

# CCBR: Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform

## *Making Abortion Unthinkable*

February–March 2009

*“The presentation was awesome and changed my views on abortion.”*

*–17-year-old male, St. Augustine Secondary School, Brampton, ON*

Dear Friends,

For new readers or anyone who still wonders if CCBR is making an impact on our society, consider what we accomplished in *just* the first 60 days of 2009:

- Jojo and I gave 45 presentations from coast to coast speaking to over 6,000 people!
- Our projects generated media coverage (radio, newspaper, *and* television) across the country, keeping abortion in the news for a full month. Our philosophy reached hundreds of thousands of people and we didn't pay a penny for this “advertising.”
- Our newest intern Chandler led a team of volunteers putting our Reproductive “Choice” Campaign truck on the road 14 times.

Can you believe there are still 10 months left in the year? Of course, most encouraging is not simply that we shared the truth with people, but that it *changed* people.

When Jojo spoke at the University of New Brunswick, Saint John, an 18-year-old female wrote that before his presentation she “did not really know much about [abortion].” Afterwards, however, she wrote, “This presentation just showed how brutal this actually is.” Furthermore, she described her opinion on abortion as moving from 7 before the presentation to 10 afterwards (where 0 means “support all abortion” and 10 means “against all abortion”!).

Another woman who had attended that same talk e-mailed this encouraging note:

I wanted to send a quick note after seeing Jose Ruba speak the last two nights here in Saint John, NB. First, he was inspiring and although I have always been somewhat involved in the pro-life movement, since moving to Saint John three years ago I have not done much for the cause but I am again pumped...thank you for that.

I also wanted to let you know there was a conversion at the speech last evening. I spoke to a young man [...] after the presentation. He was in awe and stated that he has always been pro-choice “just because.” He walked away now wondering how anyone could make an argument in

favour of abortion. He thought he was prepared for the images but he could not believe his eyes and stated, “No words could convey the message in the same way.”

That sentiment about the power of images was echoed by a woman who attended a talk I gave at Parkdale Grace Fellowship

### Saint Mary's University caves to hostile pro-abortion mob



When Jojo agreed to give a lecture at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, NS, he had no idea he would face an angry mob (above, top row) that would incessantly chant over his speaking for an hour and block the video projector. Nor could he foresee that, in the face of such hostility, the university would give in to mob rule and shut down his presentation rather than just remove the disruptors.

But that is exactly what Jojo faced on February 5 when he gave our “Echoes of the Holocaust” presentation, which looks at the parallels between abortion and historical atrocities. True to our standards, Jojo remained respectful and calm amidst the mob's furore, and their intolerance only proved to make themselves look bad. Video footage of the event was posted on YouTube ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=eulKlaVM9DE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eulKlaVM9DE)) and has received over 9000 views!

Furthermore, the controversy prompted news coverage of this pro-“choice” censorship nationwide—including Jojo's being interviewed by CTV News in Halifax as well as by media in St. John's, NL; Calgary; and even the United States! The good that came from this bad situation is that it enabled Jojo to promote the pro-life perspective to a vastly wider audience than would have been reachable in that one lecture hall!

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in Calgary. She said, "Pictures of aborted babies were used, which were very motivating." She also admitted that she had been "skeptical about the tactic of using graphic images," but that I "did a great job of explaining why this tactic is necessary and effective."

Our impact these past two months was seen not only at university and church presentations, but also at high schools. One teenager e-mailed us following a presentation to hundreds of his peers:

You recently spoke at my school on the subject of abortion. I just wanted to let you know that me and so many of my friends greatly appreciated what you did. My school seldom has anyone there that actually tells it how it is. Our chapels usually consist of very watered-down material, so it was very refreshing to have you there. Again, thank you for saying what needs to be said and showing us what we need to see.

At St. Augustine's Secondary School in Brampton, ON, a 16-year-old male described his views prior to the presentation as "If it didn't affect me, I didn't care." He underwent quite a transformation, moving from 5 to 10 and saying, "I see that every life is as valuable as the next."



