



Life Matters Journal

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On Violence and Victim-Blaming

In the aftermath of tragedies like the Pulse club shooting, pro-life people should work to rehumanize victims and stand in solidarity.

Consistent Conservatives

Republicans' new internal struggle over the death penalty spilled over into Kansas this year.

The Just War Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons

Although nuclear weapons receive far less attention today than during the Cold War, the weapons—and the dangers and ethical problems they pose—remain with us.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

This summer, the Life Matters Journal team is bringing forth the message of the Consistent Life Ethic in so many ways. We are doing outreach at three conferences, outside two political conventions, and at many other events where we will advocate life-affirming protections for every human being. We are so thankful for your support, which helps our staff witness and educate at these events, on social media, and through our publication.



Regarding the journal, the time has come to expand the role of the executive editor of *Life Matters Journal*. After nearly two years in this position, I am moving on and making way for the next leader of this publication, who will be able to devote himself or herself to this front of the pro-life movement on a full-time basis. More details to follow.

Managing our dedicated editorial team and bolstering the work of our many contributors who have written thoughtful, inspiring pieces for you has been an honor. I hope you have enjoyed reading the journal as much as I have loved working on it, and I look forward to seeing what the next editor is able to achieve!

For peace and all life,

Mary Stroka

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether legal or illegal.

We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to take a lukewarm, halfway attitude toward the victims of violence. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others.

We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are *Life Matters Journal*, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer: The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. We exist to present a forum for discussion within the consistent life ethic, to promote discourse and present an opportunity for peer-review and dialogue.

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Life Matters Journal

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On Violence And Victim-Blaming

By Aimee Murphy

Just weeks ago, a shooter walked into Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, with the intent to kill.

With an assault rifle and a handgun, he killed 49 people and wounded another 53.¹ And immediately there was speculation flying around about whether he was affiliated with ISIS or whether he was a closeted queer. And there are discussions about gun control and questions of how the federal government gathers intelligence on potential threats.

There was no time to grieve the loss of these unique and irreplaceable individuals, their loss swept under the rug in favor of blaring the information about the shooter, in favor of heated television and Facebook debates about gun policy, in favor of criticizing Pulse patrons for being there at all. LGBT+ individuals felt justifiably concerned for their safety in the wake of the attacks.

And then, as the gay community stood in solidarity to mourn the loss of those with whom they share a piece of their identity, the most depraved comments began to come out of the woodwork. Things like the tweet from the @IWillTryLater account: “Y’all see a Gay club shooting as a horrible tragedy. I see it as someone doing Community Service.”² Or like the quips of Roger Jimenez, a pastor from Verity Baptist Church in Sacramento who said, “As a Christian, we shouldn’t be mourning the death of 50 sodomites,” and also said, “The tragedy is that more of them didn’t die. The tragedy is—I’m kind of upset that he didn’t finish the job!” He clarified his point later, saying, “My whole point was, if people die who deserve to die, we don’t need to be mourning that.”³ So on top of being the victims of a shooting, the gay community is also hoping against hope that there won’t be a copycat shooter who takes these words and runs with them.

Let’s get this straight: the patrons of Pulse were not acting aggressively and were not committing any acts of violence by dancing the night away in a bar that presented them with a safe space to express themselves. I really can’t believe I have to say this: since the only acts of justifiable “violence” (according to all of the tenets of just defense) are defensive action during an imminent or ongoing attack, these Pulse patrons, no matter their sexuality, did not deserve any violence that was waged against them. They were victims of a man who was unhinged. They have names. They have stories. Their lives matter.

But too often today, our culture gets caught up trying to justify violence *ex post facto*. Perhaps it’s because our media does such an incredible job of telling the backstory of the aggressor, the shooter, the terrorist; but rarely do we get full segments on the lives and backstories of those victims of violence. We spend so much time dwelling on the humanity (and inhumanity) of the gunman that our culture begins to make excuses for why the gunman’s form of violence was okay. So we get victim blaming time and time again

as we hear about how violence against certain classes of “sinful” people (whether they’re called “sluts,” “fags,” or worse) is justified.

