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"Abortion Survivor"

Iniquity to the Third and Fourth Generation

By Philip Beard

Can anything new be said about the continuing evil of abortion? Volumes have been written about the scientific, religious, moral, ethical, and social reasons for ending the slaughter of one and a half million unborn children each year in the United States alone, not to mention millions more world-wide. Even President Reagan added an election-year plea to the massive literature calling for a halt to this legal holocaust (see *Abortion and the Conscience of a Nation*, Thomas Nelson, 1984).

When all is said and done, perhaps less should be said and more should be done to stop abortions. Yet, two articles in recent secular journals compel me to say something about an anti-abortion argument, which may not have caught your attention. That is: Abortion has a devastating impact on the lives of the children who are not aborted – on the "abortion survivors."

I mention this argument to encourage us to redouble and rekindle our efforts to oppose the practice as vigorously and as lawfully (please, no bombings!) as we can. I say, "redouble" to those of us who have been working hard in this battle; I say "rekindle" to those of us who have almost lost heart in what is a difficult and at times apparently fruitless struggle.

Now to those familiar with the Bible's Ten Commandments, my thesis (Abortion has a devastating impact on the children not aborted.) is not news. When God said in the Second Commandment not to make idols, He went on to say that if people did make idols, He would "visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children even to the third and fourth generation." (Ex. 20:5; see also Ex. 34:7 and Deut. 5:9).

In other words, the sins of the parents most surely will affect their children. Who of us does not know this very well? But for those less familiar with

(or unconvinced by) the Bible, this ancient truth is supported by the work of scholars in the secular field.

In a 1984 issue of *Clinical Social Work Journal*, Anita and Eugene Weiner talk about what they call the "Aborted Sibling Factor." They assert: "There is increasing evidence that even very young children may be aware of maternal abortions despite family attempts to maintain secrecy" (p. 209).

As the Weiners treated a 5-year-old girl who was having bad dreams and feelings of terror, they discovered that these experiences were triggered by "her mother's multiple abortions and her own fear of being destroyed through maternal aggression" (p. 209).

And while they were treating this little girl, they also learned of a 7 year old child who "had drawn a picture of a flower pot with seven flowers in it. Three of the flowers were drawn in full red colors, and the other four were only outlined, not colored in. The child was the second of three live children in a family where there had been two abortions, one stillbirth, and one child who dies at age six months" (p. 214).

Sadly, even in light of these two experiences, part of the Weiners' treatment of the 5-year-old girl was to tell her that "although an embryo is alive it is not yet a person" (p. 213). Thus, they somehow do not grasp the implications of their own study and fail to heed the warning given in another article – which they themselves cite.

That article, entitled "A Consideration of Abortion Survivors," is by Dr. Philip Ney, head of the Department of Psychological Medicine at the University of Otago in Christchurch, New Zealand. It appeared in the Spring 1986 issue of *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*.

Ney's article echoes the concerns of many opponents of abortion: the continuation of legalized abortion will lead to serious and damaging consequences in the future – and the future is now. Ney estimates that about 50 percent of all pregnancies in North America now end by induced abortion. Thus, he says "it is reasonable to consider a live new born as a survivor" (p. 168). And as legalized abortion continues, the number of survivors grows.

Like the Weiners, Ney contends that even very young children are aware of their mothers' pregnancies. He also cites an article in which the author "describe the perceptions of the depressed women...who knew of their mother's attempt to abort them and partly because of that aborted their own pregnancies" (p. 170). Ney thus issues an ominous warning about the effects of abortion on surviving children:

Children are becoming increasingly aware...that they exist only because their mothers chose them and chose them only because they were desirable. Since their fate once hung on their desirability, they tend to feel secure only when they are pleasing to their parents...Consequently, a large number of children become overanxious parent-pleasers until they can no longer cope. Then they become self-blaming and depressed or hostile and rebellious. Though parents may fail to recognize the child's depression because of their own preoccupation with guilt, there is an increasing incidence of depression and suicide among children which may be partly explained by this mechanism. (pp. 171-172)

Ney discusses many other possible complications resulting from abortion: child abuse, failure of mothers – and fathers – to properly “bond” with their born children, emotional detachment from children in general, increased discrimination against women, increased materialism as a substitute for parental love, anger by children toward parents and other authority figures, diminished self-esteem among children and adolescents, and growing hostility between generations.

With regard to all these complications, we should think again of the second commandment. Is abortion the most significant issue of our day? No. Idolatry is. As many others have pointed out, it is our society's idolatrous preoccupation with self that underlies many people's acceptance and advocacy of legal abortion. Whether we use Francis Chaeffer's phrase “personal peace and affluence” or Christopher Lasch's concept of the “culture of narcissism,” we are talking about idolatry.

And as the Psalmist warns about idols, “Those who make them will become like them” (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). If we dehumanize our children by aborting them, how long will it be before they dehumanize us? Ney comments: “We might wonder what happens in the future when abortion survivors hold in their hands the fate of those aged or enfeebled parents and professionals who regarded them so callously when as unborn children they were so vulnerable” (p. 177). Not a new thought to those familiar with the frequent warnings that abortion will inevitably lead to infanticide and euthanasia, but a solemn reminder nevertheless.

At this point, we would pause and ask ourselves an honest question: how much have we bowed down and worshiped the idols of our day? No, we do not approve of abortion, but are we comfortable in the materialism and self-centeredness that have contributed to the climate in which abortion flourishes? Unless we are without sin, we had better not throw any stones. And if we have sinned, we should repent and do deeds worthy of repentance.

And there is much we can do. If we encourage and challenge President Reagan and other anti-abortion officials to back up their words with works, we may yet see the end of legalized abortion in the United States. If we will write letter and speak out and march and visit people and give to organizations such as Birthright and do many other things to help provide just and comprehensive alternatives to abortion, we may yet – by God's grace – turn our nation away from a broad road that is leading to destruction. For many of us, one of our main tasks is raising and nurturing our own children for the Lord, so that they may bring words and deeds of hope and healing to generations yet unborn.



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