



# LIFE MATTERS JOURNAL

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**LIFE.  
PEACE.  
JUSTICE.**  
a conference on life issues  
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## LIFE/PEACE/JUSTICE: A RECAP OF THE BEST CONSISTENT LIFE ETHIC CONFERENCE YET!

fourth wave feminism

40 FILM REVIEW

LEARNING FROM OSCAR ROMERO

**WAR IS A RACKET:  
ATROCITIES &  
AFTERMATH**

*...and 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: "L/P/J v1.0" by Aimee Murphy*

# LIFE MATTERS JOURNAL

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## INTRODUCTION - LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

### Dear readers, supporters, and friends,

I'm so thrilled at the growth and changes we have in store for Life Matters Journal this Summer. So many, in fact, that by the next issue, we plan to see another face and author in this very column!

As we grow, here are the few major changes we expect to see:

1. A new Executive Editor, with great editorial know-how and the leadership skills to make this publication even better. She'll be dedicated solely to the project of the magazine publication for LMJ.
2. I'll be transitioning to the position of solely Executive Director of the Life Matters Journal organization, with hope for more time and energy to be put towards other projects. Going along with that...
3. We plan to begin writing a great book which will be an amazing resource for Consistent Life Ethic supporters -- with an especial nod towards students engaging the young culture at hand. And...
4. We will also be hosting our first Summer Internship cycle beginning in June, ending in August! If you're interested in applying, send an email for more information and instructions to [lifemattersjournal@gmail.com](mailto:lifemattersjournal@gmail.com)! There's FREE housing, some free meals, and free coffee and tea always included. Also - flexible hours and the assurance of knowing that you'll be dedicating many of your summer hours to the pursuit of life, peace, and justice for all.

The idea of hosting summer interns has been an exciting idea for me since we founded Life Matters Journal back in 2011, especially because I myself hadn't felt quite right in applying for so many of the pro-life internships

that aligned with solely Conservative party politics and weren't as welcoming as I'd hoped to more alternative pro-lifers. But even some peace organizations I'd looked into supported abortion. I'm so stoked to be able to offer such an amazing opportunity for growth with our own organization and for young pro-life and pro-peace leaders who, prior to now, had not quite felt at home in the movements.

I encourage you to apply or pass on the word about this amazing opportunity - it won't be all paperwork, and there won't be any fetching of coffee for anyone but yourself.

If you have other Summer plans, I hope they're filled with joy, and the opportunity to give life and promote peace for humanity.

For peace and all life,



*Aimee Murphy*  
Executive Editor

Have a letter for the editors here at Life Matters Journal? Please write us at [lifemattersjournal@gmail.com](mailto:lifemattersjournal@gmail.com) 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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The views presented in the 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.



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# CURRENT EVENTS AND CONSISTENT LIFE: A RECAP OF LIFE/PEACE/JUSTICE

## AS THE CONSISTENT LIFE ETHIC GROWS, SO DOES OPPOSITION TO THE DEATH PENALTY

*by Ben Jones*

At the inaugural Life/Peace/Justice Conference in Philadelphia this past March, I had the opportunity as a representative of Conservatives Concerned about the Death Penalty (CCATDP) to join Kristen Day of Democrats for Life of America (DFLA) for the panel “Going Against the Political Grain for Peace and Life.” Both DFLA and CCATDP seem, at least to some, to be unlikely advocates for the issues they champion. When CCATDP launched at CPAC in 2013, some news outlets expressed surprise that a group of conservatives was drawing attention to flaws in the death penalty.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, DFLA breaks the mold for what we are conditioned to expect in our sharply partisan political environment.<sup>2</sup>

Yet one thing stood out at this year’s Life/Peace/Justice Conference: attendees never expressed the least bit of surprise seeing groups like DFLA and CCATDP. This attitude reflected the commitment of attendees to work across the political spectrum in promoting a culture of life.

The strong support for and interest in CCATDP from attendees was incredibly encouraging. Fortunately,



Photo by Scott Lenger, some rights reserved

we have met similar encouragement in our outreach efforts across the country. A number of recent developments in particular give us reason to be hopeful regarding efforts to end the death penalty in the US. First, a number of conservatives are casting aside the stereotype that they need to support capital punishment, as they champion efforts to end it. From Kansas to South Dakota to Kentucky, Republican legislators are emerging as leading sponsors of bills to repeal the death penalty. One such example is Kentucky Republican Representative David Floyd. He makes a simple but powerful case why conservatives like himself are calling for repeal: “Conservatives value innocent life and should not support a state government program that can kill innocent people.”<sup>3</sup>

Second, support for the death penalty has ceased to be a litmus test issue among conservatives. As more Republicans with impeccable conservative credentials have become vocal in their opposition to the death penalty, it no longer is tenable to claim that to be a good Republican you must support it. This point is especially evident in Kansas, where the state party stripped its pro-death penalty plank from its 2014 platform. The move came after some party leaders argued that the current platform failed to reflect the growing number of Republicans in the state committed to a consistent life ethic.

Third, young people are increasingly rejecting the death penalty. An informative recent poll found that Christian millennials are significantly less likely than older Christians to support the death penalty (32% v. 42%).<sup>4</sup> This poll backs up our own experience talking to students with campus pro-life and conservative groups, who often need little persuading when it comes to opposing the death penalty. Increasingly for them, pro-life means consistent life.

This last point is especially instructive, for the attitudes of young people today will be policy tomorrow. In our outreach to conservatives, and young conservatives especially, we see an undeniable interest among them to consider alternatives to the death penalty. Wesley Pruden, former editor of *The Washington Times*, has observed that if this trend continues we will arrive at a point where “death gets no sanction and the executioner is banished for all.”<sup>5</sup>



All these developments bode well for the consistent life movement. Conservatives' changing attitudes toward capital punishment point toward a growing commitment to make sure that political labels do not get in the way of promoting a culture of life. And for those committed to a consistent life ethic, that is strong reason to be hopeful about the future.

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# BRINGING TO LIGHT PERSPECTIVES ON LIFE

*by Mary Stroka*

While trekking across the country from Chicago to Philadelphia the last weekend in March for Life Matters Journal's one-day Life/Peace/Justice Conference, I thought I was pretty devoted to the consistent life ethic. Looking back, that's nothing, at least compared to the witness of the speakers present. Add the rapt attention of the roughly 150 conference attendees, and you've got a small movement on fire with activism.

Abby Johnson, an outspoken pro-life advocate who was formerly a Planned Parenthood clinic director, tried to reschedule her flight after she had to cancel her original one after fainting. She's in her third trimester of pregnancy and still wanted to be there. With little notice, Jewels Green replaced Johnson and delivered a beautifully moving speech about her own journey from abortion clinic counseling and work to pro-life activism.

Reverend Patrick Mahoney of Christian Defense Coalition has been arrested 63 times and said it's his goal to have more arrests than years to his age. Some of the speakers had been involved in political campaigns that influenced their views on human rights. Others were brought into the movement through situations that impacted their personal lives. Still more just saw a void in the pro-life movement, especially in secular circles.

Each of the speakers had his or her unique path of coming to embrace the consistent life ethic, and so did the conference attendees.

Just as the consistent life ethic breaks through political party and religious barriers, the conference broke down barriers between pro-life celebrities and their

followers, beyond the regular, impersonal communication possible through social media. Real-time, real life communication abounded at the conference.

For example, I saw pro-life film producer Jason Jones speaking with a conference-goer after the man had asked a question during Jones' presentation about drone warfare. Overhearing the two of them devotedly talking about the issue for several minutes in the hallway really inspired me. The conference was immersed in this dedication to in-depth discussion about life issues, and it was especially obvious in that scene.

Several perspectives were raised throughout the day. Some speakers argued for complete pacifism, even to the point of saying that World War II was not a "just war" and that it could have been prevented if the German churches had acted immediately. Professor Robert Arner of Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia argued that resorting to violence in combatting evil is a "lack of creativity." Some conference attendees argued back, saying that force is sometimes necessary to quell aggressors, like in the Russia-Ukraine crisis. The speakers made several calls for action, both large and small. Jones said getting both political parties on board to provide the vulnerable full legal protection was critical, since it's impossible to do it without both parties' cooperation. Mary Meehan of Human Life Review argued that the President needs to make an executive order to the CIA to not overthrow other governments. Shane Claiborne, a founder of Philadelphia's The Simple Way, recommended that we focus on what we are for instead of what we are against. And Mahoney said we need reach out in practical, tangible ways and make an effort to build relationships.

Regardless of the intricacies of various perspectives, life issues are interconnected. As the speakers stressed, we need to hold a consistent pro-life position on each issue of the spectrum of situations. And we need to work together across political party lines and religious traditions to honor the dignity of each human person.



# THE ENCOUNTER: A WAY FORWARD FOR PEACE & LIFE

*by Brian Lohmann*

The encounter. This is what brought us together. On a rainy spring day, Saturday, March 29, in Philadelphia on the campus of Villanova University, I had the honor of learning from, and strategizing with, an impressive group of devoted and unique advocates for peace and life. This gathering, I humbly propose, should—and I earnestly hope will—be a guiding light for the future of the pro-life movement. And it all starts with: the encounter.

Life/Peace/Justice: A Conference on Life Issues brought together grassroots activists—from seasoned 40-year veterans to young college students—to share stories of solidarity with “the least of these.”

We heard a military veteran about the depersonalizing and destructive nature of drone warfare; a former death-row inmate and his story of innocence and exoneration by DNA evidence; post-abortive men and women and their cause for hope; the brother of a young woman with disabilities and the story of her court-ordered death by starvation and dehydration; a former abortion clinic worker and the life-affirming choice to reclaim her true self; and an advocate of nonviolence and service to the poor who worked alongside Mother Teresa tending to the dying in the streets of Calcutta.

What made this gathering unique and is the reason for my hope that the larger movement for life adopts the participants’ approach is that although these advocates reflect a wide array of philosophical, religious, and political diversity, they do not reduce themselves or their work to labels or categories. On the contrary, they are unified not by their love for a



party but for the person.

Love for the political party has contributed to the dangerous minimization of “life issues” to mere bullet points in a platform, thus degrading the human person by reducing the issues to talking points and crafty sound bites in the pursuit of votes. How many times has this Republican promised to defend the unborn or that Democrat pledged to end unjust interventionist wars—only to leave their devoted grassroots supporters disappointed and wondering why they yet again placed their faith in a party?

We must not abandon politics. It is imperative that we work within the political system to defend the human person—but we must not rely ultimately on governmental solutions. We cannot abandon effecting change through public policy—but first we must not abandon our neighbor in the name of political expediency, simply to get someone with an “R” or a “D” after his or her name elected.

As I reflect upon this outstanding gathering of advocates for Life/Peace/Justice, I’m convinced even further that the very nature of politics is an

exercise in depersonalizing conflict, of “us versus them.” There is a false “right/left” paradigm, where “conservatives” are concerned with abortion, euthanasia, and embryonic stem-cell research and “liberals” focus on war, torture, and the death penalty. These issues all need to be claimed as human rights issues, and not relegated to “ownership” by one party or the other.

This “black-and-white” fallacy is dangerous and must be rejected. It minimizes these various forms of aggressive violence against human persons to simple ideological points on one side or another of the political spectrum. And in pigeonholing these acts of violence as belonging to a party platform, the human persons who suffer these indignities are thus branded as useful only as a means to gain election to a political office.

This false “right/left” dilemma not only hurts those who the political parties purport to protect, but it also harms those who desire to advocate for peace and life. It inhibits conversation and alienates those of good will, who would otherwise be allies for the human person, from one another. How many times have we been told how unwise and imprudent it is to work with someone from the “other” party? I submit that the makeup of the political climate prevents conversation and dehumanizes the “other” as an enemy and not a potential friend. We must learn to use the political process in pursuit of the ultimate end of our work—the protection of the human person, and their inherent dignity—and not allow ourselves to be used in the process.

