

# The Contest of Wills

**If you were told you could be suspended or expelled from university—even arrested—for peacefully proclaiming the truth about abortion, what would you do?** That was the challenge recently faced by pro-life students at the University of Calgary (U of C). Their university was intimidating them into self-censorship and the question was this: **whose will would win?** The will of the students to be a voice for the voiceless? Or the will of the university to suppress pro-life speech?

On November 26 and 27, 2008, these courageous pro-life students defied their university's unjust demands and exhibited the reality of abortion on their campus. They were met with a swarm of media outlets vying for up-close coverage of the students as they made the following statement at their press conference:

***“I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.”***

*These words of Voltaire are being ignored by the University of Calgary and we, their own students and the victims of their oppression, wish to expose their censorship, intimidation, and bully tactics.*

*We have been threatened with suspension, expulsion, and arrest. Why? Because we dare to peacefully express our unpopular opinion. If it can happen to us, it can happen to you.*

*We are members of Campus Pro-Life (CPL), a U of C student club that seeks to educate about abortion. Each semester on campus since 2006, we have peacefully exhibited the Genocide Awareness Project (GAP)—an outdoor exhibit that visually compares abortion to historical atrocities, such as the Holocaust. We have always been non-violent and respectful, engaging in reasoned, calm discussion with passersby. After this press conference today, we will yet again erect our exhibit and peacefully and reasonably engage our peers in debate.*

*In the latest of a series of what can only be called systematic denial of liberty of those who disagree with the majority, the University of Calgary has told us that our GAP display is banned from campus unless we point our signs inwards. Being told to turn our signs inwards is like being told we can*

*express our views as long as nobody can hear us. Being told we can express ourselves, but with our signs inwards, is like telling black people they can ride the bus—but demanding they sit at the back. It's unconscionable!*



▲ Leah, Cam, and Alanna (left to right), CPL's president, vice-president, and treasurer, respectively, address the media.

▼ Asia, CPL secretary, talks to a student at GAP.



***But as terrible as the university's threat is to freedoms in Canada, it cannot compare to the damage done by abortion. The right to freedom of speech presupposes the right to life—indeed, our very existence is a necessary prerequisite to speaking. As abortion makes a mockery of this most fundamental right, it is only natural that its supporters are as intolerant as they are.***

*Abortion exists. If it did not, then we would not be here, risking arrest, today. Abortion exists. If it were not so, then society would be spared the pangs of guilt inspired by the signs we will bring*

onto campus today. *Abortion exists. In all its hideous cruelty, it exists.*

*We of Campus Pro-Life seek only to expose the injustice perpetrated on those who cannot lift their voices in protest. In our quest to accomplish this end, the university, far from supporting its own students who pursue the truth, has suppressed—and attempted to intimidate—us.*

*Arrest, the police have told us, could result in consequences that would haunt us all our lives. **Of what meaning should the rest of our lives be if we had no liberty?** If we allow ourselves to be meekly stripped of liberty, who then will stop this same perversion from occurring to other fellow Canadians? **And, if we refuse to risk our comfort for the sake of the unborn's lives, it is that which will truly haunt us.***

*We of Campus Pro-Life can accept no compromise with the evil of abortion. The value of lives saved is far beyond the value of anything we could lose by our stand. **Arrest us, charge us, expel us, do what you want with these bodies of ours! But for every pro-lifer who suffers for the cause, perhaps, just perhaps, another life will be born into this world. And so, it is with that hope that we are willing to risk all that we are putting on the line today. We shall let history be the judge of our actions.***

As of the printing of this article, the university maintained its threats but did not act on them. Why, then, would the university make such threats to the students in the first place? Is it possible the university thought the students would simply comply, being unwilling to risk suspension, expulsion, or arrest? Is it possible the university didn't think the students cared about unborn babies as much as they cared about their academic records? Is it possible the university didn't think the students cared about unborn babies as much as they cared about their future careers? Unborn babies may mean nothing to some people, but they mean everything to these students. This was a contest of wills. And the students showed their will to be stronger.