This culture of victim blaming has been so much in our news lately: the case of “Stanford rapist” Brock Turner has brought the terrible tactic to light as countless people blamed his victim because she had been unconscious from drinking. One of Brock’s friends, Leslie Rasmussen, wrote in a letter, “I don’t think it’s fair to base the fate of the next ten[-plus] years of his life on the decision of a girl who doesn’t remember anything but the amount she drank to press charges.”⁴ Like the victims of the Pulse shooting who were nonviolently seeking a good time, this poor girl probably expected nothing while drinking except a hangover—none of these victims expected such violence. Gay people are not more inherently worthy of being targets of violence; girls who drink a lot are not more inherently worthy of being targets of violence. But the way that some people in our culture have come to the defense of these perpetrators or swept the identities of these victims under the rug because “they deserved it” is nothing short of dehumanizing and morally dangerous.

As a culture, we have to stop making excuses for violence and giving leniency to perpetrators because the victims seem somehow more worthy of being violated due to their supposed sins. We have to have frank discussions about mental health, accountability, and cultures of violence. We need to educate our children and raise them to understand the inherent dignity of each and every human being and stop building tolerance to habits of low-grade violence. We must start to hold our celebrity darlings, heroes, and friends accountable for the aggression they initiate and perpetuate in our culture. We have to be better than this.

Notes:

¹ Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Richard Pérez-Peña, “Orlando Shooting Survivors Cope with the Trauma of Good Fortune,” *New York Times*, June 14, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/15/us/orlando-shooting.html?_r=0.

² Patrick Saunders, “Walmart Fires Marietta Man Who Said Orlando LGBT Club Shooter Was ‘Doing Community Service,’” *Georgia Voice*, June 12, 2016, <http://thegavoice.com/walmart-fires-marietta-man-said-orlando-lgbt-club-shooter-community-service/>. The account has since been shut down and then opened by LGBT+ advocates to be a memorial of social media hate speech.

³ Scott Eslinger, “Baptist Pastor Stands by Anti-gay Orlando Shooting Sermon,” *12News*, June 14, 2016, <http://www.12newsnow.com/story/32221732/baptist-pastor-stands-by-anti-gay-orlando-shooting-sermon>; Lindsey Bever, “Pastor Refuses to Mourn Orlando Victims: ‘The Tragedy Is That More of Them Didn’t Die,’” *Washington Post*, June 15, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/06/14/pastor-refuses-to-mourn-orlando-victims-the-tragedy-is-that-more-of-them-didnt-die/>.

⁴ Alex Zielinski, “Friend Of Stanford Rapist Blamed Victim, Urged Judge Not To Be ‘Politically Correct,’” *ThinkProgress*, June 6, 2016, <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2016/06/06/3784952/letter-victim-blaming-turner/>.

Consistent Conservatives: The Consistent Life Ethic and Kansas Republicans

By Nicholas Neal

In 2015, Nebraska became the first Republican-controlled state to abolish its death penalty.¹ While Governor Pete Ricketts vetoed the abolition bill, the state's legislature overrode the veto with the aid of 17 Republican state senators.²

This split in the Nebraska GOP over the death penalty was not between moderates and conservatives but rather between conservatives with differing applications of conservative principles. The anti-death penalty Republicans used pro-life arguments, pro-limited government arguments, and anti-spending arguments to ground their center-right, abolitionist position.³

The Republicans' new internal struggle over the death penalty spilled over into Kansas this year. During the Kansas GOP convention, a pro-death penalty plank was suggested for the party platform. After a contentious debate, the Kansas GOP voted 90-75 to keep the platform neutral.⁴

The conservative heterodoxy on capital punishment is more apparent among right-leaning intellectuals than the movement's rank and file. Conservative writers such as S. E. Cupp, Richard Viguerie, and George Will all oppose the death penalty and have written against it in the past.⁵ However, according to the Pew Research Center, there is not any downward trend in death penalty support among Republicans and conservatives.⁶

While an anti-death penalty stance might be held by only a small number of conservatives, such a stance is significant in the context of conservative history. During the presidential election of 1988, the Republican campaign ads highlighted democratic candidate Michael Dukakis' opposition to the death penalty in order to paint him as weak on crime.⁷ The anti-death penalty actions of a few Republican state officials are quite extraordinary considering that pro-death penalty sentiment was part of how the GOP won in '88.

