro-choice advocates might try to silence, their expressions of grief and loss, descriptions of the uncomfortable silence inside abortion clinics, and honesty about difficulties along the road to recovery after abortion.

After listening to their stories, I still think these women should not have ended the lives of their children, but many of their stories also show a remarkable period of personal growth that began with

the experience of unexpectedly becoming pregnant and having an abortion and continued by recognizing the problematic circumstances that led to that choice and by working to change their circumstances and themselves.

When I listened to the episodes, I heard variations of Ashley's story much more frequently than the stereotypical tales of random promiscuity. A young woman is looking for a meaningful relationship. She starts dating a guy, starts having sex with him, and becomes pregnant. Neither wanting nor expecting to become pregnant, she is surprised to discover that she is and may experience some mixture of fear, confusion, and conflict about what to do. Others are certain that they want an abortion and simply set about doing it.

In some stories, the guy abandons her, her family is not supportive or she fears they won't be, and the sadness and isolation move her to get an abortion. In other stories, the guy sticks with her, and some but not all of the women want to know what her partner thinks about keeping the baby. He typically says "It's your choice" and accompanies her to the clinic, in some cases struggling with his own feelings about wanting to raise the child.

Often, the unexpected pregnancy makes the couple confront the problems in their relationship. They realize they want children but not with each other and that the relationship should have ended long before. Some couples think that they are unable to parent, or they want to complete important projects like career or graduate school before having children. There are also couples who don't want children at all but do want companionship.

Regardless of the particular circumstances, most of the relationships end within months of the abortion. Many of these women eventually meet someone else, establish a more stable, loving relationship, and have children. Very few have an abortion after having children.

The Human Experience of Abortion

Their stories highlight the humanity of the women who have abortions, and here is what stood out to me:

First, becoming pregnant unexpectedly and having an abortion usually changes a woman for the rest of her life. Her abortion experience ranges from unpleasant to grueling, and she never wants to repeat it. Looking back on the experience, most of the women count it as one of their pivotal life events. Becoming pregnant was a pivot from girlhood toward womanhood and from "I didn't think it would happen to me" to "Wow, I can actually have a baby."

Along with their fears about the unexpected pregnancy, some women have other reactions they never expected, including bonding with the baby. For younger women, having the abortion

is often one of the first hard decisions she ever had to make, even if deep down she knew what she would likely choose at the moment she saw the pregnancy test result. She seeks people to talk to and often learns who her real friends are and aren't. Sometimes she's surprised to learn that other women among her friends and family, including her own mother, had abortions.

Second, most women who get abortions recognize that they have ended the life of a child, and many feel that they have lost something of themselves too. They know an embryo is not a blob of cells but a human being. They feel embarrassed that they let themselves get pregnant. They feel the contradictory pressure on women to get an abortion when the circumstances are not right and then the guilt of having done so. They grieve and sometimes take years to process their grief. They write about the experience, perform rituals, mark anniversaries of due dates as birthdays, bury the remains, and visit burial places. Other women repress their grief, only to have it return years later.

Third, nothing riles post-abortive women more than pro-life advocates who try to make them feel guilt and shame and tell them they have killed their babies. Not only do most already recognize that they've ended their child's life, but they also know the reasons why that choice seemed right to them.

They reserve the most intense anger for those of us who pray or witness outside abortion clinics, especially those who try to speak to women as they enter the clinic. They speak of hearing pro-lifers shout that if they go through with the abortion, then they will be murderers. They do not make any distinction between pro-life advocates who use shaming language and those whose speech is more judicious and caring. It is true that some women are coerced or conflicted as they approach a clinic, but at least as many arrive at the clinic having given serious thought to the decision and have little patience for others who would challenge their choice.

Fourth, entering the abortion clinic moves her from anger to fear and especially to sadness. Many women speak about a strange silence in the waiting room, where the women all know why they are there and do not make eye contact or speak to each other. Sometimes the clinic staff even instruct them not to have conversations, which becomes especially difficult when one woman becomes upset and another wants to comfort her. They are disappointed when their partner, if he accompanies her, has to stay in the waiting room when she goes back for the abortion. Nonetheless, she appreciates the presence of a kind nurse or volunteer to hold her hand. She also appreciates real talk about what to expect physically and, for a medication abortion, what changes are expected and what are the signs she should go to the nearest hospital emergency room.

