

Life Insight

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Dear Reader:

On May 3 the pro-life movement in America lost its most visible champion, a "simple priest" as he wanted to be known--of passionate conviction, uncommon warmth, "outrageous humor" and immense goodwill.

Printed below is a personal remembrance of His Eminence Cardinal John O'Connor by Helen Alvaré.

I wouldn't be surprised if many people who have seen Cardinal John O'Connor on television, or in his pulpit at St. Patrick's Cathedral, or on one of those amazing front page stories of the New York Post ("SHOOT ME FIRST, says Cardinal O'Connor to Abortion Clinic Shooter") imagined him to be a pretty tough leader. Born to command. And as far as it goes, they would be right. But there's another style of leadership the Cardinal had, seen by many, but rarely publicly noted. A style of special importance in the Catholic tradition. The leader as servant. Servant of the servants of God. Cardinal John O'Connor had this in abundance.

When he was elected Chairman of the Pro-Life Committee at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Cardinal O'Connor came to Washington, DC to meet with the Committee's entire staff. There was some trepidation among staff about meeting this very important churchman who would direct all national Catholic pro-life activities for the next three years. All gathered in a conference room at the bishops' headquarters. The Cardinal opened: "How can I help you?" How can I help you? This wasn't what anyone expected to hear. But it summed up who he was, and who he continued to be for us and for the pro-life movement for the rest of his life.

Throughout the time of his chairmanship, he continued to be both leader and servant in the

best Catholic tradition. It's 6:00 pm on a Saturday night in 1991 and my husband and I are heading out for dinner together in downtown D.C. The phone rings. It's the Cardinal. "Helen, have you seen what our ad firm has produced?" "Well your Eminence, I . . ." "Are they kidding? This is the Church we're talking about! We could never use this! Tell them whatever we do has to be completely Catholic!"

It's later that year. The Cardinal believes deeply that the many national groups in the pro-life movement ought to get to know one another better. Ought to work more closely together or, at the very least, never to impede one another's work. He calls us together, over 100 groups, at his residence in New York. I listen. Some complain about the slow progress of our cause. Others complain--bluntly, without any of the diplomatic niceties--about what the bishops' Pro-Life Committee, which the Cardinal still heads, is or is not doing. The Cardinal could not be more gentle in his response. He empathizes with their frustration. He explains differences of opinion. He asks for their advice on how the Church can heal any divisions and be the best Catholic pro-life voice ever. He tells them they can come to him any time for help. Any time. That's what he's there for.

It's 1993 or 1995, or any year in between or since. The phone rings in the Pro-Life Secretariat. It's Cardinal O'Connor. "Gail," or "Helen," he says, "I want to do more. I don't feel I've done enough lately. What do you need right now?"

It's May 8, 2000. The funeral of Cardinal O'Connor. His great friend and fellow pro-life leader Cardinal Bernard Law celebrates the O'Connor legacy: the constant reminder that the Church must be "unambiguously pro-life." Applause--over 2 minutes long--rises up from the congregation like a wave. A long, loud, powerful wave. Attending national, state and local pro-abortion politicians, overwhelmed by the length and power of the response, eventually rise. In the words of Cardinal Law, "I can see he hasn't left the pulpit."

Your Eminence, clearly you haven't lost your influence simply by the fact of leaving this earth. What can you do for us? Just you wait and see what we have in mind!

Bizarre Reactions to Jubilee Post-Abortion Outreach

It appears that the success of the NCCB's Jubilee year outreach to post-aborted women is really starting to bother Planned Parenthood, the National Abortion Federation (NAF) and other abortion purveyors around the country.

The outreach effort, undertaken to make women and men suffering from an abortion experience aware of the assistance available to them through the Church's Project Rachel ministry, began in February in the (arch)dioceses of Washington, Baltimore and Arlington. From there, the program is spreading to other (arch)dioceses, including Boston, Syracuse, West Palm Beach, Tampa-St. Petersburg, Altoona-Johnstown, Springfield, Ill., Dallas, Oakland, San Francisco, Calgary, and the states of Michigan, Nebraska and New Hampshire.

