

Response to Attendee of UVic Echoes of the Holocaust Talk

In October 2010, CCBR was forwarded the following e-mail by Youth Protecting Youth (YPY), the pro-life student group at the University of Victoria. It was from an attendee of Jojo Ruba's Echoes of the Holocaust talk at the university who questioned the use of graphic visuals and the effectiveness of the presentation.

Jojo Ruba's response is provided below as a teaching tool. Personal references have been removed to maintain confidentiality.

Hey YPY,

First of all thank you again for the opportunity to share with you. I hope our talks challenged you and equipped you to be effective pro-life ambassadors where ever you go.

And I appreciate too the opportunity to read these comments. One of the most frustrating aspects of this article is that this person never actually shared these ideas with me. If I failed so badly in being an effective pro-life ambassador, then I would hope that fellow pro-lifers like her would want me to improve. This isn't just about making me a better speaker but if she's right, then her correction could make the difference between life and death – and yet she only chooses to talk to you. That is disappointing.

If this person does decide to come out publicly with these thoughts, please let her know that I will be more than happy to engage her in dialogue about these views. And so it goes without saying that you are free to share any of these ideas I wrote here with her. Ultimately, we should always be seeking right-thinking on any issue because right-thinking leads to right actions.

There are four important points that I need to make to answer her concerns. The first three are fundamental assumptions she's made that form the basis of her criticisms yet she fails to prove them. The last point is the crucial one – this article actually shows that she has a different goal than we do.

1. The most fundamental assumption she makes is that the majority of Canadians and even the people in that room, agree that the unborn are human beings.

She asserts this because few people in that room questioned my claims about the biology of the unborn. That wasn't true of course – the assumption that the unborn are not equal to born people in value was foundational to almost every argument used against me during Q and A.

Moreover, if they truly agreed with me that the unborn are human beings, then why did they consider my comparison to the Holocaust, hateful? Some pro-lifers don't like our comparisons either but they never consider it hateful because they understand that the value of a child's life is just as important as that of a Jew or a Tutsi. Only people who don't value the fetus and the genocide victim the same way could make that argument.

But let's see what happens if we take this critic's assumption to its logical conclusion. If it is true that the vast majority of Canadians, including the women who have abortions, agree with pro-lifers that the unborn are human beings, then that means 100 000 Canadian women every year kill what they know as their children. Moreover, many do this because they feel coerced by other Canadians – relatives, friends, partners – who also feel that the solution to difficult life problems is to kill an innocent child.

But if this is true, then the biggest problem Canadian society has is a thinking problem, is it not? Because if a large chunk of our population truly believe in sacrificing a child's life to ensure they have an education, or to continue working or to avoid a problem pregnancy, then we live in a society of sociopaths – and that is a thinking problem not a social services problem. But this can't be true.

If Canadians truly believe it is acceptable to kill others to solve their difficult life problems, then they should be doing that with born people too, right? Sure the law prevents them from doing that now but if people truly believed killing could solve their problems, there would be such a high demand to "choose" to kill, say an inconvenient 12-year-old or an unloving husband that it would become legal to kill born people.

And yet no one in that room offered to solve the problems of pregnant women or of their partners by killing a born person. No one suggested we just kill the pregnant woman or their partners! Why? Because we all know their lives are valuable. But when the large crowd of abortion advocates insisted that the unborn should be treated differently than their born parents, it indicates that they don't value the unborn the same way as the born. Priests for Life actually says this well:

"In a sense, people already know this is a baby. But there are different kinds of knowing. One can assert that abortion takes a human life, as most Americans do assert. But without seeing it, one can also fail to appreciate the enormity of the evil, and can reconcile the assertion that it is wrong with the assertion that it is necessary, at least sometimes, and especially in the first trimester. This dynamic is reflected in the statistics regarding the positions of Americans on abortion. Most are in the middle, the "conflicted middle," holding that what is admittedly child killing should sometimes be allowed. This "conflicted middle" will decide the outcome of the abortion war in our country, and they have to be moved out of the middle...To most Americans, women in crisis pregnancy are real but their unborn babies are unreal (especially during the embryo and early fetal stages of prenatal development). To most Americans, the hardship of a mother's crisis pregnancy evokes more sympathy than her baby's death by abortion because the horror of abortion is far less real than the terror of crisis pregnancy."¹

This problem tells me that the biggest need in our broader culture right now is to help Canadians think clearly about their actions.