Certain trends among conservatives are causing this. One is the party's new-found willingness to adopt criminal justice reform. In May 2015, Republican Governor Rick Perry called for cutting incarceration for non-violent criminals.⁸ During the 2016 Republican presidential primary, both Senator Rand Paul and Governor Chris Christie called for reforms in drug criminalization.⁹

The most interesting cause of the shift in anti-death penalty opinion however, is that the consistent life ethic is infiltrating the conservative movement.

Dalton Glasscock, the former president of the Kansas College Republicans, stated in regard to the party's stance on the death penalty that "I believe if we say we're pro-life, we need to be truly pro-life, from conception to death."¹⁰

Kansas State Representative Bill Sutton stated, "I would prefer that Kansas repeals the death penalty and replaces it with life in

prison without parole rather than try to expedite executions. As someone who is strongly committed to protecting life from conception to natural death, I want to be sure that Kansas passes legislation that promotes a culture of life."¹¹

The Kansas Republican platform, while remaining neutral on the death penalty, also remained pro-life on abortion.¹² The GOP's shift on the death penalty isn't a sign of the party becoming more liberal. It's a sign that they're becoming more consistent. Conservatives' tendency to allow violence toward criminals is waning because of its tension with the idea of holding the sanctity of human life above all else.

A state party adopting a neutral stance on the death penalty may not seem like a dramatic cultural victory. However, consistent life ethicists should feel proud. Our ideas are not as obscure as they used to be and they are actually being advocated by those with legislative power. The consistent life ethic is making progress, and in an era where conservatives are trying to redefine themselves, we ought to capitalize on that.

Notes:

¹ Julie Bosman, "Nebraska Bans Death Penalty, Defying a Veto," *New York Times*, May 27, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/28/us/nebraska-abolishes-death-penalty.html>.

² Chris Enloe, "Nebraska Could Become the First Republican Controlled State to Abolish the Death Penalty in Decades," *Independent Journal Review*, accessed June 18, 2016, <http://www.ijreview.com/2015/04/306957-nebraska-become-first-republican-controlled-state-abolish-death-penalty-decades/>.

³ Amber Phillips, "Nebraska and the Conservative Case for Opposing the Death Penalty," *Washington Post*, May 27, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/05/21/nebraska-and-the-conservative-case-for-opposing-the-death-penalty/>.

⁴ Andy Marso, "Kansas Republicans Vote against Adding Death Penalty to Platform," *KCUR 89.3*, May 15, 2016, <http://kcur.org/post/kansas-republicans-vote-against-adding-death-penalty-platform#stream/0>.

⁵ S.E. Cupp, "The Conservative Case against the Death Penalty," *New York Daily News*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/conservative-case-death-penalty-article-1.1781639>; Richard A. Viguerie, "When Governments Kill," *Death Penalty Information Center*, July 2009, <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/new-voices-prominent-conservative-calls-death-penalty-moratorium>; George Will, "Capital Punishment's Slow Death," *Washington Post*, May 20, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/capital-punishments-slow-death/2015/05/20/f3c14d32-fe4f-11e4-8b6c-0dc2e21e223d_story.html.

⁶ "Less Support for Death Penalty, Especially Among Democrats," *Pew Research Center*, April 16, 2015, <http://www.people-press.org/2015/04/16/less-support-for-death-penalty-especially-among-democrats/>.

⁷ "Revolving Door," Campaign ad, Bush Quayle '88, 1988, available at *Living Room Candidate*, accessed June 18, 2016, <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1988>.

⁸ C.J. Ciaramella, "Perry Calls for 'Common Sense' Reforms to Criminal Justice System," *Washington Free Beacon*, May 13, 2015, <http://freebeacon.com/issues/perry-calls-for-common-sense-reforms-to-criminal-justice-system/>.

⁹ Jonathan Easley, "GOP Contenders Embrace Criminal Justice Reform," *The Hill*, July 15, 2015, <http://thehill.com/campaign-issues/248069-gop-contenders-embrace-criminal-justice-reform>.

¹⁰ Amber Phillips, "Death Penalty Support Is No Longer a Given in Red States," *Washington Post*, May 18, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/05/18/death-penalty-support-is-no-longer-a-given-in-red-states/>.

¹¹ "What Kansas Conservatives Are Saying," *Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty*, accessed June 18, 2016, <http://conservativesconcerned.org/in-the-states/kansas/>.