The consistent life ethic espoused by those gathered for Life/Peace/Justice, I propose, should be the via media, the “middle way” forward for the pro-life movement. On one end of the spectrum, the single-issue focus may tend to be myopic, overlooking structures of violence and the interrelated nature of all attacks on life and human dignity. For our single-issue friends, I would encourage openness to considering all attacks on life, while continuing your devoted

focus on your particular area of passion. We do need advocates such as you, who tirelessly pour themselves into an issue, be it abortion or war, as they play an integral role in the consistent life family. On the other end of the spectrum, the approach that can tend to conflate all attacks on the human person as equal can lend itself to not differentiating between more and less unjust offenses against life. For those who look at the multiplicity of issues and all the attacks on life, I would humbly propose an ordering of injustices, some of which are more egregious than others. But as with those whose focus is single-issue, these friends in the battle for a wider approach to life issues play a key role in the consistent life battle for the human person, reminding us of the interconnectedness of all life issues.

The consistent ethic of life, as the via media, also should be a point of evangelization, as a conversation starter and point upon which to build bridges and form alliances. In short, we need to confound others with our unchanging approach to the human person. How many times have our friends who support abortion been astonished that we, who oppose it, are also interested in the dignity of those unfairly sentenced to death or in an unjust war being waged? Aren’t anti-abortion advocates supposed to be in favor of the death penalty and interventionist war? And how many times have our friends who are pro-life on abortion yet hawkish on war been amazed by our consideration to look at foreign policy differently through a consistent life lens?

We need to encourage our one-issue friends to not hang their hat on one politician or party just because they’re right on one issue. Let us encourage our friends who are pro-life on abortion to humanize the innocents who die in war, and let us invite our anti-death penalty friends to consider the issue of capital punishment for the unborn. In the name of charity, let us affirm those one-issue voters where they get it right. And in the process, let us heal the false “right/left” divide and bewilder our friends with our consistency. Then, the conversation in favor of life and

peace can really begin.

Once this conversation begins, we can then enter more deeply into communion with the other to share the joys and sufferings of our brothers and sisters, bearing each other's burdens and healing each other's wounds. That is why we're here, after all: to serve and to love. We are a people endlessly fascinated by what is real, what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful in this life. And where do we find this? It is in the human person, full of dignity and worthy of respect, where we find reality, truth, goodness, and beauty.

In this conversation about the defense of the dignity of our neighbor, we must recall that it is not primarily an issue of politics, it is foremost an issue of encounter: encountering the preborn child; the abused woman; the man addicted to drugs; the prisoner on death-row; the suicidal teen; the woman trapped in sex trafficking; the developmentally disabled child; the immigrant; the poor; the homeless; the widow; the orphan; the war veteran with PTSD; the persecuted Middle Eastern minority; the man and woman suffering from abortion.

And for those we encounter, we are called to solidarity with them. Not a vague sentimentality from a safe distance or a superficial distress at another's condition, but a firm commitment to love. And to love is to desire what is good for the other, with a willingness to act to effect change to bring about that good.

The source of much of the inconsistency between the support of human rights in theory and their denial in reality lies in a disordered notion of liberty. When unfettered individualism wins the day, there is no space for openness to, communion with, and charity toward another. We are all our brother's keeper. We have been given to one another. Radical independence needs to be replaced by revolutionary interdependence. We are called to encounter, acknowledge the transcendent dignity of, have empathy for, love, and join in solidarity with "the other"—our neighbor. Then will our efforts to promote a culture of peace and life bear fruit. We are called to compassion, a movement of the heart in response to another: "feeling" (passion) "with" (com) the other. Let us mercifully gaze upon and welcome the stranger among us as "another self," as our brother and sister, from in utero to the grave. Let us encounter one another.



ESSAYS

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# WHY MY LAI?

## WHAT CAUSED AMERICAN SOLDIERS TO COMMIT ATROCITIES IN VIETNAM?

*by Sarah Terzo*

When most Americans think of war atrocities, they usually think of Nazi concentration camps or “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia, Uganda, and other distant countries. Few Americans realize that our soldiers in Vietnam were guilty of many war crimes ranging from the torture of Vietcong prisoners to the slaughter of unarmed men, women, and children in villages such as Son My. Many factors contributed to these violent incidents, but most to blame was the leadership and training of the troops.

By far the most well-known and most well publicized of the incidents was the massacre at the village of My Lai 4. My Lai 4 was actually one of several hamlets, a part of a sector of the larger village of Son My. The area had been nicknamed “Pinkville” by Army intelligence. It was not known to be a Viet Cong stronghold or even to be in support of the enemy. Two separate units attacked two parts of My Lai. These units met with absolutely no resistance. The only Army casualty in either operation was a private who shot himself in the foot.

Past encounters with American G.I.s had taught the families of Son My the correct way to approach

American soldiers. Instead of running, hiding, or resisting, they walked slowly towards the Americans, with raised hands and smiles.<sup>1</sup> This time, however, they were rounded up – mostly old people, children, and women, many of them pregnant – and shot. Those who tried to take refuge in their homes were driven out with fire, and then killed. No prisoners were taken. Combat photographer Ronald Haeberle and Army correspondent Jay Roberts would report that some of the men seemed gripped by a kind of hysteria, shooting dead bodies again and again.<sup>2</sup>

The platoon leaders did not stand in the way of the massacre. In fact, they openly participated and encouraged the men. Several witnesses insist that Medina, the man in charge of the entire operation, personally killed a Vietnamese woman and a three-year-old child. Survivors and soldiers, both those who participated and those who did not, gave descriptions of men fitting officers’ descriptions committing atrocities alongside the other soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Members of the unit also raped women and, in at least one case, young children. According to those present, many of the soldiers laughed and made jokes during the killings. From one account by a soldier who

was at the village of My Lai that day:

I saw this guy. He was one of my best friends in the unit. But honest to Christ, at first I didn't even recognize him. He was kneeling on the ground, this absolutely incredible – I don't know what you'd call it, a smile or a snarl or something, but his whole face was distorted. . . . There was blood everywhere. Anyway, he was kneeling there, holding this grenade launcher, and he was launching grenades at the pooches [huts] a couple of times he launched grenades at groups of people. The grenades would explode, you know, Kaplow, and then you'd see pieces of bodies lying around. . . . I remember there was this one group, maybe ten people, most of them women and little kids, huddled altogether like they were scared and couldn't seem to move. Anyway, he turns right towards them and lets fly with a grenade. . . . I think if I even said a word to him at all, he would've turned around and killed me and not thought a damn thing about it.<sup>4</sup>

The massacre did not end until other units arrived on the scene. None of the soldiers or officers who took part in the slaughter were reprimanded at the time. It should be noted that not every soldier took part in the killings. Those who did not later said that they felt powerless to stop it, as the quote above indicates. It would be months and months, and in some cases over a year, until My Lai and other massacres caught the attention of the military hierarchy and efforts were made to identify those responsible and take disciplinary action.

Son My was not the only area to be devastated by Army search and destroy missions. The policy of Americans was to burn down a village, destroy all animals and crops, and rub salt into the ground, ruining it. These things were done in order to prevent Vietcong from using the area for food or shelter. This wanton destruction of private property was, in itself, against the rules of the Geneva Convention, but at least had a military purpose. If the people were lucky, they were rounded up and put into camps.



Photo by Claudia Schullinger, some rights reserved.

Soldiers who saw these camps call them “concentration camps.” According to Peter Norman Martinson, a veteran who was there:

[There was] electric torture and beatings. There is a volume called the Law of the Land warfare, I think it's FM-100-51, and it's an abridged version of the Geneva Convention, having to do with the handling of prisoners and the treatment of civilians and so on. . . . I could cite you chapter and verse, which was departed from significantly. I mean, not departed from, but just directly opposite of what happened in Vietnam. Sexes not being segregated, people being fed improperly. . . . No proper sanitary facilities, no medical treatment. . . . I think the Geneva Convention classifies these as war crimes.<sup>5</sup>

Another veteran, Harry Plimpton, was on a search and destroy mission in which 500 civilians were killed. The platoon leader ordered that no prisoners were to be taken. Seventy-five civilians were murdered at Vu Doc. The civilians, like the ones at Son My, came running to surrender with hands raised. Beneath the huts in many Vietnamese villages ran a network of tunnels. Frightened families, often with small children, would sometimes hide in them when Americans came. Often, prisoners would tell the soldiers about members

of their families down below. However, it was Army policy to fill in all these tunnels, blocking the exits and trapping the people inside to slowly suffocate. There were other massacres of villages. 400 were killed in the village of Bau Tri. In other operations, where prisoners were taken, Army hospitals did not treat the wounded Vietnamese.

Soldier Terry Whitmore talks about a massacre near Quang Tri, where 200 people were killed. The platoon rounded up a large group of children, and an officer ordered for them to be shot. Whitmore said “That was the only huge massacre I was in. But civilians got killed almost every day if we were around them... That’s common – knock off a civilian for the hell of it.”<sup>6</sup>

Many civilians were killed out of hand in this way. Ed Traratola, a veteran, remembers shooting elderly men and women who did not have identification papers. When distributing rations, some soldiers in his unit would throw entire cases of C rations at civilians from off trucks. These cases could severely injure or kill those who were hit. Officers were aware of this behavior and did not stop it. They often instructed the men to do anything they wanted, since prisoners would only slow unit down. According to Traratola:

... And then to the young children, we had these blue tablets, and you heat C rations with them, and they look like candy, but when you light them on fire, there is no fire, just tremendous heat. We used to light them and throw them out to the little kids, and then when they pick them up in their hands, it just burns right through their

hands... We all did it... I couldn’t take Vietnamese people anymore.<sup>7</sup>

Torture of captured Vietcong was policy, but violence was perpetrated even on innocent bystanders.

Finally, the rape of women was a relatively common occurrence. Lieut. William Calley, one of the officers at the My Lai massacre, told of stopping soldiers from raping a woman holding a baby sometime before the My Lai incident. He later said, “I don’t know why I was so goddamned saintly about it. Rape, in Vietnam, is a very common thing.”<sup>8</sup>

According to soldier Richard Dow:

Sometimes the sergeants would say, especially if some of the guys had been wounded or killed, “We don’t care what you do. . . . You can rape the women or whatever you want” . . . Sometimes you were out on patrol in the field for a long time without women. . . . When we came to a village where they had some young girls, we’d say, “We want to see some chicks. . . . We can be mean if we have to.” . . . Then we took a few girls, and then a few guys would go in and take the girls. Maybe a squad or two. The girls were fifteen, sixteen, around there.<sup>9</sup>

Officers often made no attempt to punish those who committed rape. Perhaps not every platoon commander looked the other way, but there were many who did. Veterans have said that officers were fully aware of crimes taking place. Sometimes officers slyly condoned the behavior by warning the perpetrators not to get caught. But few of the rapists had cause to worry about being court-martialed. Lack of stern discipline and a complete lack of accountability were major factors in the high number of rapes and civilian killings that took place in the war.

The killing of civilians, whether on a small or large-scale, has many possible causes. The average age of soldiers in Vietnam was 19 to 20, younger than in previous wars. The stress of war, the shock and anger of seeing friends and fellow soldiers killed, as well as



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the wide use of drugs and alcohol among troops may have contributed to many of the atrocities committed.