▲ I (standing on stage) resume speaking to the students at St. Marcellinus School after showing them the video "This Is Abortion." The question that appears at the end of the video is one which we should never stop asking ourselves: "Children are dying; the world is watching; what will you do?"

Of course, not everyone attains the same degree of conviction immediately, but many of them are at least moving in the right direction. A 17-year-old female at Cardinal Leger Secondary School, also in Brampton, shifted from a 5 to a 6, stating, "I was more convinced after the presentation. [The speaker] made very good points and started to change my opinion."

A 16-year-old female there went from a 7 to a 10 saying, "The presentation motivated me to do something to stop abortion because it was graphic. I would recommend this presentation so people know how wrong it is."

Another 16-year-old female shifted to pro-life, this time from a 4 to a 9. She wrote, "Before the presentation, I felt that if you got raped it would be okay to have an abortion. After the presentation I was really affected. I don't know how someone can give up their baby, a human soul."

With your continued support, we will affect more young people, and ultimately the next generation. If you haven't given in a while, we hope you'll be able to give something. With our growing staff and increased activity, now is a perfect time to renew or even deepen your commitment to helping us spread the pro-life message. Thank you for partnering with us!

*Stephanie*

Stephanie Gray, on behalf of the CCBR team

P.S., This month we enclose an article I wrote in response to recent opinion pieces critical of our work, including an article by National Post columnist Barbara Kay who wrote very negatively about our Genocide Awareness Project. A shorter version of this enclosure was printed as an op-ed piece in the Post! We effectively received almost a third of a page of free advertising, not only outlining our philosophy but also highlighting our website, [unmaskingchoice.ca](http://unmaskingchoice.ca). As with the mob at Saint Mary's shutting down Jojo's talk, something bad presented an opportunity for us to do something good!

Note: Quotations may have been edited for grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling, and/or length.

Last year I spoke to a group of teens and encouraged them to always keep our "Unmasking 'Choice'" brochures on hand to be able to show to others. One of those girls, Ceci, heeded that advice and recently wrote me this:

*A coffee break conversation against pro-lifers between my manager and another cashier gave me the opportunity to speak out for the unborn. As I tried to remember what I should say, their conversation became more and more one-sided. I knew I was alone in my convictions and nearly decided that speaking out would do more harm than good. As I got up to leave the staff room, however, I suddenly felt a stack of CCBR pamphlets that I had placed in my bag the morning before. This was the push I needed. I timidly interrupted, and asked if they would like to see the facts. That day, I handed out three pamphlets in the crowded coffee room. They were stared at for several minutes before being carefully folded away. I had no idea of what impact they had until one of the men came up to me and said he had changed his mind. Having this message in my purse at all times has possibly saved a life, and for that I thank God."*

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## A WARNING TO PRO-LIFERS

Three separate perspectives, with problematic ideas about pro-life strategy, have been promoted in recent weeks. The first was a National Post article by Barbara Kay in which she called the Genocide Awareness Project (GAP), which visually compares abortion to the Holocaust, the “worst” use of the pro-life movement’s time and resources and called for a shift in pro-life messaging to bridge to people like her. Then there was a World Magazine piece by Marvin Olasky which criticized pro-lifers who display abortion imagery and who liken abortion to the Holocaust, emphasizing a need for a less controversial approach. Finally, there was a meeting I attended where the event host criticized GAP, arguing that the pro-life movement needs to align its strategy to that of a marketing model in order to avoid turning people off.

Resisting activities which ruffle feathers and rock boats is reminiscent of the Alabama clergymen who, in 1963, wrote Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., criticizing his peaceful but controversial efforts at social reform, claiming they were not only “unwise and untimely” but “extreme.” History has shown who was right.

In responding to those clergymen, Dr. King wrote this:

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.

Indeed, what is worse: those who cover up abortion while agreeing with abortion, or those who cover up abortion while opposing abortion?

Just as there were those who opposed racism and segregation and yet were confused about how to oppose the injustice effectively, so too is that the case with abortion. This commentary will endeavor to address some confusion about pro-life strategy.

### Popularity Versus Persecution

The idea that the pro-life movement needs to change its image by eliminating graphic pictures is rooted in the perspective that in order to achieve social change, we need to first be focussed on how we come across or are perceived by society. In other words, we need to change how people perceive *us* in order to change how they perceive *the injustice*.