¹² Associated Press, "The Latest: Kobach in Kansas Delegation to GOP Convention," May 14, 2016, <http://gazette.com/the-latest-kansas-gop-rejects-death-penalty-platform-plank/article/feed/34937>



The Just War Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons

By John Whitehead

Although nuclear weapons receive far less attention today than during the Cold War, the weapons—and the dangers and ethical problems they pose—remain with us. The nuclear weapons currently held by the nine nuclear powers number roughly 10,300. Of these, a little over half are in storage and the remainder are deployed with operational military forces. Almost 2,000 nuclear weapons are on high alert and thus can be used at relatively short notice.¹ This status quo is a dangerous and deeply unethical situation. The proper response to this situation is to renew global efforts to reduce the world's nuclear arsenals dramatically and one day even eliminate them altogether.

Nuclear weapons and the proper response to them can be analyzed from many different perspectives, including either pacifism or realpolitik, but I will look at this issue from the standpoint of Just War Theory. Just War Theory is a school of political philosophy that offers principles for 1) when waging war is justified and 2) how, if war is justified, that war can be waged in a just, morally appropriate manner.² The main principle of Just War Theory that I will focus on falls into the second category of principles, related to how war can be justly waged. This is the principle of discrimination: discrimination between combatants and noncombatants in wartime. This central principle of Just War Theory is one that nuclear weapons clearly violate.

The principle of discrimination holds that in wartime military forces should, when using violence, discriminate between those citizens of an opposing nation who qualify as combatants and those who qualify as noncombatants. Combatants include active military personnel of the opposing nation, who are trained and authorized by their government to use lethal violence and are able and prepared to do so. As such, combatants may be reciprocally regarded as legitimate targets of lethal violence in wartime.

Noncombatants, who are a much larger class of people, include civilians and military personnel who have in some way been rendered incapable of fighting (for example, military personnel who have been taken captive and become prisoners of war). People who fall into the category of noncombatants, even though they may be citizens of an opposing nation, are not legitimate targets of lethal violence.

Nuclear weapons do not discriminate between these categories of combatants and noncombatants. Their massive destructive power would kill all classes of people, even those clearly in the noncombatant category, in a population against which nuclear weapons are used. Such an outcome is clear if one considers a few basic facts about current nuclear arsenals.

The explosive power of nuclear weapons is generally measured in kilotons of dynamite—that is, in thousands of tons of dynamite. Many existing nuclear warheads—including a large number of war-

heads in the arsenals of Russia and the United States, the two largest nuclear powers—have yields in the hundreds of kilotons. Of the United States' deployed nuclear warheads, more than three-quarters have explosive yields of 100 kilotons—that is, 100,000 tons of dynamite—or more.³

To put this in perspective, consider that the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had yields in the range of 15-20 kilotons. Thus, many nuclear weapons currently held by the United States and Russia are at least five times as powerful as the nuclear weapons that devastated those two cities. If a relatively small nuclear weapon of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki variety, let alone one of the 100 kiloton weapons, were used against a populated area, the results would be indiscriminate and deadly.

To kill everyone in a city—men, women, and children—without distinction cannot be considered consistent with the principle of discrimination. It would be considered an atrocity; an act of mass murder. Even if such weapons were used against a military target, such as a military base or a concentration of troops, if that target were located within or close to a civilian population center, huge numbers of civilians would be killed. Thus, nuclear weapons with yields in the tens, let alone hundreds, of kilotons cannot be used in a way consistent with the Just War principle of discrimination. To use even a limited number of weapons of such destructive power would be profoundly immoral.

Some might defend the maintenance of current nuclear arsenals, including both the elaborate military preparations and procedures for using them and the high level of readiness at which so many of them are kept, by arguing they serve a deterrent purpose. This is the classic rationale for nuclear weapons: by possessing nuclear weapons and threatening retaliation in kind to a nuclear attack, the nuclear powers keep themselves safe from aggression.

Some will even argue that the nuclear arsenals possessed by the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War prevented those superpowers from going to war with conventional weapons—nuclear weapons, so the argument goes, “kept the peace.” This argument implicitly assumes that nations can possess nuclear weapons and threaten their use without ever actually using them, with all the catastrophic and immoral consequences involved.