Many factors worked together in influencing the hearts and minds of those fighting in Vietnam. Most soldiers got to Vietnam with images and stereotypes of the Vietnamese people already planted in their minds. Military training, perhaps the most powerful factor behind war crimes in Vietnam, dehumanized the Vietnamese people. In order to turn them into efficient killers, recruits were trained to regard Vietnamese as if they were animals. Mark Worrell, a former member of the Marines, remembers his training:

. . . And throughout the entire training they emphasized the animalness of the Vietnamese. They were subhuman, we were told. We could do anything we wanted to them when we got there. They told us you could kill the gook and then cut him apart. . . . Every effort was made to glorify the extermination and torture of these lowly Vietnamese. The sergeants always called them gooks or slope heads. One recruit called them Vietnamese ones and the sergeant told him he was a "God damned gook lover."<sup>10</sup>

Efforts were made to desensitize recruits to killing and violence. Making them constantly scream slogans about killing was one common brainwashing technique. At rollcall, before mess hall, and on command, men were drilled to yell and growl. Many things were taught "unofficially." As one soldier put it:

There were classes where the instructors used to caution us not to just shoot anything. You know, to preserve civilian lives and treat civilians decently. But these classes – there weren't very many of them. And they were so short and they were overshadowed by all these classes where the instructors constantly, you know, taught us "blow them away!" . . . Then they would go and tell us stories, their stories would not quite go along with what they taught us. They would tell us about blowing away civilians, of that to expect in Vietnam, and they would refer to the Vietnamese as gooks, and slant eyes, and dinks,

and we got the overall picture. . . . You cannot trust anybody, and as long as no one is watching, to be hard, tough, and have no feeling.<sup>11</sup>

According to Treratola:

Everyone was looking forward to it [going to Vietnam] because it was like we would go out on the bayonet course and the instructor would say, "slash," and we would all say, "kill the gook," and we would jab it. After a while you really wanted to kill someone, because they made it seem like it's really interesting and will be a lot of fun. After a while you don't care anymore, you just give up.<sup>12</sup>

Bill Hatton, a corporal tactics instructor at Camp Pendleton, discussed his experiences in boot camp during the Vietnam period:

In boot camp you are too afraid to do or say anything different. Myself, I went through it and was pretty enthused with the whole thing, not knowing any better. . . . All through boot camp you are instilled continually, you run around chanting, "kill, kill," things like this. . . . If the Marine Corps is able to send their people over right after boot camp and ITR, they have the most ideal material in the world. They have the most efficient killing machine there is. . . . You are systematically humiliated and molded into what they want, and if you try to fight it, you will be beaten. You can't win at that level.<sup>13</sup>

This training to view the Vietnamese as subhuman continued in Vietnam. It was not unheard of for officers to order men to mutilate the Vietcong bodies or to do it themselves.<sup>14</sup>

An investigation which took place years after the massacre at My Lai showed that many of the soldiers taking part in the massacres had received insufficient training in the area of illegal orders. The soldiers had been trained and conditioned to obey orders without questioning them. Very little of their time in training was spent on the responsibility to report war crimes and the means of doing so. Rather, they were taught

to obey all orders unless the order was beyond the authority of the person giving it. One unit responsible for massacres at Son My, American (23D) Division 3, had been found deficient by the United States Army Vietnam Inspector General. The inspection report of July 31, 1968 lists as a deficiency the lack of instructions on the Geneva Convention because of numerous replacements (1300 in the 11th brigade) of people who are found to be non-deployable.

Replacements often arrived right up until the day of deployment. With so many new men coming in, it was very difficult to ensure that each soldier had received adequate training. In fact, the 11th brigade shortened its training from eight weeks to four.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes lack of good training and leadership made the difference between a platoon that remained (relatively) orderly and one in which the men, officers included, lost control and committed atrocities.

It must be kept in mind that the Vietcong committed their share of atrocities as well – in many cases, to a greater extent than the Americans. It is easy to imagine the Americans' rage at the treatment of their own. In the case of Son My, many of the officers were inexperienced. One had arrived in country only three weeks before the massacre. The majority of the soldiers in the companies had not yet seen real combat, so they, too, had little experience. There were few contacts with the enemy before the Son My massacre. Thus, the men were often forced to operate in an unalleviated anxiety. As comrades in arms died in mines and booby traps at the hands of unseen enemies, frustration grew. Inexperienced soldiers were unable to deal with the intensity of their anger. Coupled with the almost complete lack of accountability due to poor leadership and lack of discipline, this inexperience led to feelings of confusion, fear and chaos. Asserting power over Vietnamese civilians, who in many ways represented "The Enemy," was a means of gaining a sense of control.

Good leaders were hard to come by. Some officers felt it psychologically necessary for soldiers to occasionally be allowed to rape, torture, or kill civilians and captives. As has already been mentioned, many

officers went on vendettas, advocating or participating in war crimes in response to casualties of the unit. A truly capable leader should have attempted to curb such tendencies in his men rather than encouraging and fostering them.

One possible reason previously mentioned for officers' lack of control was the often extremely barbaric treatment of American G.I.s at the hands of the Vietcong, but it should be noted that treatment of Vietcong war prisoners by Americans was no less barbaric. Extremely cruel methods of torture, such as electrocution and garroting, were used by American soldiers. Shortly before the My Lai massacre, Lieut. Calley and his men discovered the body of an American G.I.s, the body had been hung, disemboweled, and partially decapitated. Lieut. Calley later said, in his book, "That boy, I say, is as innocent as any baby in My Lai 4."<sup>16</sup>

We can only imagine the effect such incidents had on the men of the unit. Even these shocking losses, however, did not justify the murder of women and children.

Many of the soldiers heard nothing that contradicted their impression of the Vietnamese people, which had been molded in training to suit the Army's needs. In Vietnam, it was hard to tell who the enemy was. Many G.I.s died in booby traps, which could, of course, be set by anyone. Children were sometimes used by the Vietcong to throw grenades. Sometimes the enemy struck when it was least expected.<sup>17</sup> Soldiers could walk into villages where everyone seemed friendly, until, just as they began to relax, a mortar would shell came down out of nowhere, and the survivors would see other men of their unit blown apart. Often platoons left a village and walked straight into booby traps and land mines that the people did not warn them about. Vietcong could blend in with the locals, and G.I.s would be unable to tell the civilians from the soldiers. These experiences were more than enough to reinforce the stereotype that all Vietnamese were "the enemy." Still, anyone of reasonable intelligence (and the platoons that operated in Son My had a high





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can soldier and a member of their unit. As a warning-percentage of high school graduates in them) knows that babies and toddlers are not Vietcong, and did not set mines or arm booby-traps.

Years after the Vietnam War, the subject of war atrocities has never been put to rest. Movies such as *Platoon*, which won an Academy award, dealt with the motivations behind war crimes and the clash of ideologies faced on the fields of war. People are still studying the events of My Lai and other war atrocities around the world in an attempt to understand the darker side of human nature, and the U.S. military has been forced to come to terms with its policies and training's role in the atrocities. If not for the dehumanizing tactics that soldiers were subjected to in training, the constant reinforcement of certain ideas, and poor examples given by the leadership, the massacres and atrocities in Vietnam might not have occurred with such frequency.

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# LEARNING A CATHOLIC STANCE ON SOCIAL JUSTICE FROM OSCAR ROMERO

*by Anthony Bedoy*

**A**lmost 35 years after his death at the hands of right-wing forces in El Salvador, Oscar Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador, offers important lessons for Catholics in living a spiritual life. A common understanding of spirituality tends to imagine individuals meditating or praying in a room alone. The modern human is less likely to speak of spirituality in common day-to-day experiences. For Oscar Romero, however, his spiritual life was of profound importance and informed his actions and his ethical views. There was no separation for Oscar Romero between his spiritual connection to God and his visceral connection to his people. This understanding of lived ethics is not simply how Romero lived, though. He saw it as the way any Catholic should live in the world. Oscar Romero believed that all of his intellectual learning throughout his life ought to be for something other than his own use. During his time as an archbishop and up until his death, Romero stood for an ethical theology that not only called us to action, but also called us to live changed lives with changed hearts.

To some in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, Romero is a controversial individual because he is seen as having integrated much of Marxist thought and Liberation Theology into his own life. While this

might be true, it is not fair to Romero to discount all of his ethical life and teachings. It is important to look at Romero's spirituality and ethics. Romero's spiritual life called him from his individualistic attitudes to a life of lived ethics. His ethics can be broken down into three basic parts that represent a model for the informed Catholic conscience. The parts include scriptural understanding, Catholic teaching (or tradition), and lived praxis (living in history). Romero is a symbol of hope and the reinvigoration of an ethical structure where Christ is central in the lives of the poor. Looking at Romero's life as an example of Catholic tradition, Liberation Theology, and Ignatian Spirituality, I will argue that the Catholic Church can see Romero's ethical teachings as a fruitful attempt to bring forth the Kingdom of God. Through Romero's conscious effort to integrate Scripture, Church teaching, and historical context, the Catholic Church can learn how "Salvation History" continuously exists in the lives of all people, and, in particular, its manifestation in the lives of the people of El Salvador.

## **Spirituality**

It is clear that spiritual experiences can take a variety of forms, involving different kinds of connections with God. Analyzing Oscar Romero's spirituality requires first recognizing what spiritual experience

is. Dorothee Soelle, a German theologian and political activist, states, “There is a directness of experience in which people can say: ‘God came to see me,’ or ‘I saw the light at the end of the tunnel,’ or ‘this thing happened to me at such and such time.’”<sup>1</sup> Soelle goes on in her book *The Silent Cry* to identify what a mystic is and the way God interacts with humans in common reality. To an extent, spirituality can be understood in connection with Soelle’s concept of mysticism. Spirituality is not a disembodied experience that happens outside of humans. Spirituality is the direct interaction between God and a human, whether or not the human is knowingly or actively involved.

How does all of this defining apply to Oscar Romero? It applies because Romero’s connection with God followed this pattern, happening not on lofty, pious thrones, but in common reality.

To begin the discussion of spirituality, let us recognize the prophetic reality of any spiritual individual. The Catholic Church recognizes that all individuals, “laity” and ordained, are sharing in the office of Christ: all these faithful who are incorporated into Christ and the people of God are sharing in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly life of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Each of us has our own part to play in the Christian mission. Therefore it is important to recognize how one’s spirituality can be a prophetic message to the Church and to the world.