Even before the radio ads began to run in Boston, the outreach effort attracted the attention of the local media. The city's largest paper, the *Boston Globe*, ran a front page article on the effort, and the local Associated Press (AP) reporter also did a story. This AP story was later picked up by other newspapers nationwide. When running the story, many of these newspapers added to it information about their own local Project Rachel offices.

Surprisingly, the two original Boston stories were fair, even positive, in their coverage. They quoted favorably Barbara Thorp, director of pro-life activities with the Boston Archdiocese (the AP story mistakenly put "director of pro-life services," but this was a minor error; nothing to compare with what CNN--see below--would do to it) and also a woman who had gone through the Project Rachel program, who spoke of the healing and peace she found through it.

On the whole, this coverage was good news, very appropriate for a project that is based on good news, the good news of hope and reconciliation for those who have suffered from an abortion experience.

But this good news apparently was seen as bad news by those in the business of abortion.

"We don't believe that an organization which teaches that abortion is a mortal sin is appropriate for unbiased and healthy counseling," sniffed Virginia Martin, an executive vice president of Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, D.C. In another report, Frances Kissling, president of the spectacularly oxymoronic "Catholics for a Free Choice," bloviated that "if the Church affirmed women's ability to make good decisions . . . told the truth about Church teachings that leave room for women to decide to have abortions in good conscience (sic), and offered non-judgmental spiritual counseling before the abortion decision was made, there would be no need for post-abortion reconciliation. To a considerable extent, the bishops' current program of reconciliation is designed to solve a problem that the Church has created."

In offering these opinions, Ms. Martin and Ms. Kissling managed to sound both silly and petty at the same time. To say that the Church should not provide post-abortion counseling because of its teaching on abortion is like saying the Church should stop providing services to those suffering from AIDS because of its teachings against behaviors that may lead to that disease. The assertion flies in the face of the experiences of those who have participated in Project Rachel, one of whom told the *Boston Globe* that the process "was without recrimination or judgment."

The suggestion that the women and men seeking the help offered by Project Rachel do so because they are on some sort of "Catholic guilt trip" is not only a slur that would not be tolerated if aimed at any other religion. It is belied by the fact that over 40 percent of those who contacted Project Rachel as a result of the Jubilee effort were people of other faiths or none. Killing a child is a shameful thing and human beings know this instinctively.

The Boston AP story reported that Michelle Ringuette, spokeswoman for the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, attempted to discredit the need for Project Rachel by noting that out of 1,000 abortions a month in Massachusetts, "only two to four women call for counseling."

Hmmm . . . let's see. A woman goes to a Planned Parenthood clinic and has an abortion. Later, she becomes emotionally devastated by this experience; her life may totter on the brink of emotional ruin. And she is seriously expected to go back to the scene of her devastation for help in overcoming it? Of course Planned Parenthood receives virtually no requests for post-abortion healing. Women who are hurting from abortion know the source of that hurt, and it's not the Catholic Church.

CNN reached new heights of media political correctness on abortion when it changed Barbara Thorp's title to "Director of Anti-Abortion Services, Archdiocese of Boston" (her correct title, as noted above, is director of pro-life activities).

Apparently NAF and Planned Parenthood judged their scattered media salvos inadequate to undermine the goodwill for Project Rachel generated by positive stories in Boston. So they took the occasion of NAF's "2000 Public Service Campaign," scheduled for May-June in Boston to announce a press conference under the headlines:

"PRO-CHOICE ADVOCATES REFUTE ANTI-CHOICE ADS THAT MISLEAD WOMEN ABOUT THE EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF ABORTION: National Abortion Federation Public Service Ads, Featuring Toll-Free Abortion Hotline Number, Present Accurate Information About Abortion

to Boston Women."

NAF's "public service" ads (rejected by Atlanta's Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority or MARTA) consist of two innuendo-laden statements. The first ad's message reads: "Sister, daughter, mother. A few names women who've had an abortion actually deserve to be called." In smaller type, it continues: "Women who've had an abortion endure all kinds of name calling, much of which is unprintable here. But the belief that there's a certain 'type' of woman who chooses abortion is as outdated as it is ignorant. Just consider one simple fact: by age 45, nearly half (43%) of the women in America will have had an abortion. ... They are the women we love."