This rationale is flawed, however. As long as nuclear weapons are operational, and particularly as long as they are on high-alert and available for quick and ready use, a very real and serious risk exists that they will actually be used. They might not be used as the result of a carefully calculated, pre-meditated decision. They might, however, be used either because a confrontation between nuclear powers flares up into military conflict and eventually becomes a nuclear exchange, as part of a back-and-forth pattern of rapid escalation, or because of sheer accident.

There are contemporary examples of incidents between nuclear powers that had the potential to escalate to more serious, even nuclear, conflict. Russia and the United States' relationship has degenerated in recent years to a state similar to the Cold War era, and military conflict between the two nations could flare up in—to take just two examples—Ukraine or Syria.

In Ukraine, the US military currently maintains a “Joint Multinational Training Group” with the purpose of training Ukrainian armed forces.⁴ Yet Ukraine is still engaged in low-simmering civil war with eastern separatists backed by Russia—if the civil war should expand or if Russian forces launch a general invasion of Ukraine, then US forces could come into direct conflict with Russian ones.

Russian and American involvement in the Syrian civil war could also become a flashpoint for nuclear power conflict. In the fall of 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet, with the Turks claiming the Russian jet crossed the border into Turkey. Russia responded by stationing anti-aircraft missile batteries in Syria; these missiles can be fired some distance into Turkey.⁵ The prospects of a Russian-Turkish confrontation is an alarming one given that (1) Turkey is an American ally and NATO member—and thus a Russian attack on Turkey could oblige the United States to respond; and (2) the United States may have nuclear weapons stationed at Incirlik Air Base in Turkey.⁶

Further, Russian-American relations over the past few very tense years have been troubled by numerous confrontations or stand-offs between the military forces of each side. Earlier in 2016, Russian planes flew dangerously close to the United States destroyer *Donald Cook* in the Baltic Sea, and many such incidents have occurred over the past two years.⁷

The other way nuclear weapons might be used is purely as the result of an accident: political or military commanders might incorrectly perceive that another nation has launched a nuclear attack and might end up retaliating in response to what is actually a false alarm. History suggests how real this danger is:

- In 1960, the US military received a warning that a Soviet nuclear missile strike on the United States was in progress. In such a situation, American nuclear retaliation was a possibility. However, the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System in Greenland had made a mistake and identified as an incoming Soviet missile attack what was actually the moon rising over Norway.

- A parallel situation occurred almost 20 years later. In 1979, the American military received another warning of a Soviet attack and took some initial steps to respond. American missiles were put on alert and crews were sent to bombers. Again, however, it was all a false alarm. A technician had been running a computer program that simulated a war game for training purposes and the game was mistaken for the real thing.

- A similar incident occurred on the Russian side after the Cold War. In 1995, Russian authorities detected what they thought might well be an American nuclear missile launch targeted at Russia and then-president Boris Yeltsin was alerted. The actual cause of the alarm was a weather rocket launched in Norway. The Norwegians had notified the Russians of the rocket launch beforehand, but somehow information had not gotten to correct people in Russia or had otherwise been overlooked, and for a moment the weather

rocket threatened to trigger a nuclear exchange.⁸

Such mistakes and near-misses are inevitable when you have fallible people and fallible technology in charge of extraordinarily dangerous weapons. As long as nuclear weapons are operational and on high alert, the danger exists that someday another one of these false alarms will take place and the weapons are actually used before someone figures out what is really happening.

For all these reasons, the nuclear status quo must be ended. This will require the world's nuclear powers both to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in national arsenals and to reduce nuclear weapons' level of readiness by, for example, removing warheads from missiles or otherwise disassembling nuclear weapons so they cannot be used at a moment's notice.⁹

All nine nuclear powers should be involved in these disarmament efforts but the lead must be taken by the two largest nuclear powers, Russia and the United States. These two nations have the most work to do as far as reducing the size and readiness of their nuclear arsenals, and I doubt other nuclear powers will be willing to engage in reductions of their own unless they see Russia and the United States already making significant steps toward disarmament.

Precise disarmament agreements and the steps necessary to verify that all the nuclear powers are abiding by such agreements will have to be worked out among the nuclear powers through careful negotiation. These negotiations will be the work of policymakers but the work of lobbying, of raising awareness, and of building a global movement in favor of abolishing nuclear weapons or even just the most destructive high-yield nuclear weapons is work for all of us. Let us raise our voices about the need to end this dangerous, immoral situation and to reduce and, I hope, one day abolish nuclear weapons.