2. She creates a false dichotomy between using graphic abortion images and other pro-life activities.

As you know, CCBR has never said the graphic images are the only thing pro-lifers must use to change minds on abortion. Anyone who has seen our new training videos can see that we use logic, ultrasound imagery and abortion imagery to make our points, among other tools.

But she jumps from the assumption that we only use graphics and logic to argue that graphic images and logic don't work, at least not to the same extent as fetal ultrasounds. Ultrasounds work, she says because personalizing the unborn changes the minds on abortion. Moreover, she asserts that ultrasounds save hundreds of lives but graphic images only save a few lives. Since people are desensitized to graphic images and abortion advocates don't really care for them, she reasons, what I should be doing is ensuring that people have access to these ultrasound images.

This argument of course contradicts her first point. If most people already agree with us that the unborn are human beings, why would showing ultrasounds change minds?

Moreover, these images are already made available to the general public. Even before the internet was widely used, fetal ultrasounds and images were on the cover of popular magazines and celebrities talked about seeing their unborn baby's pictures. Today, the vast majority of pregnant women who want their children, can get in-utero images. If they miss those, they can find health warnings from the Canadian government about how drinking alcohol or smoking can damage their unborn child.

Despite this, the support for legal abortion has remained unchanged. People may believe their unborn children have value but they do not accept that every fetal life has value. As Priests for Life says on their site:

"Much pro-life educational activity, moreover, simply assumes the truth of the proposition that abortion is an act of violence which kills a baby. Note here that often we are simply stating a conclusion without providing the evidence that leads to that conclusion. And if people don't want to believe that abortion kills a baby, they won't believe it."ⁱⁱ

I'm not doubting that ultrasound images can save lives. What I am doubting is the assumption that we can honestly educate the public about abortion without seeing what abortion does to the unborn. Imagine if we were to educate the public about the Holocaust and only use happy images of European Jewish children playing games. We could enjoy those images, even sympathize with the children but how would those images help us understand the horror of the Holocaust?

Interestingly too, she asserts that the general public has been desensitized by images of all kinds so we can't use abortion imagery. But if this is the case, then shouldn't that be true of fetal images as well? If shocking graphic images don't work because people have seen them too frequently, how would happy images of the unborn work since the public is much more saturated with those images?

3. She treats every engagement with the public as if they were the same.

I think the most frustrating assertion she makes is that because I didn't offer any kind of help for women in crisis pregnancy, I failed to share the pro-life message effectively.

She even writes: "We must respond to the crisis and education is not the tool that one deals with in the crisis!!! That is an essential aspect to his presentation that was totally missed by himself however not his audience."

But I would suggest to her that the vast majority of people in that room were not facing a crisis pregnancy! Surely, she can recognize that there's a difference between a pro-life counselor meeting with someone one-on-one and a pro-life lecture in a room of hundreds.

Now that doesn't mean we couldn't have been proactive in pointing out the resources that YPY did have in the back for the local pregnancy centres. And I could have spoken extensively of work our staff has done over the years providing exactly the kind of care this critic talks about. And perhaps, I can do more of that for next time.