Soelle puts the prophetic message in the language of resistance. Some will see spirituality as removed from the world, a flight from reality, and introversion into the salvation of one’s own soul.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, spirituality, when practiced in the Catholic faith, is inherently outward looking. In addition to the communal aspect of the spiritual life, the prophetic reality of resistance stands firm in the recognition of the “other” as also a part of the “self.” Soelle writes, “The broadest notion of resistance assumed here arises from the distance established from what is regarded as the normal world, a world founded on power, possession, and violence.”<sup>4</sup> The spiritual Catholic will begin not by making God the crutch on which we put our burdens and responsibilities but by making God an ally

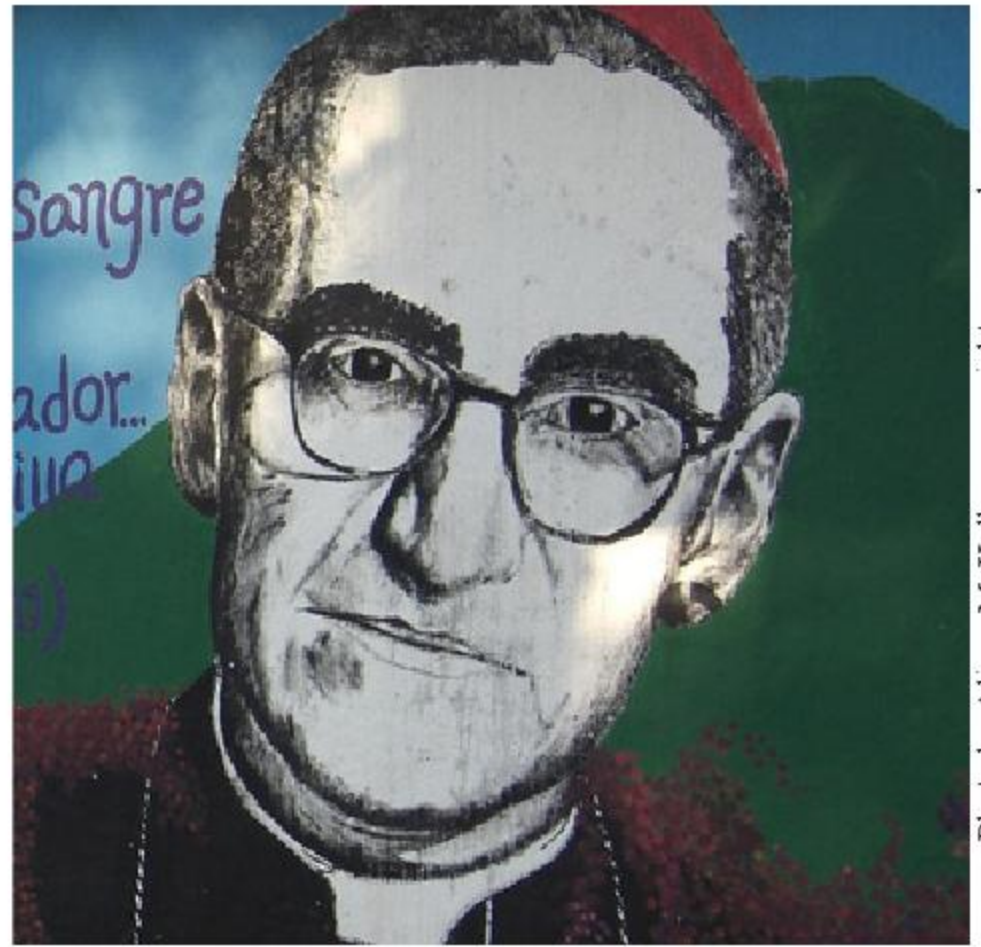


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of the exploited.<sup>5</sup> The prophetic nature of the Catholic calls all individuals of the faith to always refocus themselves and their communities on the message of God.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Ignatian Prayer*

Now that we have established that a spiritual individual (and all Catholics in general) and mystics are prophetic by definition and nature, we can analyze Romero’s form of spirituality that led him to his prophetic words and actions. Romero was a son of the Catholic Church and related very closely to Ignatian Spirituality. Romero was formed by the Jesuit order, but not a member. As one student of Romero’s spirituality explained,

Romero made the Exercises under the direction of Father Miguel Elizondo, the novice master for the Jesuits of Central America. Notes that Romero later made during shorter retreats, some of them based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and repeating some of the key exercises, reveal that the Exercises continued to influence his spiritual journey. When he became a bishop, he chose a phrase related to the Spiritual Exercises for his episcopal motto: “Sentir con la Iglesia,” which means “to be of one mind with the church.”<sup>7</sup>

Apparently, he practiced the meditations that Ignatius of Loyola created. Father David Fleming, S.J., wrote in his book *What is Ignatian Spirituality?* that “Ignatius sees God as present, not remote or detached. He is involved in the details of our life. Our daily lives in this world matter.”<sup>8</sup> Knowing this, we can recognize that Romero’s own spirituality must have been one that was connected to his daily life. Thus his prayer life could not have been detached from his environment. In addition to this focus on God in our lives, Ignatian Spirituality calls individuals to enter into work with Christ our King. “Christ is not a remote ruler commanding his forces through a hierarchy of princes, earls, dukes, lords, and knights. He is ‘in the trenches.’ He is doing the work of evangelizing and healing himself.”<sup>9</sup>

#### *Imagination*

A hallmark of Ignatian Spirituality is imaginative prayer. Ignatius of Loyola believed that there was a spiritual force behind his feelings. Whether the force behind one of his emotions was the “good” or the “evil” spirit was something Ignatius sought to distinguish.<sup>10</sup> From there, Ignatius began to use his imaginative tool to discern how God was moving him in his life. Father Fleming also states, in his compact explanation of Ignatian Spirituality, that one method of imaginative prayer is to immerse ourselves in the Gospels and experience Christ in the Gospels. The method calls us to know Jesus in an imaginative way. Through this imaginative prayer and through our dedication to Christ in our daily lives, Ignatian Spirituality calls us to a new focus, something different in our lives.

#### *Change of Heart*

One of the cornerstones of Ignatian Spirituality is change of heart. For Ignatius of Loyola, God was revealed to him not in philosophical concepts or intellectual understanding but through his heart. “God as Love was no longer just a scriptural statement. Ignatius experienced God as an intensely personal, active, generous God, a God as Love loving.”<sup>11</sup> Later in his



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book, Father Fleming explains an ancient understanding of the heart that was used by the biblical authors: when we say “my heart goes out to you,” we mean more than a feeling of concern; we are also sending forth a message of solidarity. Ignatian Spirituality recognizes this.<sup>12</sup> Truly, when considering human relations, our interactions are not something we can solely intellectualize or understand. There is some sort of heartfelt relation that goes into it. Here is where Ignatian Spirituality makes the human connection with the divine. While one’s religious practices and intellectual understanding deepens, it is not the mind that is changed, but rather the heart that is transformed.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Lived Spiritual Life*

As far as we can tell, Romero would have practiced Ignatian meditation, imagination, and the spiritual exercises throughout his life. Were his words and deeds evidence of his spiritual life? To some, outward actions and words can all be mere facade and disingenuous, and because our knowledge of Romero’s mind comes only from his homilies and his diary, we cannot know for sure what he believed. Some authors believe that Romero’s prophetic theology was completely separated from his spirituality. In *Oscar Romero: Reflections on his Life and Writings*, the authors write, “Romero’s prophetic theology, which sought to defend the poor, was strong, clear and uncompromising, but

his 'personal' spirituality was fastened to a more conservative tradition, discipline, and language."<sup>14</sup>

To some extent these individuals are correct that one's theology is not always connected to one's spirituality. Knowing Romero's own spiritual background, however, his "conservative" spirituality is actually simply a traditional view of the poor that has been lost in a modern society. In one of his homilies on November 26, 1978, Romero said: "Each time we look upon the poor, on the farmworkers who harvest the coffee, the sugarcane, or the cotton, or the farmer who joins the caravan of workers looking to earn their savings for the year...remember, there is the face of Christ."<sup>15</sup> Arguably, this is a window into understanding Romero's own spirituality. He imagined the face of Christ in the faces of the poor. Therefore, in his own prophetic theology, he is simply harkening back to a spirituality that has been lost in the Church and the individualistic culture of our day. Romero's Ignatian exercises led him to find Christ in the poor of Salvador, and thus when he saw Christ in the poor, he could respond with nothing short of action. This led him to the prophetic words and deeds we know of today. "Over years of prayerful reflection and spiritual direction of others, [he] developed many ways to listen to the language of the heart."<sup>16</sup>

### **Romero's Lived Ethics and the Catholic Conscience**

In the Catholic tradition, we are called to analyze our decisions using Scripture, experiential understanding, and Catholic teaching. Individually, the Scripture might lead us to different conclusions, but all individuals' decisions should encompass all three elements of an informed conscience. Arguably, an ill-informed conscience will choose to deny one of the parts of the triangle in order to justify a conclusion. Most people have a disposition towards one part of the three-part conscience, and this can lead one to ignore the other sections of the Catholic conscience. To understand Romero's ethics, we must analyze how all three elements provided his reasons for standing with the poor and choosing a liberating theology.

### *Scripture*

To begin, with Romero's own dedication to Scripture. He was a priest and thus very well-versed in Scripture, reading them and praying them on a daily basis. Beyond that, though, he always advocated dedication to the Gospels in his own homilies and teachings. In one press conference, on February 9, 1979, he called all individuals to conversion to the Gospel. He said that those in the diplomatic and military worlds who are Catholic should be true to the Gospel message.<sup>17</sup> Romero's own preaching was not fettered with quotes from Scripture, but he was most definitely conscious of the message of the Gospels.

Romero approached the Gospels as a challenge to live like Christ with the Spirit of God that changes hearts. He also focused on the scriptural message of the cross and resurrection. When Romero calls for definitive liberation, he applies the logic of the cross and resurrection. "It is precisely by incarnating our lives in the historical and conflictual struggles of our time – and especially those of the poor – that we discover God's plan and promise of salvation," he said.<sup>18</sup> This is all in reference to the paschal mystery of the Gospels. Romero is referring to Romans 6:3-11 and Paul's take on the death and resurrection: "But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him."<sup>19</sup> Romero believed in a divine aspect of liberation and preached it based on his knowledge of Scripture. In his diary, Romero wrote, "Through his Paschal Mystery, Christ redeems us from sin, from death, from hell and from every kind of slavery. I pointed out that Christian liberation is more complete and deeper than any other liberation that is merely political, social, or economic."<sup>20</sup>

### *Praxis*

The experience Romero had of the Salvadoran people came mostly after his appointment as archbishop of San Salvador. Prior to his appointment, Romero was mostly a quiet man who took to his studies and didn't speak out on social matters. The government was actually pleased to hear Romero was appointed because he was considered a conservative member of the Catholic Church. Many liberation theologians were concerned that his reputation would negatively affect

the Church's commitment to the poor in El Salvador.<sup>21</sup>

After Romero became the archbishop, there was a defining moment when he recognized the importance of the community he lived in, and he entered into a new aspect of his moral development. When many of his friends were assassinated, including Father Rutilio Grande, S.J., Romero was profoundly affected and changed by the reality of the Salvadoran oppression of the poor.<sup>22</sup> As Romero became more involved in his community, immersion into the life of the poor and hurting in Salvador became his focus. In one of his homilies, on March 14, 1977, he spoke out about the violence against the people and clearly stated his resentment of such violence. Even if that violence was allowed or committed by the Church, he was clear that it was not acceptable. Romero said, "As long as one does not live a conversion in one's heart, a teaching enlightened by faith to organize life according to the heart of God, all will be feeble, revolutionary, passing, violent. None of these is Christian."<sup>23</sup>

What Romero became through his time as archbishop was something no one saw coming. He learned to inform his actions not just from his intellect or his theology, but allowed for the people and history to speak to him, as God working in reality. He allowed his people to choose the fate of the Church. This way of leadership dramatically diverged from the hierarchical method the Catholic Church had held.<sup>24</sup> For Romero, there was a dramatic shift from obeying the teachings of the Church to actually applying the teachings to the history he lived in.