Notes:

¹ Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “Status of World Nuclear Forces,” Federation of American Scientists, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/>.

² For a brief summary of Just War Theory principles, see Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 285.

³ Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “Russian Nuclear Forces, 2016,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 72, no. 3 (2016), 126, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2016.1170359>; Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, “United States Nuclear Forces, 2016,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 72, no. 2 (2016), 64, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2016.1145901>.

⁴ “Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine,” United States Army Europe, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.eur.army.mil/jmtg-u/>.

⁵ BBC, “Turkey’s Downing of Russian Warplane: What We Know,” December 1, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34912581>; Interfax, “Russian S-400 Systems May Stay in Syria for a While: Federation Council,” March 15, 2016, https://rbth.com/news/2016/03/15/russian-s-400-systems-may-stay-in-syria-for-a-while-federation-council_575905.

⁶ Die Welt, “Reports: US Nuclear ‘Upgrades’ in Europe,” September 23, 2015, <http://www.dw.com/en/reports-us-nuclear-upgrades-in-europe/a-18731756>.

⁷ Phil Stewart, “Russia Jets Make ‘Simulated Attack’ Passes near U.S. Destroyer: U.S.,” Reuters, April 15, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-simulatedattack-idUSKCN0XA1UW>.

⁸ These incidents are described in Louis Menand, “Nukes of Hazard,” *New Yorker*, September 30, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/nukes-of-hazard>.

⁹ These two approaches to disarmament are described in Jonathan Schell, *The Gift of Time: The Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons Now* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 69–70.

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Time for Life: Recognizing the Humanity of the Dehumanized

By Jason Oller

Louisiana has the nation's highest incarceration rate.¹ As a native of Louisiana, I am not proud of this. However, I appreciate efforts to help young people not end up in full-out adult prison. One such effort is an ecumenical juvenile prison ministry I am involved with called Epiphany. Though it is a Christian outreach, it has a universal message for the young men in the juvenile prison: their lives matter and they deserve love, respect, and a listening ear.

Louisiana, despite its high incarceration rates, is a state that is predominantly pro-life. Democrat or Republican, most Louisianans oppose abortion. Honestly, to be pro-life for the unborn is not difficult. To me, it is easy to view an unborn child, an infant, or a toddler as needing protection. Children are innocent and full of potential. Children are cute. Teenagers and adults in prison are not as innocent or cute.

Life Matters Journal Executive Director Aimee Murphy visited my university through our pro-life group, Louisiana Tech Bulldogs for Life, and spoke about upholding a consistent life ethic. We wanted a speaker with such a “whole life” philosophy. Since becoming involved in the pro-life movement, I have loved the whole-life consistent life ethic. Human life is worthy of protection from conception to natural death. However, beyond protection, human life is worthy of dignity and respect. Actions, I believe, are the best way to show this.

When I became involved in Epiphany, our pro-life group's previous president asked me if she and the group could do anything to help. Bulldogs for Life has been trying to engage in the “ministry of pro-life” by doing things like raising money, donating items such as formula, and working at a fundraiser for a crisis pregnancy center. Helping with Epiphany's work was a natural next step. To help Epiphany, a few of our Bulldogs for Life members baked cookies for these young men. As part of Epiphany's ministry, we volunteers feed the young men lots of food, especially cookies. In order to get more people involved, we ask people to bake for the young men and to pray for them.

I was able to spend a weekend with these young men doing the Epiphany retreat. We started off with a talk on goals. These young men have goals: some that are realistic and some that are not so realistic. I had a few say they wanted to be professional basketball players, to join the military, or to go to college or trade school. Regardless, they are goals. As a college student nearing graduation and planning for my future, hearing other people's goals delighted me.

Actually being with people puts a face on them and breaks stereotypes and prejudices. Being around LGBTQ people, people from other countries, the homeless, incarcerated youth, and other people from “different” groups puts a face on those whom so many want to toss away. If we lock people away and isolate them into

“them” instead of “other humans needing some help,” we dehumanize fellow human beings. However, being around other unique people shows me their humanity, their goals, and that they have the same desires as I do. Epiphany caused moments of “sonder,” as I realized that these young men, as well as people in other groups society tends to cast out, had goals, passions, and desires like I do.²

Besides giving the young men treats, we spent time with them just talking and listening. We were in groups arranged like families. We gave talks, we played games, we laughed, we sang, we danced. We just had a good time. It was not marching. It was not advocating for criminal justice reform and for restorative justice. Those things are necessary in the consistent life movement, but we also need to spend time with the lives we believe we should protect.