But the question we need to force Canadians to think about is simple: is it legitimate to kill our own offspring for any reason or for no reason at all? That is the moment of "crisis" that most students in that room needed to know about because how they answer that question will affect how they will react to a future crisis pregnancy! If they truly believe the unborn are human beings like us, then for

the most part they will choose to go to a pregnancy centre for help. If they do not, no amount of good service from a pregnancy centre will help. Again, Priests for Life says it well:

“When you want people to act to reform deeply embedded trends in society, it is not enough simply to know that the trends are wrong. One must be profoundly disturbed so as to be stirred to action. One must perceive the difference between evil and absolute evil, between tolerable evil and intolerable evil. One must be made angry enough to be willing to sacrifice to end injustice -- and in this sense, the very reason some say pictures don't work because they make people mad are really hitting upon the reason why they do work.”

In fact, we've already seen this in Canada. We've written extensively on how pregnancy centres help and can't help women in crisis pregnancy:

“In fact, in 2002, Focus on the Family's newsletter HeartLink reported that “less than 10 percent of the clients darkening the doors of pregnancy care centers [across the United States] were abortionminded.” That is, fewer than 1 in 10 women making use of their pregnancy-support services were seriously considering abortion. By their own admission, these PCCs reach very few of their target audience: women contemplating abortion. In most cases, these women aren't even coming through the door. Rather, these women—1.3 million every year in the U.S.—enter the doors of abortion providers.

In its 2004 Starfish Report, CAPSS [Christian Canadian pregnancy centres] provided a detailed description of its statistics: the “total number of... expectant clients who were initially abortion-minded or vulnerable to proceed with an abortion” was 1,074.29 They report 157 known saved lives, 99 known lives lost to abortion, and 361 cases with the outcome unknown or not reported.³⁰ The statistics are qualified with this statement: “Please note that some of the centres who report abortion-minded clients are unable at this point, in their reporting capabilities, to track all outcomes. Thus the numbers for a [saved lives]; b [lost to abortion]; c [unknown outcome]; do not total to all abortion-minded women.”

Even with the best possible interpretation of these statistics, only 1,074 abortion-minded or abortion vulnerable women went to 52 of their centres while over 100,000 abortion-minded Canadian women went to abortion facilities that same year. Even if the PCC's figure was tripled or quadrupled there would still be a drastic divide between that and the abortion figure.

Of course, this analysis does not include data from PCCs unaffiliated with CAPSS or other Birthright centres. If these and other numbers are made available, they will be incorporated into a future edition of this analysis.

Also, some may consider it unfair to compare statistics from abortion clinics with PCCs, because the former receive government funding and greater promotion (e.g., from physicians) than the latter. While this imbalance certainly exists, an abortion-minded woman does not make her choice because of these: if she really doesn't want an abortion, she won't get one. And if she really wants an abortion, she will get one. In other words, the problem of large numbers of abortion-minded women choosing abortion clinics over PCCs is not due simply to an imbalance in support between the former and the latter.

Here's why: Most abortion-minded women do not choose the help of PCCs because the PCCs will help women through the pregnancies but abortion clinics will help them out of the

pregnancies. PCCs are willing to provide whatever a woman needs (e.g., housing, baby supplies, moral support). The abortion clinic offers her what she wants.¹¹¹¹

We acknowledge the essential work of pregnancy centres. But these numbers tell us that these centres cannot work alone – they need educational groups like ours, to evangelize for the pro-life view. They need people to talk to those who don't have children they can watch on ultrasound and convince them to value unborn lives anyway.

And that's the point. We don't value the unborn simply because they are someone's child. We don't value them because of the relationships they have. This kind of argument is close to the kind of thinking that justifies Peter Singer's ethics. Rather, we recognize the inherent dignity of each person because of what they are. This was what the Nazi society and other genocidal societies overlooked. This is what our society is trying to suppress. We can't help the unborn if we help suppress this idea too by suggesting that our value as human beings hinge on how other people value us, rather than because of what we are inherently.

Moreover, that value doesn't hinge on whether or not pro-lifers are good people. In all honesty, I have never done anything to stop the suffering in Darfur. I don't even think that affected how I voted in the last election. But does that mean I can't speak out against the genocide there? Even if I were the worst person possible – someone who's never helped a pregnant women all of his life, did that change the truthfulness of my arguments that night? Clearly not.