### *Tradition*

Liberation theology was seen as a dangerous method of applying Christ's teachings to Marxist thought. At the time when Romero began his stand for the Salvadoran people, many conservative bishops and leaders of the Church were worried about the focus of Romero and the liberation theologians. Romero was conscious of what his brothers and sisters in Christ were speaking of him. As some commentators on Romero's life and work note,

"What hurt [Romero] was the way in which he was misunderstood by his fellow bishops who... criticized his theology as too historically imbedded and insufficiently attendant to the transcendent. The spirituality of the other Salvadoran bishops was at best based on a theology of transcendence that insulated them from the people's crucifixion, keeping their religious faith 'pure' and unsullied by history and, at worst, openly allied with the interests of the wealthy and powerful."<sup>25</sup>

It is true that Romero focused on the historical aspect of salvation, but many would argue that focusing solely on the transcendent fails to recognize the true Christian message. Ignacio Ellacuria, a professor at a Jesuit University in El Salvador and a contemporary of Romero's, summarized the foundation of Romero's spirituality and ethics beautifully: Romero based his hope on two pillars: a historical focus that included the knowledge of his people and the desire to find solutions to their hardships and a transcendent focus that informed his understanding that ultimately God wanted us to live, not to die.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly enough, this foundation is not entirely foreign to the Catholic faith. In *Living Justice*, Father Thomas Massaro, S.J., speaks of Catholic Social Teaching in action. Father Massaro writes, "Any responsible theology must consider, with the utmost seriousness, both aspects of our reality. To truly respect people is to demonstrate concern for their earthly well-being as well as their heavenly destiny."<sup>27</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the leading proponents of liberation theology, speaks on a similar topic, arguing that there is more to Christ's message than spiritual well-being. Gutierrez brings to mind the individualization of Jesus' message that happens often in the Church.<sup>28</sup> To some, only the transcendent aspect of Christ is important, and in that way we lose the importance of Christ's temporal reality. He existed in history, and when we focus on only his transcendent reality, it robs the scriptures of their historical nature and disregards the objective realities in which "individuals and peoples live and die, struggle and assert their faith."<sup>29</sup>

Romero was aware that he was being criticized and thus spoke out in his homilies to explain himself. "Let

us be clear: when the church preaches social justice, equality, and the dignity of people, defending those who suffer and those who are assaulted, this is not subversion; this is not Marxism. This is the authentic teaching of the church."<sup>30</sup> In his diary, he also stated clearly that Catholics must always clarify the position of the Church and never identify themselves as a political party.<sup>31</sup> In his diary, he speaks of times when he struggled with his own theology. He met with many of his brothers and sisters in his archdiocese and asked them for counsel:

"It seems to me that this is a source of wealth for our Church: the sanctity of the laity in their respective professions.... I introduced a topic that was explored in a very Christian and evangelical way: the theme of unity; asking them to suggest to me in a fraternal way what I can do to achieve unity with my dear brother bishops. Because if I am the cause of any obstacle to this unity, then I am willing to fix that"<sup>32</sup>

When Romero found steadiness of heart in his convictions to stand with the people, he began to understand more and more how God works among the people. He began to understand what Gutierrez speaks about in his *Theology of Liberation*. Romero wrote, "God saves the people through their own history. And God needs the people themselves to save the world: communities that, like John the Baptist, are not identified with any political movement, but which shed light on all of them."<sup>33</sup> Later in his diary, he considers that the encounter of God in the world is not the only element to liberation and evangelization. There also needs to be catechesis and the study of religion.<sup>34</sup> He began to speak like the liberation theologians but also infused his knowledge of traditional Catholic teachings into his comments.

### Romero's Prophetic Voice

When analyzing Romero's ethics as informed by Scripture, praxis, and the teachings of the Church, it seems that he counters the traditions of the Church. Arguably, Romero is true to the Catholic faith and stands firm in the Gospel messages. He fairly applies Scripture to his understanding of transcendence, while



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also entering into the historical context of the Salvadoran people. To some, however, his theology is counter to Church teachings because it calls for social change and can lead to class warfare. While that is a fair argument against Romero, he addresses such an issue in one of his own homilies. "Let us be firm in defending our rights, but with great love in our hearts, because to defend our rights in this way we are also seeking the conversion of sinners. This is the vengeance of the Christian."<sup>35</sup> Romero was clear that liberation was valuable for the poor, but first and foremost, Christ was the liberator: "Let us not put our trust in earthly liberation movements. Yes, they are providential, but only if they do not forget that all the liberating force in the world comes from Christ."<sup>36</sup>

What, then, is Romero, if he is not counter to tradition in the Catholic Church? Arguably, Romero is a prophetic voice of the 20th century. He stands as an individual who leans on his spirituality to change his heart and thus to act in an ethical manner. Romero's choice to stand by his conscience (utilizing all his knowledge of Scripture, Catholic tradition, and his own experience) is not only critically important but also valuable for others to follow. I would argue that Romero is a prophetic voice because he is calling us to refocus ourselves on Christ. This call comes in his message to see the face of Christ in the poor, to live spiritually transcendent lives, to find Christ in historical instances, and to love our brothers and sisters, both the sinners and the victim. Romero himself said in one of his homilies, on July 8, 1979:

The prophet also decries sins inside the church. And why not? We bishops, popes, priests, nuns, Catholic educators, we are human, and as humans we are sinful and we need someone to be a prophet for us too and call us to conversion and not let us set up religion as something untouchable. Religion needs prophets, and thank God we have them, because it would be a sad church that felt itself owner of the truth and rejected everything else. A church that only condemns, a church that sees sin only in others and does not look at the beam in its own eye is not the authentic church of Christ.<sup>37</sup>

Romero was a son of the Church but also an honest, spiritual man who saw God in the faces of the poor. He chose to defend the rights of the Salvadoran people, not to cause violence against the rich but to bring life to the poor. He challenged and still challenges the hierarchy, lay people, and all humanity to be conscious of injustice and to not make our lives individualistic.

### Conclusion

Romero's example calls us to stand with the poor in our cultures. We must live in solidarity and not focus on our own piety but be willing to have the heart of Christ change us. We must allow for the historical example of God working in the world to be a force in our lives. Romero once said, "Unfortunately, brothers and sisters, we are a product of a spiritualized, individualistic education. We are taught: try to save your soul and don't worry about the rest. We told those who suffered: be patient, heaven will follow, hang on. No, that's not right, that's not salvation!"<sup>38</sup> Catholic Social Teaching tells us to "speak forcefully about the sacredness of life, universal solidarity, and the common good," and Romero is not separate from this tradition.<sup>39</sup> He calls us to liberate our brothers and sisters not in death but in life. This teaching is grounded in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the spiritual lessons of Ignatius of Loyola, the teachings of the Catholic Church and most definitely the history we live in. Romero calls us to "sentir con la Iglesia" or to feel at one mind with the

Church. The Church always needs someone to refocus its lenses towards Christ, and in the 20th century, Romero was a prophetic voice for the South American Church and the world.

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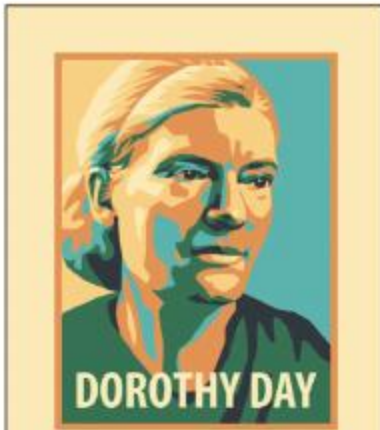
**Father Daniel Berrigan, Consistent.**

"One is called to be consistently, even if the change one wants for seems impossible."

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

On January 19, 1972, Father Berrigan marched with his brother during the civil rights movement at Selma in 1965. Together they led numerous 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, wrote letters of disobedience, and went to jail because the police hung senselessly and precariously upon weapons coming fallows to build and to learn to improve—weapons which become more useful."



**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 1897, Dorothy Day was an American journalist, a powerful social activist and a devoted Catholic. With her late husband Peter Maurer, 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 storyteller with a purpose.

Born in 1948 in segregated Arkansas, Ms. Meeks has spent a lifetime working on issues of race and justice. She is the daughter of a sharecropper and a teacher. Catherine grew up hearing her father talk about a 12-year-old brother who died from a heart appendix before she was born—remained in service 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 pioneering a healthy racial dialogue worldwide.



**Gandhi, Consistent.**

Mohandas 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 delicate transition to independence. His leadership of national civil disobedience led ultimately to India's separation from Great Britain, and



**Reverend Johnny Hunter, Consistent.**

Dr. Johnny M. 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 mission.

Reverend Hunter believes he knows the mission—his greatest life. With more than 30 years in the ministry, Dr. Hunter is the President of Global Life & Family Mission (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, Belknap, NY. He is a nationally respected public and political advocate, and founded the Life Education and Resource Network (LEARN, Inc.), a broad consortium of Christian pro-life, 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 1928, where she 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 Stephen 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 J. 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 Maine. His early ministerial experience 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 nurture social programs, and has worked tirelessly on pro-life causes, homelessness, hunger, services 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 Movement for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Confronting 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 vigilance, eventually helping to force the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.



**Sister Helen Prejean, Consistent.**

In 1987 a friend asked Sister Helen Prejean if she would correspond with convicted murderer Elmo Patrick Sonnier, located in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. This began a journey recounted in her book *Dead Man Walking*—that continues today in her tireless work to abolish the death penalty.

A Catholic since 1957, Sister Helen believes 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 want to really appeal to killing: war, executions, killing of the old and dependent, 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 its end."



**Martin Sheen, Consistent.**

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

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 repression in Central America, marched on international affairs, fought against the Suburban death squads, and supported the closing of nuclear test sites. He has been arrested on a number of occasions for nonviolent civil disobedience.



**Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Consistent.**

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin (1918-1996) has been widely credited with advancing the Consistent Life Ethic. Originally called the Seamless Garment, 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 the categories the issues of genetics, abortion, capital punishment, modern 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 Padua, Italy: "When human life is considered 'cheap' or easily expendable in one area, eventually nothing is held as sacred and all lives are in jeopardy."



**Aimee Bedoy Murphy, Consistent.**

Aimee Murphy was born in 1981. She is also a founder and the Executive Director of Life Matters Inc., the leading consistent life ethic organization. Aimee was a teenager 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 college years, Aimee worked to successfully change the pro-life organization on her college campus to one that offered equal respect to the dignity of all human life. She helped to facilitate change in the pro-life dialogue on many college campuses. As someone whose others began to see abortion as a right, Aimee believes that "making the pro-life movement more accessible correlates directly to the level of consistency in the ethic of its members."

Through her work at 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 web of subversive friends, competing to spread the vision of 'Loving God, Loving People, and Following Jesus' in our neighborhoods and in our 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, Wheaton College and Princeton Theological Seminary. He is now a part of The Abolition Seminars. Claiborne has been at Willow Creek Community Church and spent time with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India. Shane has been a part of peace dialogues

# 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>

# THE EMERGENCE OF FOURTH-WAVE FEMINISM

*by Carol Crossed*

**F**ourth Wave Feminism reflects the emerging phase in the evolution of true feminist thought.

The First Wave of feminism (1840-1920) was focused on getting the vote for women. This struggle was won by the suffragists' holistic inclusion of equal rights in their philosophy. Women not only sought legal equality with men but also supported the rights of other oppressed segments of the population. Suffragists supported abolitionism, child labor laws, worker and immigrant rights, and the rights of the unborn. No one said it more clearly than Elizabeth Cady Stanton in her famous comment to Julia Ward Howe about abortion: "When we consider that we [as women] have been considered property, it is degrading that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit." This wave of feminism is represented by Susan B. Anthony and *The Revolution*, the newspaper she owned and published. In it and other women's rights journals, abortion was called "child murder," "prenatal killing," and "foeticide."

The Second Wave of feminism (1970s), represented by Gloria Steinem, pushed beyond getting the vote for women to gaining equal opportunity in education and employment. The Vietnam War, global insecurity

created by the nuclear threat, and the war on poverty cried out for more nurturing voices, such as women's, to participate in government and corporate decision-making. The lessening of family responsibilities and making motherhood optional required not only the widespread availability of better contraceptive options, but the right to abortion, Second Wave feminists argued.