But that is *not* how successful social reformers throughout history have transformed their cultures. Not William Wilberforce, not Mahatma Gandhi, not Rosa Parks, not Dr. King, to name just a few. These people and their movements did not work to change how people perceived them. They worked to change how people perceived the injustices at hand. They were more concerned about people *being* good than they were concerned about people *feeling* good. As a result, they faced severe persecution: threats, arrest, physical attacks, and even death.

Their example conveys an important lesson: persecution is not necessarily a sign of ineffectiveness. On the contrary, it may be a sign of effectiveness. To determine this, one must ask “why?” one is being persecuted. If the answer is because the messenger is mean, then that is grounds to change. However, if the answer is because the message is challenging, uncomfortable, and inconvenient (yet true and just) then one must persevere amidst the persecution.

Does this mean historical social reformers didn’t care *at all* about how they came across? No. They certainly ensured their conduct was above reproach and that they acted in a spirit of love, respect, and truth. They ensured their character complemented their message. Yet even with that, their characters were attacked *because* of their message. But these social reformers were willing to accept that abuse. Their *primary* concern was not what people thought of them; it was what people thought of the injustice. Likewise, the pro-life movement does not exist to change how people perceive pro-lifers; they exist to change how people perceive abortion. And so, the movement should learn from historical social reformers who accepted that, no matter how upright their characters were, their uncomfortable and graphic message would make them unpopular.

They knew that exposing and confronting injustice came with a price: trading in popularity for persecution. It meant accepting the vilification which inevitably followed. It helps to consider that, historically and presently, oppressors do two things:

1) suppress evidence and 2) villanize those who expose the evidence in an effort to dupe them into helping sweep that evidence under the carpet.

Vilification is a means to shift the public's focus from abortion to the pro-lifer (by keeping abortion in a positive light and casting pro-lifers in a negative light) and to get pro-lifers to *react* by shifting focus from abortion to casting themselves in a positive light. It is designed to get pro-lifers to be self-focussed, to make them worry about how they come across. It is designed to get pro-lifers' attention off of abortion and onto themselves. This is done because abortion advocates can easily defend "choice," and thus can easily make pro-lifers look bad for opposing "choice." The challenge for the pro-life social reformer is to not be influenced by this tactic. Instead, the pro-lifer must use the best available evidence—imagery—to restore meaning to the word "choice" so that being against the choice to kill a baby is rightly seen as good, and supporting the choice to kill a baby is rightly seen as bad.

As history has shown, public perception of social reformers was not very high until public perception of the injustice changed. Then, when that shift happened, the public embraced the very people and the very movements they once despised. Often, however, this occurred after the death of those social reformers. Furthermore, this social change occurred because the ugly, disturbing, unpleasant, gut-wrenching facts were shown. These social reformers were willing to sacrifice popularity for the sake of truth. The irony is that in doing so, they received popularity in the long run. Suffragette Susan B. Anthony expressed this well:

Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing, never can bring about a reform. Those who are really in earnest must be willing to be anything or nothing in the world's estimation, and publicly and privately, in season and out, avow their sympathy with despised and persecuted ideas and their advocates, and bear the consequences.

### Being Reactive

The idea that pro-lifers need to change what they're doing *simply* because people respond badly is not only flawed, it is entirely reactive—which is what the other side wants.

One need only look to the recent campaign to "Make a donation to Planned Parenthood in Sarah Palin's name," where abortion advocates used the "threat" of Palin's potential rise to the American vice presidency as an impetus for contributions (bringing in almost \$1 million). Should Palin have become less pro-life in order to get people to stop making donations? Should Dr. King and Gandhi have ceased their tactics because people got angry (and eventually killed them)? If not, then why should pro-lifers change what they say and do simply because their opponents don't like it? To do so is to allow the other side to dictate what one does; it allows them to set the terms for debate; it gives them the upper hand; it enables them to talk about what they *can* defend ("choice"), rather than make them defend what they cannot (baby killing).