The implication that Project Rachel is all about vilifying women by calling them names too foul to print could not be more wrong. And, by the way, that "simple fact" about nearly half of American women having an abortion by age 45 ... only in their fondest dreams and marketing plans!

The second ad declares ominously: "Our doctors have learned everything there is to know about making abortion safe. Except what to wear to work." It continues: "A bullet proof vest is the last thing any doctor thought he or she would need to wear to work. Yet today, this is the unfortunate reality. ..."

How this bit of nastiness--lumping all pro-life people in with the few mentally unbalanced individuals who have resorted to lethal violence--answers the "misleading" information in the Project Rachel outreach ads is anyone's guess. If the ads seem offensive, the press conference to discredit the Rachel ads was even worse. NAF Executive Director Vicki Saporta flew up from Washington to tell the press that women overwhelmingly feel relief after abortion. She forgot to mention that often the "relief" typically lasts only a few hours, days or weeks before it is replaced by crushing grief and sorrow. She also pointed out that "instead of vilifying them, we should give them the support they deserve." And that's precisely what Project Rachel has been doing for 15 years. No one thought to ask her what NAF has done in the way of supporting women devastated by abortion. Pity. The silence would have spoken volumes.

Dr. Maureen Paul, incoming NAF president and medical director of Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts declared that "the makers of these ads have no idea what women who choose abortion actually experience." The truth: the texts of all ads were taken directly from the words of women who've had abortions. And that is precisely why they resonate so strongly among women suffering from abortion. They ring true because they

are true.

The most disturbing comment of the press conference came from a second-year med student from Harvard: "The best day I have had in the last two years of medical school was spent in an abortion clinic, shadowing Dr. Paul. ... I went home that day as happy as I have ever been about my decision to be a doctor."

The silver lining was that only three members of the press even showed up: a cameraman, a journalist from a suburban paper, and one from Boston's archdiocesan paper. Numerous women who had been helped by Project Rachel in Boston contacted that office to express their anger at the NAF-Planned Parenthood attacks. One statement is representative of their feelings:

Many years ago I was young and in trouble. I went to Planned Parenthood for help. I needed someone to talk to. They presented only one option. They told me the cost in dollars. They never told me the true costs that I would pay over the years. I have suffered in silence, ashamed of my dirty little secret, no one to talk to, not even my family or friends.

This cycle of pain, anguish and silence continued until I asked and received help from Project Rachel. The volunteer at Project Rachel helped me to come to terms with my actions. They saved me by enabling the healing process to begin. They helped me reconcile with God. I hope that all troubled women are allowed the free choice to go to Project Rachel without condemnation. I urge all who suffer because of their choices to seek [Project Rachel] and you shall be healed.

Supreme Court Hears Oral Argument on Partial-Birth Abortion

On April 25, the Supreme Court heard oral argument in *Stenberg v. Carhart*, a case which will decide the constitutionality of a Nebraska statute banning partial birth abortions (sometimes referred to as D&X abortions). Donald B. Stenberg, the Attorney General of Nebraska, noted in argument that 30 states have voted to ban the procedure, and that Nebraska's ban passed unanimously save for a single dissenting vote. States have a legitimate interest, he asserted, in drawing a bright line between infanticide and abortion.

Oral argument at the Supreme Court is usually peppered with questions from the Justices. Though questions from the bench are not necessarily a sign of how the Justices will vote in a particular case, they can sometimes signal areas of concern to a Justice.

One issue in the case is whether the statute only bans D&X ("partial-birth") abortions or other types of abortion, such as D&Es (dismemberment abortions). Justice O'Connor, who along with Justice Kennedy is widely viewed as a swing vote in this case, said from the bench that she found it difficult to read the Nebraska statute and be certain that it excluded D&Es. They are both gruesome, she added. Mr. Stenberg replied that the statute only bans D&Xs, a position that reflected his opinion as chief law enforcement officer of Nebraska. Did the Attorney General issue a formal opinion to that effect, Justice Kennedy inquired? No, Mr. Stenberg replied, but no one asked for an opinion, and the position Nebraska took in this litigation is shared by other states with respect to their statutes.