Finally, having an abortion sometimes makes a woman reexamine her assumptions about fundamental human questions regarding suffering, love, fertility, loss, death, grief, shame, and failure and about how those assumptions have played out in her life so far. Most of the women on *The Abortion Diary* say that they do not regret their abortions, but many say they do regret the circumstances that led them to become pregnant and confront that choice in the first place. Some say the abortion "showed me I needed to grow up and get my act together." That often involves admitting and responding to the personal weaknesses that led to a variety of problems, including the untimely pregnancy.

She arrives at a more mature vision of permanent loving

relationships, recognizes the problems of the men she had been involved with, changes her relationship habits, and ends up married with children. Sometimes there's a need to take stock of her own talents and aspirations and embark on a long-term project in life, work, or both.

What These Stories Teach About Abortion

Civil discourse about abortion should be merciful as well as honest. The women of *The Abortion Diary* speak candidly about seeking abortions to escape criticism and embarrassment or to avoid disrupting important projects such as graduate school. Unfortunately, some pro-life advocates use such stories to portray women who have had abortions as selfish and childish. No mercy for the woman.

Other women get abortions when they find themselves in such difficult and dire social circumstances that it seems impossible to do otherwise. Unfortunately, abortion advocates exploit those hard cases to expand legal abortion. No mercy for the child.

Social stigma against abortion inevitably arises because it deliberately ends a human life, but stigma need not arise because a woman becomes pregnant when she did not want to, because she is poor or unmarried, or because other people expected her to use contraception. Each one of us makes mistakes and fears the consequences and the criticism, especially from the people closest to us.

The women of *The Abortion Diary* remind us that correcting our biggest mistakes leads to remarkable lifelong growth when we can share our stories. Eliminating stigma about unwanted pregnancy will save children because fear of rejection leads women to abort them.

The lack of legal and material support leads to abortion as well. Abortion will never be morally good or legally just, and enshrining abortion in law and state constitutions is just as much a perversion of justice as slavery laws ever were. But ending the practice may be more difficult than ending the practice of slavery and discrimination in the United States.

It is hard enough to write laws protecting the child in the womb when pro-choice rhetoric confuses and frightens voters. It is even harder to support the woman whose untimely pregnancy has left her vulnerable and whose society has unjustly come to depend upon abortion to solve that problem.

Without the right kind of support, some women will default to abortion, including clandestine ones. Providing the right kind of support requires people around her to accept the burdens of helping her and for her to accept the help. If people are not prepared to accept those burdens, abortion shifts them onto the child in the womb. The more times that abortion shifts that burden onto the child, the more that solution appears to be one that people obviously should accept — until people reckon with the facts that abortion is a form of killing and that childbirth could become a realistic alternative and a better life-changing experience.

The variety of women's abortion stories shows the need for abortion restrictions and for pregnancy help centers that are not involved with the abortion industry. For example, some women interviewed in *The Abortion Diary* were adamant that the required 24 hour wait between consultation and abortion never could have changed their thinking. But others admitted to making the decision "on autopilot" and needing the time to process the decision.

They wished they had considered abortion's implications and would have accomplished post-abortion healing more easily had they done so. A few even said they would have kept their babies if they had taken more time to think.

Women also need to hear about realistic pathways for carrying their children to term and raising them themselves or, if that is not possible, for giving the child up for adoption, despite adoption's difficult dynamics. Many women are conflicted about having an abortion but pushed toward abortion by their own future aspirations, a real or perceived inability to parent, partners or family who do not want a child at that time or ever, and political pressures. These women deserve real non-abortion options presented as a feasible if not desirable path forward.

Today's abortion providers such as Planned Parenthood are not at all prepared to help women understand non-abortion options in a positive light. Other providers, such as Pregnancy Resource Centers, are maligned because they refuse to provide abortions, but when these organizations are well-resourced and well-governed, their non-abortion stance enables them to partner with community resources that provide safe and affordable housing, quality and affordable daycare, recovery programs, and other material and emotional support.

It is better for the woman if society spends time and other resources helping her see a realistic pathway to give birth to and raise a child than if we spend resources giving her an abortion and then helping her heal from the grieving and loss that abortion entails.

Pro-choice disinformation makes progress impossible for both women and children. The vast majority of the women of *The Abortion Diary* aborted healthy children. A small percentage aborted children with life-limiting conditions such as Trisomy 18, or because there was a chance they had such a condition. None had pregnancies they wanted but could not continue because of serious or life-threatening medical conditions for the mother. Why? Because the abortion debate has never really been about life-threatening complications or serious harm to the mother's body. Long before *Roe*, doctors treated women for these complications, even if it meant losing the child. Doctors always recognized that the mother is their primary patient, that centuries-old ethical principles permitted these procedures, and that the law at that time would neither prosecute doctors nor require them to wait for circumstances of imminent death.