If I were however to speak about all the great things CCBR and I personally have done to help pregnant women, does this critic really believe that abortion advocates would have changed their minds? When they raised questions about how often I've helped pregnant women at my talk, they weren't actually asking to find out how I've helped; they were simply trying to make me look like a bad person and would have found other ways to do it if I had answered differently.

The reason why I avoided answering that question directly is because it was a distraction. If only people who adopt or who do pregnancy centre counseling are qualified to speak about abortion, then the pro-life position is no longer about whether or not the unborn are human beings but about whether or not pro-lifers are good people. The movement becomes about our reputation not the reputation of abortion. When pro-lifers raise this point as their main argument against abortion, they actually undermine the pro-life position, making it harder for us to save lives.

That being said, we always train our staff and volunteers to act consistently with our pro-life beliefs. We encourage adoption and support the kind of social services that this critic raises. But this does not make our position true and it is not the main reason why people should become pro-life.

4. She doesn't believe abortions need to be made unthinkable.

Lastly, this critic measured the success of the presentation by how many abortion advocates agreed with it or changed their minds because of it. And clearly, not many did, which in her understanding means that the presentation was a failure.

I of course would be glad to attend an event she speaks at where half the audience is composed of abortion advocates who then change their minds because of her talk. If her methods work, then I would be glad to adopt them. But I doubt she'll be able to organize an event where this happens.

We don't measure our success by how many abortion advocates like us at the end of the talk. We don't even measure our success by how many abortion advocates changed their minds

immediately – that rarely happens using any methodology. We measure our success by how many people have a pebble in their shoe – by people who are forced to think about abortion despite the fact that they would rather ignore the issue. And we've seen it time and time again when abortion advocates leave our presentations mad and then come back, sometimes years later, admitting that they changed their minds after a long period of thinking about what we said.

Of course that doesn't mean that some people can't change their minds immediately or even move to our position, even slightly. Here are some survey results from self-identified pro-choice people:

- “I believe that the video of the abortion while being tough to watch, it was also fair.” - Prochoice student who moved from 3 to 4 where 0 is pro-choice and 10 is pro-life.
- What do you remember most about the presentation: “The very graphic video...I still feel/support the right of choice. My view has shifted slightly but would still support people's right to have a choice...The pictures/video were all very powerful.” -Prochoice student who moved from 5 to 6-7
- BEFORE: “Abortion is a personal choice, I have no control over what someone else does with their body though.” AFTER: “Some good points were made but the comparison with the Holocaust...Knowledge and awareness are power.” -Pro-choice student who moved from 2 to 5

Pro-lifers can never win a popularity contest in a culture that is committed to killing children. In order to stop abortion, our goal should not be to find compromise with abortion advocates – our goal should be to change their minds.

Conclusion

I welcome any constructive criticism of our work, from both abortion advocates and pro-lifers. I am more than happy to change my techniques if they truly are detrimental to the cause of life. And I especially hope that those who agree with me will try to help us improve our presentations and activities rather than throwing criticisms about us behind our backs.

As much as we are willing to listen to our critics, our hope is that our critics are also willing to listen to us – we all must seek the truth. That's why I focus on educating the public – it is not the end goal of the movement. It is merely the starting point because the right information will lead us to right action.

As this pro-life critic states, “Truth without charity does not win hearts and minds.” But even this statement is a truth statement she's using to try and change our hearts and minds. That's because she understands that the only way we can care is if we first learn how to care truthfully. And that's the heart of why we must continue to do what we do: Because though truth without charity does not win hearts and minds, charity without truth can never be charity.

ⁱ <http://www.priestsforlife.org/resources/abortionimages/abortiongraphics.htm>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.priestsforlife.org/resources/abortionimages/abortiongraphics.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.unmaskingchoice.ca/pdf/Reforming_Our_Movement_Reforming_Our_Culture.pdf