We showed them that they were worth taking out a weekend for. For me, it was the week before finals. They were worth the hard work of finishing assignments early and delaying studies for my exams. They were worth the baking. They were worth trying to figure out how to crush up candy bars to add to the cookies without making a giant mess. (There was definitely a mess; it was a failed attempt.)

In the talks, we spoke a lot about goals, making the right choic-

es, and, since it was a Christian ministry, God. We looked to see potential. We looked to see value. I hope these young men one day have families, good jobs, and worship or don't worship as they please. I hope this temporary stop in the corrections system is restorative and they become full members of society. However, even if they somehow end up in prison again, even if they do bad things, they are human beings.

What we do does not determine worth. We are human beings, not human doings.

Human life is worthy not only of protection but of dignity and respect by virtue of existing, by being. What we do does not determine worth. We are human beings, not human doings. Past actions do not determine worth nor does future potential. Simply being human gives a life value.

Notes:

¹ The Louisiana Weekly, “La. Retains World's and Nation's Highest Incarceration Rate,” April 6, 2015, <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/la-retains-nations-and-worlds-highest-incarceration-rate/>

² For a definition of the concept “sonder,” see John Koenig, “Sonder,” The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://www.dictionaryofobscuresorrows.com/post/23536922667/sonder>. For a discussion of the concept's application to the consistent life ethic, see Aimee Murphy, “Sonder: The Key to Peace?” *Life Matters Journal* 3, no. 2 (2014): 32-33.

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Coming to Embrace the Consistent Ethic of Life

By Annaleigh Atiyeh

Life Matters Journal and other organizations co-sponsored the Life/Peace/Justice Conference at Villanova University outside Philadelphia this past April 22-24. Here, one activist who attended offers her reflections.

The Life/Peace/Justice Conference changed my life. Before my experience with the conference and *Life Matters Journal*, I was a pro-lifer—very passionate about defending the unborn and helping those suffering from depression and at risk of suicide. I was not sure, however, of how to be passionate about and stand up against the death penalty, euthanasia, human trafficking, and war. Those issues were “other aspects of the life cause,” but not issues I talked about like I did abortion, pregnancy, and suicide.

Ask me whether I stood for life from womb to tomb and I would say “yes.” What I found, though, through reading *Life Matters Journal* and finally attending the Conference, was that I did not know enough about these other life issues to be able to do them justice when talking about them. They were topics never explained to me with enough ardor or logic for me to get involved in working against them. Yet, now, as I write this, after a full dose of inspiration from the speakers at the Life/Peace/Justice Conference, I am proud to say I am a different person in my consistency, morals, and ethics: I am consistently pro-life.

Let me explain how I got here. I was the president of a pro-life student organization throughout three years of college, and I found out the hard way that it would be a hard, long road to doing effective outreach to individuals on the pro-life cause. Until I began my work, I did not understand the unpopular nature of my viewpoint and the way I would be responded to, even on a Catholic campus. Therefore, I had to try many avenues and do a lot of soul searching to navigate my way through the angry and negative responses I often faced. Do not get me wrong, I had many positive responses as well, but I was so used to people liking me and supporting my beliefs that I did not understand how people could not appreciate or see my good intentions and at least respect me for it. One might assume that a pro-lifer should get stronger in the face of this adversity or simply get bitter toward those who disagreed, but instead I became frustrated, confused, hateful toward myself, and angry at nearly everything.

I was a student-athlete, double major, and member of the honors program, which might have helped me in my pro-life activism—but instead I always seemed to fail in leadership, organizing events, expressing our purpose on campus, and building membership. What I noticed was that I lacked the knowledge of how to approach the pro-life issue without making it seem like I was all about anti-abortion work and only a single life cause. I needed a way to let people know that I was passionate about life, innocent human beings, and everyone involved, including (or rather, most importantly) the mother and father. I also needed to express how all of the issues were interconnected and work to accept and respect all of humanity; therefore I had to address other issues as well. So, I had a lot of work to do.