And so, Kay's advice that pro-life student clubs focus the abortion debate on women's health, saying, "What campus union could in conscience refuse an information session on women's health?" plays into the hands of abortion advocates. If campus unions, dominated by abortion advocates, object more when the subject is fetuses and less when it is women's health, that's a good indicator that pro-lifers should stick to their message.

### Shifting the Focus from the Unborn to Women

After all, when pro-lifers put too much emphasis on the risks women face from abortion, they lose ground. As an abortion advocate could point out, there are risks inherent to many medical procedures, so why not take the risk for the greater benefit one will likely achieve? In other words, someone could think, "Well, I *could* be negatively affected by an abortion, but how much *more* could I be negatively affected by having a child I don't want?"

Even more to the point, if pro-lifers claim that abortion is wrong because it hurts women, what happens if it doesn't hurt women? Or, what happens if the benefits appear to outweigh the hurt? Would this mean abortion becomes morally acceptable?

If pro-lifers allow ourselves to be distracted by arguments focussing primarily on why abortion is not in a *woman's* self-interest, then we are implicitly reinforcing the pro-abortion position and not our own: we are legitimizing the pro-abortion principle that the woman's interests take precedence over the child's *life*.

Canadian society is steeped in a focus on the self to the detriment of the well-being of others. This is why the abortion-rights movement is so successful: it relies heavily upon self-interest as justification for abortion. This mentality, therefore, should be rejected, not reinforced.

Abortion is *not* wrong because it hurts women. Abortion is wrong because it intentionally kills an innocent human being. *That* is why it hurts women both psychologically and physically. The pro-life message must not confuse the *reason* abortion is wrong with the *effects* abortion has on women. Testimonies and personal appeal are powerful—and important—but they shouldn't replace the foundational message about what abortion does to the unborn.

### Positivity

Of course, educating about how abortion kills babies will inevitably involve negative feelings. Know this, however: it's not possible to change people's understanding of "choice" and be "positive." That's because dismembering, disemboweling, and decapitating innocent babies is not a positive thing. Of course, this killing of these babies is considered legitimate because the babies aren't perceived as persons—the very status denied to Jews and Blacks in order to rationalize their extermination and enslavement. It is that key issue—the unjust denial of personhood—that must be raised in the abortion debate, and yet it's also the issue that is least seen or understood. This blindness is precisely why people like Kay take issue with our comparison of abortion to the Holocaust.

Those who do not see any similarity between the Holocaust and abortion either do not understand the Holocaust or they do not understand abortion. It is impossible to comprehend both and not see the parallels: innocent human beings, denied their personhood status, used for experimentation, treated as objects, legally killed in centres set up for the express purpose of terminating their lives, and disposed of like waste. The murder of Jews was justified on the basis that their religion or culture made them inferior; likewise, the murder of the unborn is justified on the basis that their age, location, or level of development makes them inferior (after all, once they are born, they are safe under the law). And while those who do the unthinkable may not be evil, their *actions* undoubtedly are—and it's actions, not actors, under examination at GAP.

### Marketing

Exposing the evil of abortion is not likely to be supported by marketing experts and branding agents because doing so makes the pro-lifer very unpopular. But it's important to keep in mind that these marketing experts likely would also have objected to the methods of Dr. King who, although having streets named after him today, was despised yesterday.

While pro-lifers should certainly make sure they are professional, respectful, and relevant, some of its required messaging just isn't built for marketing. T.A. McMahon echoes that sentiment in his analysis of "seeker sensitive" churches which do evangelization marketing-style. His insights on that can be applied to the pro-life movement. He says, in part, the following:

Fundamentally, marketing has to do with profiling consumers, ascertaining what their 'felt needs' are, and then fashioning one's product (or its image) to appeal to the targeted customer's desires. The hoped-for result is that the consumer buys or 'buys into' the product. George Barna, whom Christianity Today calls 'the church's guru of growth,' claims that such an approach is essential for the church in our market-driven society. Evangelical church-growth leaders are adamant that the marketing approach can be applied—and they have employed it—without compromising the gospel. Really?