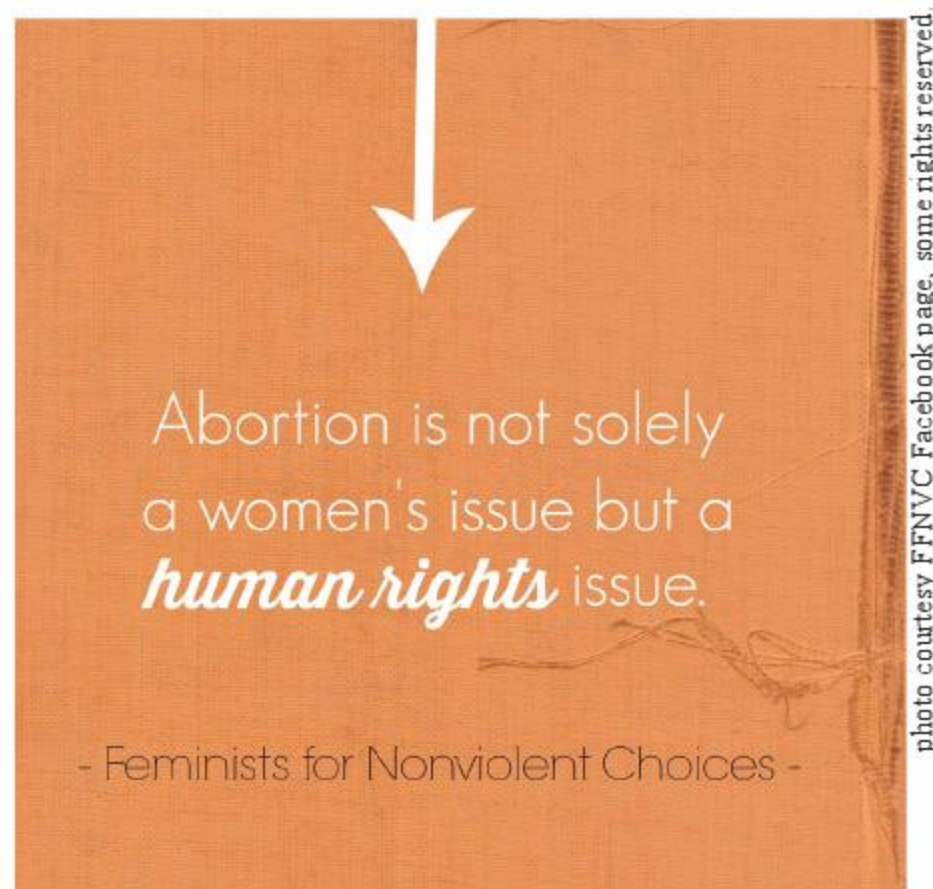
Ironically, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan did not promote abortion rights. Rather, the idea of abortion rights was introduced into the activist world by Bill Baird and abortionist Henry Morgenthaller, who made the point to Friedan and later Steinem that women needed abortion if they expected to maintain positions in the workforce. Women built tenuous alliances with those embracing an anti-war sentiment, who felt women were underrepresented in government and corporations, particularly those in the war industry. In order to appease the pacifist faction of the anti-war movement, which saw killing a human being as against nonviolent principles, the label used by abortion rights' activists evolved in the mid-1980s to the term "pro-choice." This term embraced the civil right of privacy but at the same time allowed those who "would never do this themselves" to adopt the "bandwagon approach" anti-war activists needed to meet the emerging global nuclear arms race threatening "mutually assured destruction."

The Third Wave of feminism (2000s) is primarily represented by contemporary women associated with academia at the dawning of the 21st century. These young women feel secure in their rights concerning reproduction, including abortion. However, they have found through dialogue with a more diverse population of women that the language of “choice” is not a reality for those too poor to have a choice. To poor women on university campuses, abortion felt more like a need than a choice because they lacked the social support necessary to carry their children to term. Feminist language changed to “reproductive justice,” or the striving for economic equality needed to be able to make a free choice.

The Third Wave embraces a broader justice agenda, one that includes environmental rights, gay rights, workers’ rights, and immigrant rights. In addition, Third Wave feminists “create a space” for dialogue about the freedom of the feminine body to love itself. This sometimes takes the form of supporting pornography, embracing public nudity, and legalized prostitution as it regards the right of sex workers to unionize, and so on.

Unlike Second Wave feminists, who used face-to-face confrontations such as public protest, group meetings, and civil disobedience, Third Wave feminists feel less of a need for a defensive posture and embrace more impersonal and isolated methods of communication (blogs, personal websites, e-mail, Facebook). One Third Wave feminist is blogger Rebecca Walker, the daughter of Alice Walker. Criticizing her mother’s emotional and physical absenteeism in her life, Rebecca Walker delayed motherhood. She and others of the Third Wave identify with attachment parenting as an antidote to their own generational nurturing gap that was left by their mothers in the Second Wave.

The Fourth Wave is what we see as an emerging feminism that progresses beyond justice for women, the poor, and ethnic groups to also include justice for the unborn. Fourth Wave feminists see this circling back to the principles of First Wave feminism not in contradiction to the rights for women but rather as being in support of women’s rights. Their numbers include women like the Third Wave feminists who feel abortion was never a “choice” for poor women. Many are Second Wave feminists who believed in the 1970s that abortion would remedy



single motherhood, the feminization of poverty, child abuse, and unequal pay for equal work but who have found that not only have these social ills not been eradicated after almost 40 years of abortion rights but in some cases have worsened. Moreover, many have had first-hand experience with abortion and see or live with the negative effects of abortions, particularly post-traumatic stress—the same disorder seen in soldiers who have faced war.

Other Fourth Wave feminists bypassed the Third Wave altogether and understand through the sciences of ultrasonography, genetics, and embryology the humanness of the unborn. They see themselves embracing “inclusive justice” by identifying abortion as violence to both the mother and another human being. Therefore they see contraception, the prevention of conceiving a life, as distinct from the right to take a life in abortion. In this regard they stand squarely with Susan B. Anthony and First Wave feminists who, without the assistance of science, also made that distinction.

Fourth Wave Feminism has come full circle and embraces an even greater and more expansive interpretation of human rights.

*Carol Crossed is President of the Susan B Anthony Birthplace Museum and is on the Board of Directors of Feminists for Nonviolent Choices in Rochester, New York.*

# RENEWING THE PEACE MOVEMENT

*by John Whitehead*

**O**ne part of promoting a consistent ethic of life is a cause very dear to my heart, namely, the pursuit of peace, of finding ways for nations or other communities to resolve their conflicts nonviolently, without resort to the organized, large-scale killing that is war. In this piece, I will explain precisely how, as a Christian and specifically a Catholic, I understand the pursuit of peace and why this cause is important to me. I will then offer some comments on the peace movement in the contemporary United States: my hopes for this movement and future peace activities that I think could be valuable.

I should say that I am writing on these topics as a layman, in two different senses of the term. I am a layman in the literal sense: I am not a member of the Catholic clergy nor am I a theologian, a scripture scholar, or a church historian. I am simply a Catholic who tries (very imperfectly) to understand Church teaching on peace and war. I am also a layman in relation to the peace movement: I am not a veteran peace activist but only someone who has done some study of American peace activism and had a peripheral, sporadic involvement in certain peace movement activities. I hope my perspective, such as it is, will be useful to others concerned with peace activism, however.

My Catholic faith calls me to strive for peace. While the Catholic Church, unlike the “peace churches” such as the Quakers and Mennonites, is not pacifist and allows for war being justifiable, at least in theory, there is nevertheless a long tradition of Catholic peacemaking. This tradition arguably goes all the way back to Jesus’ statement in the Sermon on the Mount that “Blessed are the Peacemakers” and has continued since then.<sup>i</sup> St. Augustine, although generally thought of as one of the fathers of the “just war theory”—the idea that war can be justified in certain circumstances—nevertheless wrote that “it is a higher glory still to slay war itself with the word than men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war.”<sup>ii</sup> Various popes, both ancient and modern, have tried to act as peacemakers by mediating among nations: in the ancient world, Pope Innocent I (A.D. 402-417) served as a mediator between the Roman Empire and the Visigoth King Alaric I, and Leo I (440-461) made similar overtures to Attila the Hun and Genseric the Vandal; in the modern era, Pius IX (1846-1878) tried to mediate the Franco-German War of 1870, Leo XIII (1878-1903) argued for a papal role in international peacemaking, and Benedict XV (1914-1922) exerted himself trying to make peace among the warring powers in the First World War.<sup>iii</sup> More recently, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council’s declared in 1965 that “as it points out the authentic and noble mean

ing of peace and condemns the frightfulness of war, the Council fervently desires to summon Christians to cooperate with all men in making secure among themselves a peace based on justice and love, and in setting up agencies of peace. This Christians should do with the help of Christ, the Author of peace.”iv

This rich Catholic tradition of pursuing peace is the most fundamental reason for my concern with the pursuit of peace. I also have two more specific and personal motivations for peacemaking. While I accept the Catholic notion of just war, contemplating actual historical wars leaves me with a rather different impression. The specific, real-life wars that I can claim to have some knowledge of are those closest to me in time and space, namely, the wars that my own country, the United States, has fought over roughly the last hundred years. Given what I know of those wars, I do not judge any of them to have been justified according to a strict application of contemporary standards for just war. Such a long history of fighting unjust wars—combined with the various other injustices of American foreign policy—makes me extremely skeptical about my government’s uses of military force. To show great caution in endorsing the use of such force and instead to pursue and promote alternatives to military force in international relations seems a much wiser course for Americans to follow, given our nation’s history.

The last reason why I am so concerned with peace activism is also the one that provides much of the passion and urgency I feel for this cause. Beginning in the 20th century, war has become deadly in a way that even the bloodiest wars of the past were not. Humanity now possesses weapons that can kill on a scale previously unknown and bring about what, with little exaggeration, can be called “the end of the world.” The dangers of nuclear war receive less attention today than they did at the height of the Cold War and the arms race, but they still exist. The United States and other nations still possess these weapons and—as the recent crisis with Russia over Ukraine and tensions with China in the Pacific region show—conflicts among nuclear powers can still arise. In the future we might not be as lucky in avoiding disaster.

Given this situation, finding stable and effective ways for nations to resolve their disputes peacefully, without being tempted to use or even threaten to use nuclear weapons, is imperative. The historian Michael Bess, in writing of the nuclear legacy of the Second World War, powerfully summed up the significance of our current situation:

World War II forever changed the moral stakes surrounding the challenge of global peace. In the aftermath of Hiroshima, peace was no longer merely a worthy goal for statesmen to pursue, but became a question of long-term survival for all of civilization. We have come to think of the period since 1945 as the nuclear era, and this terminology explicitly reflects the fact that we live in a qualitatively different world from that which came before. Among the many moral dimensions of the Second World War, this one cannot be ignored: because of the way this conflict played itself out, all of us must now live, day by day, with the knowledge that our civilization is mortal, and that we ourselves may be the instruments of its passing.i



photo courtesy Jonathon Colman, some rights reserved.

Because, for all these reasons, I am concerned with peace, I would like to see the growth of a large, energetic peace movement in the United States. Major popular movements for peace have emerged in the United States in the past—most famously in the opposition to the Vietnam War, but also in the late 1950s and early 1960s against nuclear testing and in the 1980s against the nuclear arms race. A renewal of this kind of activism in the form of a stable coalition of people and groups that oppose wars and preparations for war by this country is sorely needed. Such a coalition, if large and active enough, would be a force in American political life that both major political parties would need to take into account and that could—perhaps—move national security policy in a more positive direction.

Such a movement could productively focus on a number of specific causes within the larger goal of peace: opposition to the use of drones and other new “high-tech” methods of killing (which I suspect will continue to be a major issue); opposition to what is euphemistically called “covert action” by particular branches of the military or intelligence agencies; and, of course, opposition to nuclear weapons. If a specific military action by the United States, such as the Iraq War, arises, peace activists can of course mobilize in opposition to that, but by also working against ongoing issues that are not tied to a specific conflict we can avoid being purely reactive to whatever crisis might in the news at the moment and—perhaps—can build up participation and institutional strength through sustained efforts.

I think champions of the consistent life ethic might be particularly well positioned to inspire a renewal of the American peace movement because we can draw recruits and ideas from pro-life activists, who are already highly motivated and organized. Different social movements can support and inspire each other—in the 20th century, the peace movement and civil rights movement had a mutually reinforcing relationship—and I think the pro-life movement and peace movement can help each other in this way. As we are all well aware, of course, pro-life activism has tended to be associated with a political agenda that

includes support for American military interventions, but—as Life Matters Journal routinely proves—not all pro-lifers feel this way, and I think peace-minded pro-lifers can be the nucleus for at least one branch of a renewed peace movement.