Was there any testimony that the health of a woman might require a D&X rather than a D&E abortion, Justice O'Connor asked? The American Medical Association and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Mr. Stenberg answered, were unable to identify a single circumstance in which a D&X abortion would be the only procedure available.

Justice Ginsberg took issue with the scope of the law, saying Nebraska could have expressly banned only "D&X." Mr. Stenberg noted in rebuttal that there were differences in terminology at the time the law was passed, leaving the legislature to try to describe it.

Justice Breyer said that medical opinion, as reflected in various amicus briefs, appeared to be divided. What is the Court to do when doctors don't agree among themselves, he asked? In those circumstances, Mr. Stenberg replied, the Court should defer to the judgment of the legislature. Few doctors perform D&X abortions, he added, so it is difficult to conclude that a woman's health requires it. Even the doctor who filed suit against the Nebraska ban performs very few D&X abortions.

During Mr. Heller's argument, Justice Kennedy asked whether there are not objective standards that the medical profession as a whole can adopt. Mr. Heller agreed, but claimed that a D&X abortion is in some circumstances the most appropriate procedure in a particular case. (He did not say exactly what sort of case that would be. The findings in the U.S. District Court were favorable to him and he drew on them repeatedly when pressed.)

Doesn't the state have an interest in preventing society from descending into the degree of callousness exhibited by ancient societies that permitted infanticide, Justice Scalia asked? Doesn't it have an interest in stopping the horror of seeing a live human creature dismembered outside the womb, he asked? Mr. Heller agreed that states have an interest

in preventing infanticide, but claimed that interest is already furthered under Nebraska's homicide statute. Ironically Mr. Heller added that comparisons with infanticide could be drawn with respect to any abortion, suggesting that if prevention of infanticide were a sufficient interest to allow states to ban D&X abortions, then states could ban all abortions - a proposition the Court so far has not accepted.

A decision is expected before the end of June.

(The foregoing synopsis was prepared by Michael Moses, Office of NCCB/USCC General Counsel.)

NCCB/USCC President Responds to Latest "Catholics For A Free Choice" Vendetta

On May 10, 2000 Galveston-Houston Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/U.S. Catholic Conference, issued the following statement on the status of the organization "Catholics for a Free Choice":

"For a number of years, a group calling itself Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) has been publicly supporting abortion while claiming it speaks as an authentic Catholic voice. That claim is false. In fact, the group's activity is directed to rejection and distortion of Catholic teaching about the respect and protection due to defenseless unborn human life.

"On a number of occasions the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) has stated publicly that CFFC is not a Catholic organization, does not speak for the Catholic Church, and in fact promotes positions contrary to the teaching of the Church as articulated by the Holy See and the NCCB.

"CFFC is, practically speaking, an arm of the abortion lobby in the United States and throughout the world. It is an advocacy group dedicated to supporting abortion. It is funded by a number of powerful and wealthy private foundations, mostly American, to promote abortion as a method of population control. This position is contrary to existing United Nations policy and the laws and policies of most nations of the world.

"In its latest campaign, CFFC has undertaken a concentrated public relations effort to end the official presence and silence the moral voice of the Holy See at the United Nations as a Permanent Observer. The public relations effort has ridiculed the Holy See in language reminiscent of other episodes of anti-Catholic bigotry that the Catholic Church has endured in the past.

"As the Catholic Bishops of the United States have stated for many years, the use of the name Catholic as a platform for promoting the taking of innocent human life and ridiculing the Church is offensive not only to Catholics, but to all who expect honesty and forthrightness in public discourse. We state once again with the strongest emphasis: "Because of its opposition to the human rights of some of the most defenseless members of the human race, and because its purposes and activities deliberately contradict essential teachings of the Catholic faith, . . . Catholics for a Free Choice merits no recognition or support as a Catholic organization" (Administrative Committee, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1993)."

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