First of all, the gospel and, more significantly, the person of Jesus Christ do not fit into any marketing strategy. They are not 'products' to be 'sold.' They cannot be refashioned or image-adjusted to appeal to the felt needs of our consumer-happy culture. Any attempt to do so compromises to some degree the truth of who Christ is and what He has done for us. For example, if the lost are considered consumers and a basic marketing 'commandment' says that the customer must reign supreme, then whatever may be offensive to the lost must be discarded, revamped, or downplayed. Scripture tells us clearly that the message of the Cross is 'foolishness to them that are perishing' and

that Christ himself is a 'rock of offense' (1 Cor 1:18; 1 Pt 2:8). Some seeker-friendly churches, therefore, seek to avoid this 'negative aspect' by making the temporal benefits of becoming a Christian their chief selling point. Although that appeals to our gratification-oriented generation, it is neither the gospel nor the goal of a believer's life in Christ.

McMahon continues with his concerns, writing about how attracting "the lost on the basis of what might interest them will... [appeal to and accommodate] their flesh." He further points out that the majority of weekend attendees of seeker-sensitive churches are not the unchurched. Instead, they are people from smaller churches who are attracted to the "worldly allurements [that their own, smaller churches do not have] that were meant to entice the unbelievers." Concerned that these people are not being properly fed, he concludes, "Certainly a church can grow numerically on that basis, but not spiritually" (Source: [www.thebereancall.org/node/2587](http://www.thebereancall.org/node/2587)).

The same can be said when desire for popularity rules pro-life activity. This is not to say there isn't a place for relationship-building, raising issues strategically, etc., but the core element of the pro-life message (that abortion is an act of violence that kills a baby) nonetheless must be faced along with the discomfort and unpleasant feelings that result. If one applies the aforementioned marketing model to pro-life activism, however, there will inevitably be the avoidance of the difficult, uncomfortable (graphic) message that the "consumer" (abortion supporter or tepid pro-lifer) simply doesn't want. With abortion, the "consumer" is guided by self-interest, ease, and expediency. The pro-life message cannot be packaged to feed that, but instead the very philosophy of the consumer must be challenged at its core.

### Abortion Law

It is worth noting that with historical injustices, there were the pessimists who thought those crimes would never be outlawed, which is Kay's sentiment on abortion. In fact, she herself is "not opposed in principle to legal abortion." She says, "Canada is never going to outlaw abortion," so she calls for "an abortion law with benign, sensible constraints that line up with those of all civilized countries except ours." Her view is appalling when one considers that these so-called "civilized" countries almost always, if not entirely, limit abortion *after* 12 weeks, a time at which a majority—almost 90%—of unborn human beings to be aborted have already been slaughtered (and when 70% of Canadians support abortion!).

Kay wants the pro-life movement to change how it acts, which isn't surprising when she hasn't changed how she thinks. It would be reactive, and damaging, for the pro-life movement to change its behavior to accommodate a person who is not fully on side, rather than to continue its behavior to convince that person to *be* fully on side (acknowledging that person may resist before accepting).

After all, how *could* the pro-life movement heed the advice of someone who says, as Kay did, that "Abortion should be a serious moral decision, and undertaken with a heavy heart, with all options carefully weighed beforehand, rather than the rushed, banalized service of convenience it has become"? Would she be satisfied with a law that permitted rape as long as rape weren't "rushed" but instead was "undertaken with a heavy heart, with all options carefully weighed beforehand"?

### Concluding Thought

When we are surrounded by darkness, we close our eyes at exposure to light. But eventually the pain subsides, our eyes adjust, and we realize we are better off for being in light than in darkness. So it is with visually sharing the "inconvenient truth" about abortion: initial resistance will give way to acceptance. And we who are the messengers must stay the course, accepting short-term persecution in order to achieve long-term cultural transformation.

As Gandhi once said, "First they ignore you, then they ridicule you, then they fight you, and then you win."

*Written by Stephanie Gray, February 2009. Stephanie is co-founder and executive director of the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform, the Canadian affiliate of the organization that created the Genocide Awareness Project. She recommends all pro-life activists read the essay "Why Prophets Get Stoned," <http://catholicexchange.com/2007/01/29/79726/>*