

What Women Don't Know Does Hurt Them by Dr. Jean S. Garton

The manager of a movie theater in Seoul, South Korea, agreed to show the film "The Sound of Music." When it arrived he discovered that it ran too long to fit his time slot. So he fixed the problem with some clever editing. He simply eliminated all the songs.

We may laugh at the absurdity of his action until we realize that people often "fix" a problem in their own lives in much the same way-by "editing out" human beings. Since 1973, 42 million unborn children have been eliminated in order to "fix" the problem of their mothers' unwanted pregnancies. Tragically, 70 percent of those abortions were performed on women who claimed to be Christians. (1)



The lingering lament of many women who experience abortion is, "If only I had known." They express a deep sadness that comes from the realization that they have been betrayed, betrayed by the seductive marketing rhetoric that touts abortion as "a safe and easy solution," and betrayed by their partners, parents, physicians and, sometimes, even by their pastors. Why, they ask, didn't someone tell them how abortion could hurt them?

Why didn't someone tell them

- That the \$90 billion abortion industry remains largely unregulated, less regulated even than most animal clinics, and puts them at risk for a variety of complications including sterility and even death.
- That most women who have experienced abortion suffer lingering bouts of depression, emotional numbness, eating disorders, panic attacks, lowered self-esteem, sleep disorders and overwhelming guilt.
- That women who experience abortion have a 33 percent higher risk for breast cancer (2) and 154 percent higher risk for committing suicide (3) as well as increase risks for substance abuse and other self-destructive behaviors.

Whether pregnant by their own willful action or by a violent act such as rape, women trapped in an unwanted pregnancy look for an escape. They are prisoners of despair and, say many, the last place they expect to gain support is in the church. They get no comfort from being told about church convention resolutions opposing abortion or from theological documents no matter how soundly written. The voice of the culture is louder and tells them that abortion is their legal, constitutional right so there is no reason for women to feel guilty. But the issue isn't *feeling* guilty; the issue is guilt.

Too few churches want to address the subject of abortion or post-abortion trauma. Some because they view it as a political issue and others because they don't want to

cause pain to women sitting in the pew. That sounds compassionate, but it is interpreted by hurting women as rejection. They do not sense permission or an invitation to speak to the pastor to hear about the need for repentance and the much needed words of grace. How helpful, hopeful and healing it would be for all members of a congregation to hear from the pulpit:

- That a baby is always a gift; not a consequence; always a blessing, not a curse.
- That there is help for those who want to see their baby to term.
- That there are couples who would adopt, love and treasure their baby.
- That God forgives them even when they can't forgive themselves.
- That He loves them even when they hate themselves.
- That because of Jesus, we need never be "prisoners of despair" but always "prisoners of hope," as we are called in Zechariah 9:12.

Too many in the church have abandoned these frightened women to heartless individualism by accepting the culture's lie that "It's her choice, her right, her privacy, her body." No, it's not, if we belong to Christ. An abortion decision doesn't exist in a vacuum. It does not occur in isolation, and we are not insulated from the consequences if we are part of the Body of Christ. We are all in this together because abortion isn't really about "a woman's right to choose." Abortion is about the decline of human significance, and that makes it an issue for the church.

Some Christians believe that a teenager should have an abortion because she is too young to have a baby. If she is too young to have a baby, then isn't she too young to kill a baby? Still others say that abortion isn't a matter of concern for them because they are too old to have a baby. We may be too old to have a baby, but we are never too old to save a baby.

There is so much we can tell the woman with an untimely pregnancy that will help her to choose life:

Remind her of the track record God has had in her life; that when He makes a promise, He keeps it. *Surely I am with you always* (Matthew 28:20).

Warn her that the Devil is in the details, whispering "Who will help you? Where will you get the money? What about your job or education?" The Lord is near, be anxious about nothing (Philippians 4:6).

Assure her that she is a child of the God of Hope who will fill her with all joy and peace as she trusts in Him (Romans 15:13).

Some women compare their healing from an abortion to peeling an onion. With each passing year they pull back another layer and cry. "Then I put the onion down, wipe my eyes and wait another year before tackling the job again. I never know what odd event will trigger the sadness. Yes, little by little, God replaces the pain in my head and heart with peace," they often say.

In time, there is healing. There is comfort in knowing that what one did in the past is not what one would do now. As precious daughters of the God of Hope, our unknown future is always known to Him. Because the future is in His hands, it is a future filled with promise. So we in the church ought not do anything—whether through silence, a lack of support, or not sharing God's Word—anything that would cause a girl or woman to miss out on something that God desires to accomplish in her life and in the life of the child He has entrusted to her care.

(1) *The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2001. (23% Catholic; 47% Protestant)*

(2) *The Southern Medical Journal*

(3) *The National Cancer Institute, November 25, 2002*