Another energetic social movement that peace activists can reach out to as a potential source of support is the environmental movement—if peace activists return to the cause of opposing nuclear weapons that offers an obvious point in common with those concerned with protecting the environment.

Also, one technique that I think peace activists would do well to borrow from pro-lifers is the practice of having a major national gathering at the same time every year, such as the March for Life. I don’t expect such a gathering will generate much more media attention or other impressions on the wider world than the March for Life seems to, but these kinds of gatherings are very valuable for activists as opportunities to meet other activists, build networks, exchange ideas, and get energized. One possibility would be to try to hold such a gathering every August to mark the anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Such a gathering could be held in Los Angeles, San Francisco or another city with a large Japanese-American population. This type of location would also offer an opportunity to commemorate the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War and to take a stand not only against war but against the domestic civil liberties violations that so often accompany it.

Last, to attract as wide a following as possible, such a movement needs to be ideologically diverse. Just as the pro-life movement has been limited by its association with conservative politics, I think an overly close association between peace activism and progressive politics would be a disadvantage for the peace movement. To provide an illustration, the website for one of the oldest American peace groups, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, describes the Fellowship’s work by saying “we challenge economic exploitation, work to eradicate racism and religious intolerance, and call attention to imperialistic U.S. foreign policy.”<sup>i</sup> These are all admirable and worthy goals, but the language



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used—particular the provocative phrase “imperialistic U.S. foreign policy”—is likely to appeal primarily to progressives while potentially alienating those with differing perspectives. Not everyone who opposes or is uneasy about American military intervention necessarily feels comfortable with the characterization of U.S. policy as “imperialistic” or agrees that economic exploitation and racism are closely connected with war.

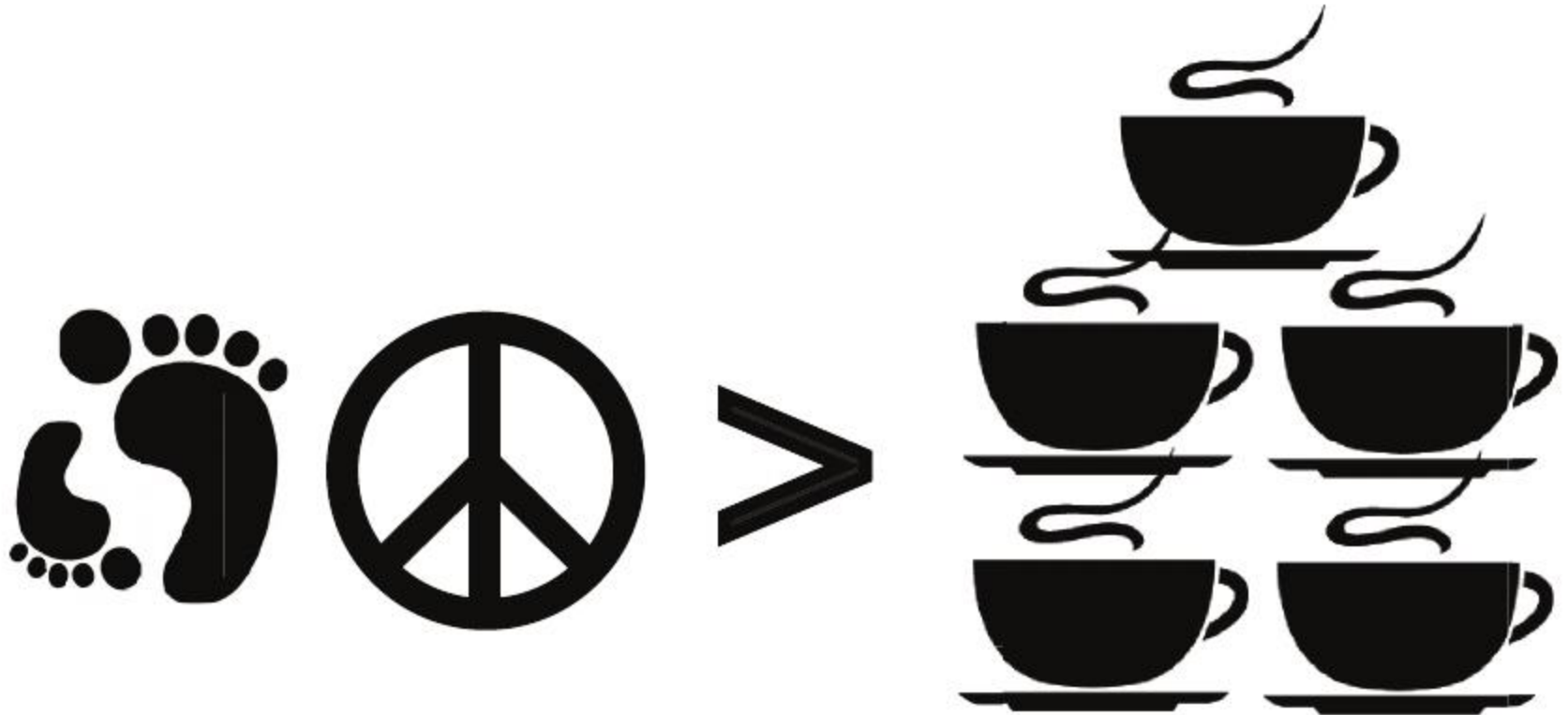
Rather than appealing to a particular political constituency, a revitalized peace movement should welcome anyone who opposes American military intervention and the massive military establishment that makes such interventions possible. It should be open to a diversity of views on other political issues and on questions such as which influences or interests cause war or make it more likely. Activists of a social democratic bent, for example, might identify “economic exploitation” rooted in corporate influence or a capitalist economic system as the culprit. Those of a more libertarian persuasion might argue that excessive government power is to blame. The peace movement should be open to both views and not insist on either.

A broad, diverse peace movement can be a powerful force within American political life and we should begin the vital work of building it.

*This article was adapted from a talk delivered at the Life/Peace/Justice Conference on March 29, 2014.*

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MAKE IT HISTORY!

# LIBERALISM WITHOUT ITS SOUL

*by Nicholas Neal*

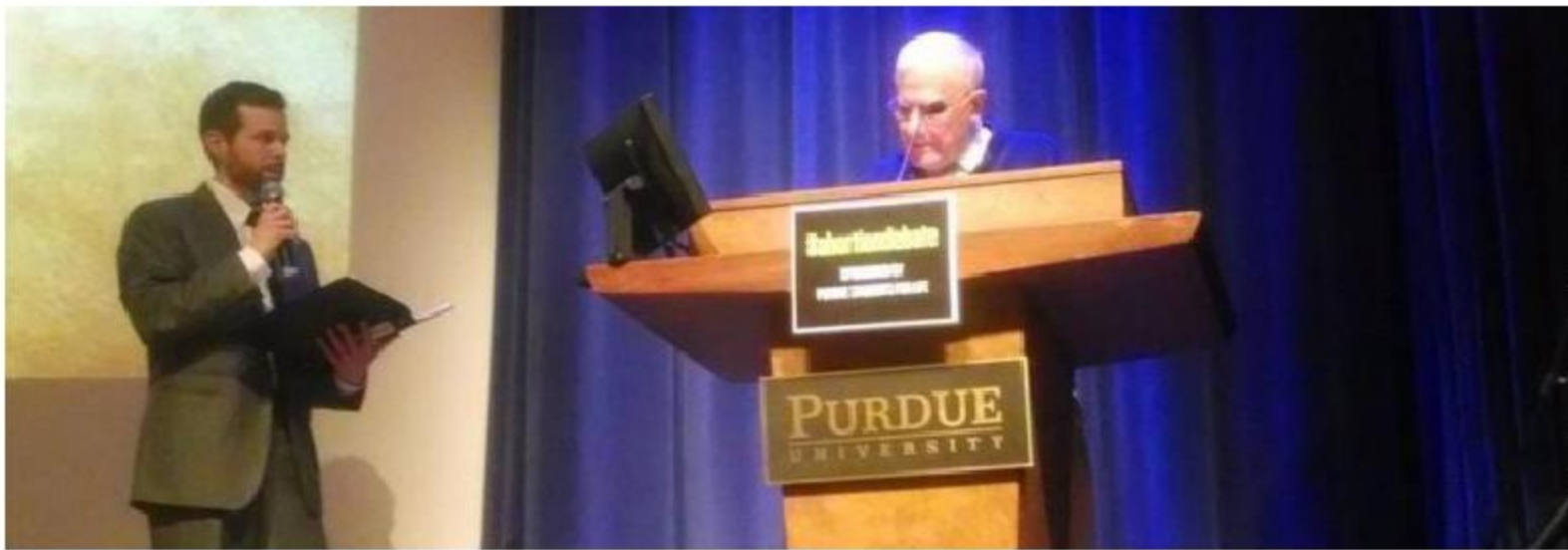


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**P**urdue University hosted a jolt-ingly eye-opening debate March 3 on the resolution “Is Abortion a Human Rights Injustice?” Arguing the affirmative was the young Seth Drayer of Created Equal, a pro-life organization that argues against abortion on human rights grounds. Purdue University’s Professor of Communications Ralph Webb, PhD, argued the negative. What made the event particularly jarring was Webb arguing not only that abortion doesn’t violate human rights, but that, in truth, there are no human rights that could be violated. The pro-choice professor was flat-out denying the concept of universal human rights, and thus the debate at Purdue University showed how abortion has caused liberalism to abandon its historically? fundamental principles.

Webb’s argument could be conceptualized as a type of fortress with two walls that his opponent was charged with knocking down. One “wall” was the denial of fetal humanity/personhood. Although he expanded on contradicting views of human life in order to throw the issue

consciousness as an origin point for humanity. Webb’s second “wall” was a much more fundamental argument: He repeatedly stated that there are no universal human rights, and that rights were really dependent upon cultures. The extent to which he was willing to take this view was painfully seen when Drayer asked him whether sex trafficking could be justified in certain cultures and Webb answered yes.

Historically, what marked liberalism in both its classical form and its modern form was a belief in human rights. It was John Locke’s two treatises on government that stated:

“The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which isthat law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.”<sup>1</sup>

This belief in human rights was what inspired the American Revolution in the 18th century, the abolition of slavery in the 19th century, the expansion of suffrage to women in the early 20th century, the civil rights movement of the 1960's and the gay rights movement of the 21st century. With an awareness of this historical backdrop, it is somewhat jarring to hear Webb, the pro-choice and "liberal" debater, argue that there are no human rights in order to undermine the claim that elective abortion is a human rights injustice.

The historical irony is that Webb was channeling the father of conservatism, Edmund Burke, in his denial of universal human rights. The idea that what is right and what is wrong can only be determined by the culture of a particular country is not that different from Burke's argument that rights are not reasoned, but based purely on the English tradition.<sup>2</sup> This idea has caused the worst aspects of conservatism historically, from the Southern defense of slavery justified by a belief that American democracy was exclusively for whites to the standard right-wing defense of waterboarding justified by a belief that the constitutional prohibition against torture does not apply to non-citizens. By grafting the denial of universal human rights into liberal philosophy, Webb and the pro-choicers who use such arguments have simply targeted dehumanization at another class of human beings, the unborn.

Indeed, it is not only Webb who has denied this central tenet of liberalism. Mary Elizabeth Williams, in a provocative 2013 Slate article titled "So What if Abortion Ends Life?," stated:

Here's the complicated reality in which we live: All life is not equal. That's a difficult thing for liberals like me to talk about, lest we wind up looking like death-panel-loving, kill-your-grandma-and-your-precious-baby storm troopers. Yet a fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She's the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always.<sup>3</sup>

Williams seems to concede that the idea that the human

fetus does not have the equal human rights of born people is a contradiction of the general liberal ideal of equality. Yet, when pushed against the idea of abortion rights, she is willing to allow this concept to drop, thus ending the noblest aspect of historical liberalism and creating a liberalism without a soul.

