

By Jonathon Van Maren

As most of you know, the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform has a primarily graphic strategy—using large photos of what abortion does to the unborn to confront the culture and raise awareness about what is actually being “chosen”. This strategy consistently results in accusations by people of various stripes—from our pro-abortion opponents to the queasier members of the pro-life ranks—that this strategy is inappropriate, or has somehow negative consequences.

Putting aside for a moment the question of the effectiveness of this strategy—a question we have dealt with extensively—I would posit that those who purport to disagree with using graphic images do not actually have a problem with graphic images being used in the public square. While this is a convenient argument that they employ in order to sound as if they have rational and even compassionate reasons for opposing the use of graphic images, the reality is that these opponents do not have a problem with graphic depictions: their quarrel with us lies in what we are depicting.

This probably sounds like a rather brash accusation. Surely the opponents of using graphic abortion pictures in public disagree with us because they feel children might be disturbed, or that post-abortive women may feel hurt, or that these pictures violate the dignity of the unborn in some obscure fashion. The fact that this is not the case is easily proven.

First, I feel it necessary to point out that graphic images are everywhere. Our colleagues at the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform have actually put together a compilation of some of the more famous images: [http://www.abortionno.org/index.php/blog/the\\_problem\\_of\\_born\\_children\\_seeing\\_photos\\_of\\_aborted\\_unborn\\_children](http://www.abortionno.org/index.php/blog/the_problem_of_born_children_seeing_photos_of_aborted_unborn_children) .

In downtown Calgary, graphic billboards show a man with a smashed in face, warning viewers of the consequences of not wearing seatbelts. Opponents of drug abuse and drinking and driving use graphic video and images depicting scarred, battered human beings ravaged by the consequences of addiction and irresponsibility. And the newspapers and magazines regularly feature the bloodied corpses of war victims, both military and civilian. I won't even bother to get into the heavily sexualized and violence soaked content of your average TV show or program—which most children have easy access to.

All of these graphic depictions, of course, are presented to the public without a peep of protest. No one claims that the photo of the firefighter cradling the bloody body of a three year old taken from the rubble of the Oklahoma City bombing should be censored because it might frighten children. No pro-lifer advocates for the removal of photos of war dead from the newspapers on public stands because they somehow “don't respect the dead.” Neither abortion advocates nor pro-lifers demand that graphic presentations on drinking and driving, drug use, and smoking should be removed from our middle schools and high schools because young people “shouldn't have to see them”.

Clearly, the public doesn't actually have a quarrel with graphic images in the public square. What they oppose is graphic images *of abortion*. The reason for this is quite simple. When I was engaging in “Choice” Chain in between Chilliwack Secondary and Chilliwack Middle School with one of my pro-life friends, it was interesting to watch the reactions. I did not encounter a single student who felt “traumatized” by our images. Rather, they asked interesting questions and engaged in generally polite

discourse. The parents, however, angrily accused us of psychologically and emotionally endangering their children.

That accusation is patently ridiculous. These young people see graphic images all the time. The reason these parents do not want their children to see *these particular images* is that they have an ideological position that they do not want their children to oppose. They don't mind if their children are exposed to graphic images that keep them from smoking, doing meth, or driving drunk. But they certainly don't want their children to be convinced that abortion is a moral wrong that kills a child. This could be an unwanted complicating factor in the future.

The same goes for pro-lifers who oppose the use of graphic images. While there are some who genuinely feel that, in spite of all historical and current evidence to the contrary, that graphic images are not effective, the majority dislike them because they feel it turns the public against them. These pro-lifers do not protest the previously mentioned uses of graphic images. However, as "pro-lifers", they want to fly under the radar, and generally speaking, be liked and accepted in the community. Pro-life activism that elicits an inevitably controversial discussion—we are, after all, telling the public that they are killing their children—causes much discomfort to many in the pro-life community. In short, personal comfort takes precedent over effective action on behalf of the unborn.

In order to effectively confront the culture and save as many children as possible, the injustice must be exposed. It is important to realize that the opponents of graphic strategy—both pro-abortion and pro-life—are being extremely disingenuous in their criticisms of these photos, as it can be easily proven that they are not against graphic images, but rather graphic images of abortion. This is not because they actually feel that these photos are psychologically harmful or somehow disrespectful—it is simply because these particular images challenge their ideology and their personal comfort.