These students, although born and not unborn, are comparable to Jim Zwerg who, although white and not black, courageously participated in the Freedom Rides during the Civil Rights era and was brutally beaten by racists. These students are

comparable to Irena Sendler who, although not Jewish, smuggled 2500 children out of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw and saved them from death; she herself was caught by the Gestapo and brutally tortured. **These people risked all for the sake of the other.**



▲ Anita (right) from Silent No More Awareness was present at U of C to witness to students, giving her powerful testimony of regretting her abortion.

At the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform (CCBR), we have the great privilege of equipping and training pro-lifers, including the U of C students, to be **winsome, persuasive defenders of the pro-life perspective**. Furthermore, we have used our studies of social reformers in history to impart the lessons learned from the past—specifically, **the power of graphic visuals in moving hearts and changing minds**. We have been humbled by the sacrificial spirit of these young people, and their strength of will to do what's right—even if it's extremely difficult.

In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote the following:

*Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its*

*exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.*

It is that philosophy that guides our fight against abortion by using GAP. And it is that philosophy that must guide the fight against universities that suppress GAP. The injustice of what is happening at U of C (and at many other Canadian campuses) must be exposed. The best way to expose it is to take what is happening behind closed doors (e.g., threats to arrest, expel, and suspend) and bring it into the open. This is done *not* by changing a club's activities or beliefs so that the university doesn't act on its threats, but instead *by pressing forward* with exercising the students' rights.

The threats from U of C, and other campuses, are attempts from the enemy to get pro-lifers to do the enemy's dirty work. These are attempts from the enemy to avoid having to censor pro-lifers by, instead, getting pro-lifers to censor themselves.

U.S. Justice Clarence Thomas, in a speech in 2001, said the following that is very relevant to this battle:

*...A good argument diluted to avoid criticism is not nearly as good as the undiluted argument, because we best arrive at truth through a process of honest and vigorous debate. Arguments should not sneak around in disguise, as if dissent were somehow sinister. One should not cowed by criticism.*

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***For brutes, the most effective tactic is to intimidate an opponent into the silence of self-censorship.***

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*Even if one has a valid position, and is intellectually honest, he has to anticipate nasty responses aimed at the messenger rather than the argument. The objective is to limit the range of the debate, the number of messengers, and the size of the audience. The aim is to pressure dissenters to sanitize their message, so as to avoid being subjected to hurtful ad hominem criticism. Who wants to be calumniated? It's not worth the trouble.*

***But is it worth it? Just what is worth it, and what is not? If one wants to be popular, it is counterproductive to disagree with the majority. If one just wants to tread water until the next***

**This pro-life poem was written by former CPL president and U of C alumnus Matthew Wilson:**

Seductive fruit with sweetly shining skin  
Left us ruptured and anew to begin.  
If you had known what evils to be wrought  
Would your hand to lips that red apple brought?  
For if only now we could simply trade  
Your bright garden for the world we have made.

Although we fondly pat our upright backs  
Claiming innocence from past torture racks,  
But is our brave new world yet so distant  
From Hitler and his timeless instant?  
When white smoke arose from Zion's ashes  
We swore not to forget these dark gashes

But still we looked with silence to the East  
As from Africa's heart there grew a beast  
When knife from tree to fellow human turned  
And again 'twas from liquid red we learned  
Would that were humanity's final smear  
But the dread black of night has yet to clear.  
For with the ignorance of poisoned love  
We pluck anew at the white baby dove.

Innocence bursts forth from two in one flesh,  
How beautiful is that small human fresh!  
Then quietly wrenched from the mother's womb  
Baby's beauty becomes his painful tomb  
As the sanctuary of blessed life  
Is pillaged by the kindly surgeon's knife.  
Next, Rachel's children welcome with knowing tears  
Another innocent bereft of years.