Scaring voters that women will die without abortion is simply widespread public deception. Aborting healthy and disabled children is ethically and legally different from having to lose a child in order to preserve the life and well-being of a mother suffering from a pregnancy that is severely compromised by medical complications. This basic ethical distinction was true long before *Roe*, was true during *Roe*, and will always be true.

Medical institutions must make sure that their medical professionals and students understand this distinction. Citizens should ask every political candidate, whether pro-choice or pro-life, to show publicly that they understand this distinction and criticize every pro-choice and pro-life argument that fails to respect it.

A pro-life advocate should be one of the best companions a post-abortive woman can have as part of the healing process. The pro-life advocate should help them find forgiveness and plan a thriving life rather than provoke more shame and guilt. Many of

the women of *The Abortion Diary* were striving to grow into adulthood, chart a course of life, and fill their lives with important projects, such as graduate school or a career. Pro-life advocates rightly point out that even such important projects do not justify ending the life of a child, but we also must recognize the difficulty of suddenly changing major life commitments in order to take on a new one and help shoulder its burdens.

If women regret the circumstances that led them to choose abortion, they might help other women avoid those circumstances. The vast majority of women of *The Abortion Diary* tried to make sexual activity a part of their search for a meaningful relationship. Reflecting back on their pregnancy and abortion experience, many recognized that this was a relationship mistake, or that contraception is not as easily used or reliable as they thought, or that they were compensating for personal problems in other areas of their lives, or that some other factor made sexual activity seem right. Then, dealing with all the implications of unexpected pregnancy and abortion prompted serious reflection and course correction that eventually led to the meaningful relationships that they had been seeking.

When they are able to tell their stories without judgment, these same women might help other women place sexual activity within a long-term relationship that has been tested enough to provide support in the case of pregnancy.

Toward the end of each interview, the director of *The Abortion Diary* asks the woman "Why do you want to share your story?" The second most common response is that she wants to keep abortion legal. The most common answer is that she does not want other women to feel alone.

Telling her abortion story is an experience of healing and growth that she wants for other women who have gone through the experience of abortion. The irony is that these women, nearly all pro-choice, also hated the experience and would have preferred to find personal growth and a meaningful relationship without it. For the sake of both the woman and the child, doing away with the abortion experience should be our society's goal.

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Notes

1. "Pro-Life Professional Insight." Rehumanize International. <https://www.rehumanizeintl.org/prolife-provider-insight>.
2. Grattan Brown, STD, and Matthew Harrison, MD, "Undoing Mifepristone Abortion for the First Time," Rehumanize International blog, April 12, 2023, <https://www.rehumanizeintl.org/post/undoing-mifepristone-abortion-for-the-first-time>.



The Consistent Life Ethic Can Save the Pro-Life Movement

By Kristina Artuković

Many of us in the pro-life movement have been aware for some time that the GOP's 2024 presidential nominee Donald Trump is not exactly pro-life. Nonetheless, the news about removing the pro-life plank from the Republican National Committee 2024 platform came as an unpleasant surprise.¹

The platform is a document of capitulation to Trump's shallow pragmatism on the issue of prenatal justice. In it, the former pro-life party explicitly abandons the goal of outlawing abortion at the federal level, singling out "Late-Term Abortion" as the only thing worthy of opposition. The GOP also pledges to support In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF) without giving any thought to its regulation. In addition, Trump's running mate J.D. Vance supports broad access to abortion pills, joining the GOP presidential candidate in misrepresenting the latest US Supreme Court decision on mifepristone.²

The US political landscape now consists of two major pro-choice parties: the Republican Party has just been transformed into a retro-Democratic Party, while the current Democratic Party is the absolute champion of completely unrestricted access to abortion.

Things are hardly going to change for the better in the years to come: without at least nominal pro-life ideals embedded in their party platform, many GOP politicians might quickly lose the motivation to keep on pushing for legal protection of nascent human life in their states. One by one, the states would succumb under pressure and become pro-choice. Republican legislators might adopt an oblique pro-life strategy, supporting more robust life-affirming welfare policies, but judging from their track record so far (with positive shifts almost solely thanks to tremendous behind-the-scenes efforts from pro-lifers), I would not count on it.³

For someone living in Europe, this sounds eerily familiar. Stripped of any political influence, and severely constrained by the overwhelming pro-choice consensus across the political spectrum, European pro-lifers are an endangered species. And they think like one, as well: the vast majority are reactionary and often anti-secular. Meanwhile, prenatal justice floats as a mere afterthought in the heads of vaguely pro-life politicians primarily driven by illiberal, anti-immigration, and nationalist pro-natalist impulses.

