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Sarah Palin - The Post Abortion Trig-ger?

Is there a connection between the criticisms of Vice Presidential hopeful Sarah Palin and repressed post abortion grief?
by Kevin Burke

The very personal and often uncharitable criticism of Vice Presidential nominee Sarah Palin and her family evident in recent media coverage, and the lack of support from many feminist and child advocacy groups, may have a relationship to the collective grief, pain and guilt from personal involvement in the abortion of an unborn child. When an issue strikes at a deeply repressed sensitive wound in a person, often the initial reaction is anger.

Every year in the United States, approximately 133,000 pregnant mothers will undergo routine pre-natal tests and receive what is called "poor pre-natal diagnosis," or PPD. This means that their infant is afflicted with a chromosomal abnormality or a serious defect in a vital organ.

With the increase in genetic testing and fertility treatments there are growing numbers of couples facing these difficult situations. More than 90 percent of these pregnancies end in abortion. Studies indicate that more than 80 percent of prenatal *Down syndrome* diagnoses end in *abortion*. Parents are often influenced by doctors, therapists, friends and family to see these children not as a gift, but rather a burden to be feared and eliminated. After abortion, the fallout from this loss places a tremendous strain on a couple as they struggle to come to terms with the shock and pain of their experience.

Phil Pedlikin, president of the Down Syndrome Association of Northern Virginia, said the coverage of Sarah Palin as the mother of a child with Down syndrome has been very mixed.

"We have found it frustrating that, even though Governor Palin has never suggested it, quite the opposite really, the emphasis of many reports has been on the 'burden' that she faces because her child has Down syndrome. Also, she is sometimes portrayed as a hero because of this additional 'burden.' We are not heroes because we have children with Down syndrome. Our children are the heroes," Mr. Pedlikin said. (Washington Times, September 4, 2008)

Governor Palin has been clear that despite the challenges Trig's condition will present, she and her husband Todd joyfully celebrate the gift of this precious life to their family.

But this very heartfelt, natural expression of love may be striking at a deeply repressed and painful wound in our culture.

Seeing the Palin family, in a very visible public forum, with an uncompromising and public pro life philosophy arouses deeply repressed feelings in post abortive parents, as well as media members, counselors, health care professionals, politicians and others who promote abortion rights, especially the abortion of children with challenges such as Down syndrome. These powerful repressed feelings of grief, guilt and shame can be deflected from the source of the wound (i.e., abortion) and projected onto an often uncharitable focus upon the trigger of these painful emotions...the Palin family.

We have also learned that Sarah's 17-year-old daughter Bristol is pregnant and will give birth to her son or daughter. This information has been exploited to attack chastity programs and the alleged glamorization of motherhood at the expense of contraception and abortion rights. But this completely misses a more crucial issue that once again our society struggles to face.

If Bristol Palin had quietly aborted, Sarah Palin would have been spared the politically untimely focus on this very personal family issue. The problem would have quietly gone away. But Bristol, like countless post abortive women, would have paid a high price to protect her mother from the political heat that her pregnancy brings to the campaign. We know from our work with thousands of women who feel pressured to abort for various reasons that she would surely suffer many of the common post abortion symptoms; depression, promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse, sleep disorders and relational problems. But she would have suffered in silence; *no one would know her secret*. No one would acknowledge that she has reason to grieve or have symptoms after abortion. Sarah Palin would have lost not only her precious grandchild...she likely would have lost her daughter Bristol to the silent ravages of post abortion suffering.

The Palin family's decision to once again affirm the value of the unborn child, and support a decision to give life confronts the collective grief, guilt and shame of all who have participated in any way in the death of an unborn child.

What we can hope and pray is that Sarah Palin's story does not continue to feed a disgraceful media feeding frenzy fueled by our post-abortive culture and instead becomes a beacon of hope and healing. The experience of the Palin family offers encouragement to other families facing challenging circumstances to value the gift of a child and to see the blessing and potential they represent, rather than a burden to avoid at all costs.

It is important to make the distinction that to affirm the value of the unborn in no way condemns those who have experienced the pain of abortion. Rather, this presents an opportunity to reach out to all who have been wounded by their participation in abortion with love and compassion. We must invite our post-abortive culture to leave the dead end road of anger and personal attacks on families like the Palins. Instead, we need to travel the road of reconciliation, healing and peace as we work together to build a culture of life for all Americans from conception to natural death.

If you or someone you love is hurting after abortion, visit **Rachel's Vineyard - Healing The Pain of Abortion, One weekend at a Time** www.rachelsvineyard.org

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