To further the irony, it is the pro-lifers who have dusted off the historical liberal arguments and applied them to the preborn. Drayer made appeals to a natural right to live, one which applied universally to all human beings. He even argued that the pro-life society would be the more inclusive society since it would base the right to life on humanity, not on age or dependency. Indeed, the famous quote by Dr. Mildred Jefferson, a pro-life activist and the first African-American woman to graduate from Harvard Medical School, opposing a society, "where only the perfect, the privileged and the planned have the right to live," is 100 percent in the spirit of historical liberalism.<sup>4</sup>

Abraham Lincoln once told a parable of two men who had gotten into such an intense fight that when it was over they winded up in each other's coat.<sup>5</sup> This is a truly apt metaphor for the Purdue debate and the abortion debate in general. The young and idealistic Drayer argued for a more inclusive society where the rights of children were respected. The old and skeptical Webb argued that there were no universal human rights and that the victims of abortion were not truly human. Such a reversal of equalitarian principle is a sad event in the history of liberalism.

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TRUE LIFE

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# WAR'S IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS

*by Mary Stroka*



Conflict is not always a bad thing. It is, at times, even necessary to use conflict effectively to bring internal tensions to the surface and bring conflicting individuals to a better understanding of each other's perspectives. Conflict of this kind is better than allowing brooding over differences, which can cause greater turmoil. It is the method by which we argue or even "fight" that makes the difference as to whether conflict is bad or good. The way we handle our disagreements can show a great deal more about our character than the actions we take in times of inner peace and celebration.

What if we apply this general principle to a macro level, that of countries' conflicts and, ultimately, war?

Though war is not inevitable, conflict is. And, obviously, in our imperfect and often suffering world, it is

something we all experience at one level or another.

When countries' conflicts come to a devastating head in war, one of the most important elements of war is the actions of ordinary people, both citizens and soldiers. Sometimes we get so focused on the evil of war and the corruption of the governments that sponsor the bloodshed that we don't pay attention to the roles and experiences of individuals.

On our way back from the Life/Peace/Justice conference that was held on March 29, my boyfriend Mike and I stopped to visit the Civil War battlefields of Gettysburg and Antietam. Treading sensitively on the ground where so many died, we reflected on what had occurred there and what the men (and, in some cases, women!) had gone through as they faced each other on the battlefields. We imagined the

courage they must have had and the fear they must have felt, knowing they could die at any moment. We saw what they might have seen, looking across the fields at their “enemies.” We imagined how the civilians who had homes sometimes literally on the battlefield may have responded. We learned more about humanity. Walking on such sacred ground not only brought the brutality of war to a more personal level for us in many respects but also gave us a better understanding of the human condition in both its good and bad aspects.

To demonstrate on a more personal level the humanity of individuals involved in war, let me share a story Mike and his mother told me about one of the experiences his mother’s father had during World War II.

Thaddeus was an officer in the 2nd Polish Corps under the British 8th Army. He learned of a young man in the corps who was struggling and unwilling to fight. Thaddeus didn’t consider the man a coward but rather someone who was facing an awful situation: after facing the horrors of war in the form of the Russian military’s ruthless treatment of the Polish people in Siberia, the man was having an emotional breakdown at the thought of going through similar experiences while serving with the British Army.

Thaddeus sat down with the man and told him how he had to fight or else he would face a court martial and be charged with the capital offense of desertion and be executed. Thaddeus told him how he would do everything he could to help him and keep him safe in the war.

Feeling he had no alternative, though, the young man shot himself after Thaddeus left him. Thaddeus, Mike’s mom said, carried feelings of guilt with him until his own death.

Reflecting on the experiences of these two men, it is hard for me to say anything at all, especially because of my proximity to these people. I am close to them through not only the ties of relationship but also my own emotional ties. I cannot relate directly, but I can almost imagine what they felt, and, again, it brings me closer to that part of the human experience. Not only is there pain, but there’s also an underlying sense of

compassion in both men’s hearts, at least from my perspective. There is the reaction of the man who committed suicide, an action that may have involved not only fear and an unwillingness to face more brutality but perhaps also a desire not to inflict more pain and suffering on those “enemies” he would face. And then there are the actions of Thaddeus, who really did everything he could, even if he felt he could have done more. This encounter sheds light on the personal experience of war. It shows the character of the people involved, who very much appear to have had the best intentions in the midst of the darkest struggles.

To fully bring this issue to the forefront of today’s struggles, it is critical, when we make decisions about the wars or potential wars we currently face, to consider the impact on individuals. These decisions involve much more than governmental agreements, politics, and the contents of general news coverage. For example, we have to consider, what will we do about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict? How can we ensure that we remain ethical in our choices regarding this dilemma that threatens more than Ukraine, since the Russians may invade more countries? I cannot answer those questions, but I think increasing our cognizance of individuals’ experiences is of the utmost importance in choosing our methods of limiting, and hopefully eliminating, the threat Russian President Vladimir Putin’s military actions pose to the world.

Want to have **your true-life story featured** in an upcoming issue of Life Matters Journal in the True Life pages?

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# MEDIA REVIEWS AND CONSISTENT LIFE

## THE 40 FILM *by Kelsey Hazzard*

The *40* film is a documentary that examines the pro-life movement 40 years after *Roe v. Wade*. It features interviews with dozens of pro-life leaders, including yours truly. But in case that isn't enough to persuade you to see it, here are four more reasons (and I'll try to be as objective as possible!):

*1. You can bring your pro-choice friends to see this movie.*

Does *40* have an agenda? Well, it's distributed by an outfit called Pro-Life Champions, so obviously the answer is yes. But that agenda does not saddle the film with cheesy narratives. Nor does the film caricature pro-choicers. And the many post-abortive women featured in the film are portrayed with great respect and compassion. (*40* both begins and ends with Yvonne Florczak-Seeman, who has had five abortions.)

*2. This movie busts all the stereotypes.*

Pro-life women? Check. Pro-lifers of color? Check. Non-Christian pro-lifers? Check. Young pro-lifers? BIG check. Rebecca Kiessling of *Save the 1* remarked that "*40* is destined to become the premiere film for educating youth on abortion." I agree, and I'd add that youth are also doing a great deal of the educating.

*3. This movie makes the case for life compassionately and effectively.*



The *40* film is equal parts historical documentary—where the pro-life movement has been, where we are, and where we're going—and abortion debate primer. Everything from “my body, my choice” to the rape exception to “safe, legal, and rare” is addressed. Not bad for a film that runs less than 90 minutes!

*4. This movie is going to save lives.*

Throughout the film, various interview subjects speak directly to any pregnant women who may be watching. Whoever is speaking, the message is consistent: “The pro-life movement is here for you. We can help.” This message is reinforced by the many non-activist mothers who share their personal stories of choosing life. When I attended the screening of *40* in Washington, D.C., after the 2014 March for Life, director John Morales said that if the film saved just one life, all his hard work would be worth it. I'll be shocked if it's just one.

POETRY & PROSE

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CHOICE, SO CRUEL AND VILE

*by Beatrice Fedor*

It was my body and his choice  
I had a heart; then I had none  
There was no crime yet I was jailed;  
Mourning without a grave, alone

You were fragile and I loved you  
They said it's the right thing to do  
To live our lives, you had to go  
Numbed, I bled you ex-utero

I cried in vain and life grew dark  
My prison cell became my ark  
I forgot you with all my might  
Busy, marching for "women's rights"  
I fell again and paid the price  
O Choice, you are so cruel and vile

Then Love, true Love entered my life  
A morning Sun thinning the ice  
He tore apart my prison walls  
Mending my broken heart and soul

Now I can live and I still cry;  
Nothing will bring my children back  
But I have faith and I have hope  
That Truth will triumph over Dark  
And bathe the wounded in His light

# THE GREATEST CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

by Kyle Murphy



On January 22nd I jumped into a vehicle with 5 other people at 4 AM and headed to DC for the March for Life. I had not been to the march for several years, mostly due to my frustrations with it. I had a mostly good experience with it but my frustrations are definitely still there.

An example of my frustrations: the march is always preceded by a rally in which various people speak about abortion. The rally started off this year with a brief concert by Matt Maher, a Catholic musician. As he was starting to play he talked about how our country needed to come to a greater respect for life. His solution? We need God.

I didn't stay for the entire rally but every speaker that I heard mentioned God at some point. We

even had a statement from Pope Francis. There was plenty of prayer during the rally.

Don't get me wrong, I love God. I love prayer. I love my Catholic faith. But the March for Life should not be a religious event.

Abortion is the greatest Civil Rights issue of the 21st century. It affects more people than any other issue. And yes, I believe we need the grace of God to combat the evil of abortion. Prayer is important when combating evil. But in the political arena we should keep religious arguments out.

Why? I'm glad you asked! Allow me to outline a few points:



**1. Religious arguments are not effective in influencing policy.**

Our political system does not base decisions on what we as a country believe the will of God is. Some would argue that our nation was founded on Christian principles, but that is certainly up for debate. Regardless of the founding, it is obvious that we do not now base decisions on the will of God. Some individual politicians perhaps believe they are doing that very thing, but as a whole we are a secular country politically. Religious arguments are not effective in influencing policy decisions.

**2. Religious arguments do not change hearts and minds.**

Let's separate out people into a few groups here: people who are not religious, people who are religious and support the legality of abortion, and people who are religious and do not support the legality of abortion. Religious arguments obviously do not change the hearts and minds of those who are not religious. People who are religious and do not support of the legality of abortion do not need their hearts and minds to be changed. People who are religious and support the legality of abortion do not listen when you make religious arguments. There are many reasons here, one is that we tend to compartmentalize our faith and determine for ourselves what it means and what beliefs we agree with. People who are religious but are pro-choice are very unlikely to listen when someone makes a religious argument.

**3. Religious arguments ostracize fellow pro-lifers.**

The March for Life is probably the only time and place I am ever embarrassed to be Roman Catholic. We Catholics turn a civil protest into a celebration of Catholicism. We talk about which dioceses are there, we read a message from the pope, we have priests and bishops speak, we have little Marian processions, one group even plays "Hail Holy Queen"

with their brass band. The March for Life is a Catholic event. How do you feel a pro-life atheist would feel at the rally or during the march? How about a muslim, or a buddhist, or even a jew? Heck, I bet even the other Christian denominations feel somewhat awkward amidst all of the Catholicism present. Before the march I met a lady in my march group who was a buddhist. At the end of the march we were standing in front of the Supreme Court when a group of post-abortive women was beginning to speak. They asked Fr. Frank Pavone of Priests for Life to begin in a prayer. As he started a (beautiful) prayer, the buddhist woman mentioned to me that she did not feel comfortable there and she was going to leave. Anecdotal, I know, but I believe it's indicative of how non-Catholics feel.

**4. Non-religious arguments work better.**

What is the goal of the March for Life and the pro-life movement in general? To end abortion, which we consider to be an evil killing of human life. To gain this end shouldn't we use the most effective arguments? I am no ethicist, but I believe that killing a human being is wrong. There are many arguments which more philosophically-inclined people can outline better than I, but my personal beliefs boil down to just that: killing a human being is wrong. Unborn children are human beings. The science of embryology tells us that. For that matter, unborn children have some political rights as well: they can inherit property and they can be considered victims in murder cases (killing a pregnant woman and her child is often considered a double-homicide). We consider them human beings except when they inconvenience us.

To me, arguments along those lines of thought are far more compelling than "God loves unborn babies," especially when it comes to atheists, agnostics, and just your average everyday non-religious person. To win the right to life, we need them on board.

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