This same situation will now, more likely than not, happen in the United States as well. Ever since the late 1980s, the US politi-

cal frame for prenatal justice has been relentlessly shifting towards the right. Pro-life Democrats, from Gov. Robert Casey to endless others, have been either ostracized or pushed into near-total quietism on the issue — which is exactly what's happening now in the Republican Party. Meanwhile, a large pro-life coalition took a firm hold on the right, combining Evangelical politics with Catholic bioethics.⁴

And yet, pro-lifers resisting this ideological mold have persevered throughout the years: Democrats for Life of America, various pro-life feminist organizations such as Feminists Choosing Life of New York and New Wave Feminists, Secular Pro-Life, Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising, the American Solidarity Party — to name a few, in addition to us at Rehumanize International.⁵ The majority of these organizations are part of the Consistent Life Network.⁶ It is their wisdom, courage, and persistence that is now critically needed.

This has been the missing piece in the European puzzle. Whole-life ethos is almost nowhere to be found here, except in places with a Catholic pacifist tradition such as Ireland. The consistent life approach, with its wholesome ethical principles and its non-partisan, diverse, and compassionate vision that upholds freedom and dignity for all, now amounts to the crucial element that may save the pro-life movement from falling into the pit of reactionarism.

Pro-lifers will either diversify or face marginalization by disappearing into a preservation park for the religious and/or submerging their pro-life beliefs into the waters of increasingly eugenic and racist post-Christian right.⁷

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to boldly communicate consistent life principles and work on cultivating and uplifting a non-traditional and secular pro-life base. Our values are now critical, both from within the movement, to keep it open and just, and towards those on the outside, to inspire and convince.

For example, both in the United States and Europe, many Christians on the left have been disillusioned with pro-life strategies and their underlying ideologies, believing that it is currently impossible to legally protect humans starting from conception without unleashing a terrible systemic injustice. There is some truth in that. Regrettably, these critics are typically unwilling to commit

to being pro-life and work on preventing such injustice from within the movement.

I believe that witnessing and sharpening consistent life principles is the only way that might resonate with the people in this camp. Having the courage to see things from their perspective while firmly holding our ground might benefit us too.

Having arrived on the verge of success after Dobbs, only to be dispersed into numerous state battle-fields and now being deserted by its main political vehicle, the pro-life movement will inevitably go through a long phase of reckoning. This almost-victory has revealed many weak spots: lack of skills necessary to present pro-life positions to a broader public; mediocre parent-friendly and other social policies; general lack of interest in social justice among conservative pro-life legislators; lack of communication between legislators and medical experts when drafting legislation; inadequacies of pro-life medical guidelines; lack of pro-life mediators on the ground in public healthcare; harms of the “abortion is never medically necessary” approach; carceralists in the base; insufficient awareness of ethical issues concerning reprototechnology, etc.

There are many things we’ll need to work on in the future. Now that we are free, no longer constrained by any major party, it’s time to build new coalitions. It’s Consistent Life Ethic time. Engage, find common ground, challenge, adapt, advise, dissent, dignify, build bridges, discuss, divest, support, criticize, inspire, liberate. In a word: rehumanize.

Notes

1. The American Presidency Project, “2024 GOP Platform: Make America Great Again!” July 8, 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/2024-republican-party-platform>.
2. Alexandria DeSanctis, “The GOP Platform Is a Major Loss for the Pro-Life Movement” *National Review*, July 12, 20 24, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2024/07/the-gop-platform-is-a-major-loss-for-the-pro-life-movement/>; NBC News, “GOP Sen. JD Vance Says He Supports Access to Abortion Pill Mifepristone,” July 7, 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/amp-video/mmvo214352965701>.
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5. See the American Solidarity Party (<https://www.solidarity-party.org/>); Democrats for Life of America (<https://www.democratsforlife.org/index.php>); Feminists Choosing Life of New York (<https://www.fclny.org/>); New Wave Feminists (<https://www.newwavefeminists.com/about>); Progressive Anti-Abortion Uprising (<https://paaunow.org/>); and Secular Pro-Life (<https://secularprolife.org/faq/>).
6. See Consistent Life Network (<https://www.consistentlifenetwork.org>).
7. See, for example, the speakers featured on the Natal Conference website, accessed July 19, 2024, <https://www.natalism.org/>; and Abigail Weinberg, “At CPAC, the ‘Great Replacement Theory’ Meets Anti-Abortion Nonsense,” *Mother Jones*, May 20, 2022, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2022/05/cpac-abortion-matt-schlapp-great-replacement/>.