Wasn't it us who from classrooms chanted:  
"Never again will humans be slanted."  
Have we courage to fight for those unborn  
And reconcile our dark history torn?  
Can we with Samson's strength young life uphold?  
Or will we leave their stories yet untold?

"Rwanda," "Germany," to death with thee!  
We, though few, refuse to stand silently,  
With hope in hand we will boldly present  
The truth which stifles those of dark intent.  
Thus we pledge to that garden green return,  
For from our broken past we can still learn.  
And entrusting ourselves to Eve in Blue,  
We can in harmony live life anew.

Still if we earn chains or scars in the fight,  
We can hold them as treasures of the light.  
And when across the bar God will beckon  
Be not afraid of accounts to reckon.  
For with humbled weathered eyes  
We will at last behold our prize.

*vacation, it isn't worth the agony. If one just wants to muddle through, it is not worth it. In my office, a little sign reads: 'To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing.'*

*None of us really believes that the things we fear discussing honestly these days are really trivial—and **the reaction of our critics shows that we are right. If our dissents are so trivial, why are their reactions so intense?** If our ideas are trivial, why the headhunting? Like you, I do not want to waste my time on the trivial. I certainly have no desire to be browbeaten and intimidated for the trivial.*

*What makes it all worthwhile? What makes it worthwhile is something greater than all of us. There are those things that at one time we all accepted as more important than our comfort or discomfort—if not our very lives: Duty, honor, country! There was a time when all was to be set aside for these. The plow was left idle, the hearth without fire, the homestead abandoned.*

*Again, by yielding to a false form of 'civility,' we sometimes allow our critics to intimidate us. As I have said, active citizens are often subjected to truly vile attacks; they are branded as mean-spirited, racist, Uncle Tom, homophobic, sexist, etc. To this we often respond (if not succumb), so as not to be constantly fighting, by trying to be tolerant and nonjudgmental—i.e., we censor ourselves. This is not civility. It is cowardice, or well-intentioned self-deception at best.*

Just as the Civil Rights Movement did not listen to racists about how they should express themselves, **neither did the students at U of C listen to their detractors** about how they should express themselves. In doing so, they challenged the rest of the pro-life movement to do the same.

Every day, babies are being dismembered, decapitated, and disemboweled. The enemy wants that hidden. And the one thing that best brings what's in darkness into light, that exposes the injustice in all its ugliness, is pictures—disturbing, shocking, ugly pictures. Words don't cut it like pictures do. Pretty pictures don't cut it like ugly pictures do. Covered pictures don't cut it like uncovered pictures do.

These pictures, then, are the undiluted argument that pro-lifers must exhibit uncensored if the

validity of the pro-life perspective is to be understood by our culture. These pictures are also the evidence that triggers intense, vile attacks by abortion advocates who desperately try to cover up this evidence and impugn the credibility of the pro-lifers who show them.



▲ Activists protesting the Chinese government's torture of Falun Gong practitioners displayed graphic images at U of C when GAP was exhibited. They, however, were not threatened with arrest for displaying disturbing images as pro-lifers were!

Recognizing both the need to exhibit this imagery and the inevitable backlash of doing so, the pro-life students at the U of C have implicitly answered the question *is it worth it?* by gambling their academic careers, by risking arrest, and by opening their good names to attack. In a world where many seem more determined to kill babies than to save them, **the pro-life students at U of C have raised the bar and challenged us all to firm our resolve—our will—to be defiant in the face of injustice, uncompromising with truth, and willing to put the other before oneself.**

**Media Coverage:** More than 25 news pieces were circulated about CPL's GAP display. This included coverage on CTV News, Global News, the National Post, AM 770 CHQR radio, the Calgary Sun, and the Calgary Herald. Most of the coverage favoured the students' free-speech rights; in fact, well-respected professors from U of C published an article in favour of the students. Furthermore, CTV even showed the graphic images in their story, which was aired live during the lunch hour. A CPL member reported that a family from her church supported abortions only in cases of rape, but **when they saw the abortion images on the news, they concluded that it was wrong to kill the unborn because of the father's crime!**