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MEN AND THE ABORTION AFTERMATH

Interview With Kevin Burke of Rachel's Vineyard

KING of PRUSSIA, Pennsylvania, AUG. 29, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- One man's sharing gives other men permission to examine their own role in abortion and the impact it has had on their lives, said counselor Kevin Burke.

Burke, the associate director of Rachel's Vineyard Ministries, and pastoral associate at Priests For Life, has co-edited a new book, "Redeeming a Father's Heart," along with David Wemhoff and Marvin Stockwell, about healing the wounds of post-abortive men.

In this interview with ZENIT, Burke discusses the type of wounds men experience when they have been involved in an abortion, avenues for healing, and how to help the women they love also find healing after an abortion.

Q: Your new book, "Redeeming a Father's Heart," addresses the suffering men experience from abortion. Why do you think this issue has gotten so little attention until now?

Burke: We have all heard the exhausted phrase repeated over the years that "abortion is a private personal decision between a woman, her health care provider and her God."

Men were seen to be peripheral figures in the process, detached and unaffected by the woman's "choice."

The reality is that men are involved in 95% of all abortion decisions, and they are profoundly impacted by their participation in the abortion of their child.

In our work as counseling professionals, my wife Theresa and I have worked with many individuals and couples who came to us for healing after abortion.

In the last eight years we have seen a steady increase in men who attended our Rachel's Vineyard Retreats seeking healing.

Many came with their wives or after their partner had attended. As they shared their experiences of abortion we quickly recognized the devastating impact it had on their lives.

Similar to women, when men experience deep healing of post abortion pain, they are freed from the shame and guilt that feeds silence and isolation.

There is a willingness to share their experience with others because they finally recognize that their feelings are normal, they are not alone.

Abortion hurts, and it impacts relationships in the home and workplace.

When one man shares his experience with close friends and family, it gives other men permission to examine their own role in abortion and the impact it has had on their lives and come forward to find healing.

Q: Aside from the absence of the physical suffering caused by the actual abortion, how does the psychological pain and healing process in post-abortive men differ from the experience of women?

Burke: The majority of men encourage, manipulate and even force their girlfriends, partners or wives to abort.

Many other men physically and/or emotionally abandon the mother of their child when they learn she is pregnant.

She is left alone to carry the full burden of the decision and the physical and emotional aftermath of the abortion.

Often the man may rationalize that abortion is in the best interest of the mother and deny her post-abortion grief.

An important part of healing for many men begins with an agonizing repentance of their role in the abortion procedure and the failure to protect mother and baby from harm.

This act of humility opens the door for them to acknowledge that they have also lost a son or a daughter.

This recognition gives them permission to examine how this loss has impacted their lives, how it has injured their father's heart, and encourages them to reach out for reconciliation with God and their child on the journey to healing, peace and restoration in Christ.

On the other end of the spectrum, there are those men who have an instinctive desire to prevent the mother of their child from having an abortion. They do everything they can to offer support to care for both mother and baby.

If they are powerless to prevent the death of their son or daughter, they typically experience serious depression, rage and grief following an unwanted abortion that can be turned inward in self destruction or acted out in numerous unhealthy ways including the abuse of drugs/alcohol/gambling addictions, anger management issues, pornography, etc.

Such men need immediate counseling and an effective emotional and spiritual healing process like the Rachel's Vineyard Retreat.

Keep in mind that men who participate in and support the abortion decision will also experience post abortion symptoms such as shame, guilt, complicated grief, anxiety, depression and relational problems.

Other men suffer from sexual dysfunctions, addictions to pornography and related problems.

The place of the wound is typically where symptoms emerge -- and those symptoms then are likely to occur in future relational difficulties or obsessions and compulsions surrounding sexuality.

Jonathan Flora's story in *Redeeming A Father's Heart* reveals that symptoms can be hidden beneath a very successful businessman who is emotionally detached and involved in transitional physical relationships for many years ... yet whose heart is wounded, closed off from deeper intimacy and love that we all hunger for.

Men often do not connect these symptoms with an abortion loss unless they are guided to explore this with a counselor, clergy, friend, through a post-abortion Web site, or a book like "Redeeming a Father's Heart."

Q: One of the chapters, "I Married A Post Abortive Woman," looks at a man who married a woman who had an abortion before they met. The woman, knowing her husband was not involved in the abortion, was reluctant to share with him her suffering. In what ways can men who find themselves in this situation help the women they love?

Burke: This is a powerful account of a husband growing in his marital promise to love his wife as Christ loves the Church.

However, you can see how tenuous the relationship is in the early stages of

their marriage as she struggles with depression, feeling unworthy to embrace motherhood and thoughts of cutting herself -- a commonly diagnosed symptom of Borderline Personality Disorder which is not uncommon among those traumatized by abortion.

The wife exhibits another symptom of post-abortion trauma: marital infidelity. This symptom is rooted in the common experience after abortion of struggling to fully trust and bond with one's spouse.

She feels unworthy of her spouse's love and she is fearful of embracing motherhood. Sadly, she acts out by having an extramarital affair. Many other relationships would have ended by this point.

Fortunately, the couple attended a marriage encounter weekend and later a Rachel's Vineyard Retreat, which led this couple to embrace the healing journey together.

What a blessing this was for their marriage! You see in this couple the redemption of their marriage as they grow to fully live the moral teachings of the Church, which are experienced not as a legalistic burden, but as a gift that offers healing, liberation and freedom.

This husband learned to grow in his role as Christ to his spouse. It is a beautiful example for all men.

It is important to note that this couple would likely have come to healing sooner if they had been gently introduced to a healing program like Rachel's Vineyard and had received information on how abortion might impact their relationship.

So many couples and families are wounded by misuse of the gift of sexuality and abortion loss.

They desperately need the healing found in the Church, and the gift of the Church's teachings on marriage and family life and the good news of abortion healing.

Q: In your book, most of the relationships involving abortions end in divorce, or breaking up. Is this common, and if so, how can couples who have had abortions save their relationships?

Burke: Yes, this is the most common outcome.

Tragically, a person will abort with the hope of salvaging their relationship, but the toxic aftereffects of abortion are like a radioactive seed planted in the

heart of the relationship that will, at varying speeds, kill the relationship.

Keep in mind that the relational pain, the damage to trust and intimacy will continue to be present in future relationships and lead to further dysfunction and divorce.

That is why a trauma-sensitive healing process like Rachel's Vineyard is so important to treat the complicated grief, shame, guilt of abortion, so an individual is healed and free to fully trust and embrace the love of another.

Q: What resources are available to help men deal with post-abortion pain both at Project Rachel and elsewhere?

Burke: I am the co-founder with my wife Theresa of Rachel's Vineyard, an international post abortion healing ministry of Priests For Life.

We are blessed to be partnered with Father Frank Pavone, who serves as the pastoral director of Rachel's Vineyard, as we work together to build a culture of life. Over 500 healing retreats were offered around the world in the last year alone.

Men and couples do beautifully on the retreats and provide a special blessing to all participants. It is a special gift for many women to see a man grieving his role in an abortion decision, and the loss of his child.

It's also a great joy to see a man embrace his child with love as the weekend progresses.

Project [Rachel](#), or other diocesan ministries, such as family life offices, sponsor about one-third of our weekend retreats in the United States.

We provide training and treatment models and work cooperatively with Project Rachel, parish-based ministries, retreat houses and all the other groups who reach out with the compassion and mercy of Christ to those suffering after abortion.

Another resource for post-abortive men is The Fatherhood Forever [Foundation](#), founded by Jason Baier, also a contributing author to "Redeeming a Father's Heart."

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