While I focused on abortion and suicide because of ongoing questions and concerns about my own purpose and work, the process of becoming wholeheartedly pro-life during college and my post-college years was long and difficult. The process involved experiences ranging from my own struggle with self-worth; to meeting people affected by abortion, euthanasia, and human trafficking; to frequent conversations with people involved with life movements on how every issue affects human dignity. I never had a definite way to express the horror of these forms of violence and the detrimental way in which they affected our humanity until finally I came across the work of Aimee Murphy, the Executive Director of *Life Matters Journal*.

I began reading up on Aimee Murphy’s story and unexpectedly my view on the pro-life movement and my approach started changing. Her story and willingness to include all the life causes made me think of who I was reaching out to and how I did it. Her messages were quirky, sounded authentic, and had a clear message that any young person could connect to. What I also saw was that her message was to respect all people, no matter what—and that is the point of the pro-life movement, right? We are to respect life from womb to tomb—are we not? I did not know it then, but I hit a jackpot when I found her publication.

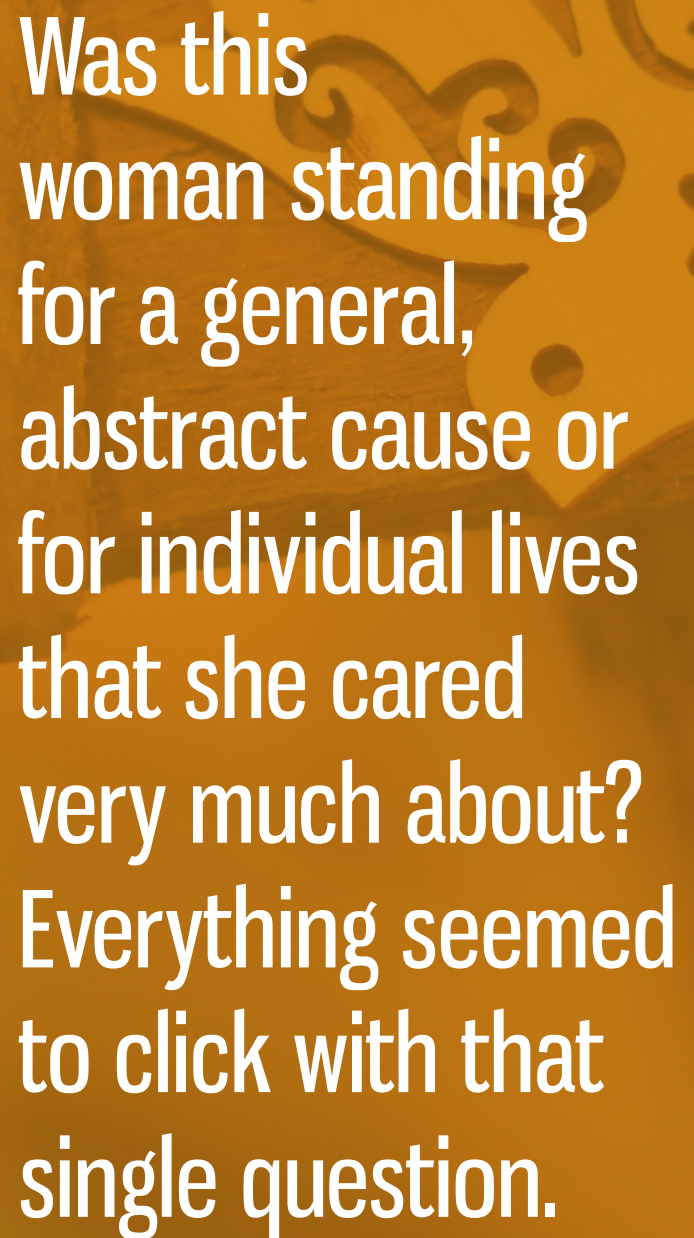
Fast-forward to post-graduate life. I have co-founded a new young adult pro-life group and decided that I needed to take a stance on, talk about, and finally become consistently pro-life on all issues. So, I invited my group's members to the Life/Peace/Justice Conference at Villanova University, and since that conference, my life has changed and my work is tremendously impacted.

It all started with Aimee's keynote speech. She set everything up perfectly, with a hypothetical scenario of a man who was in danger of being aborted, yet a woman helped his young mom outside of the abortion clinic and she chose life. This young man grew up fairly normally and eventually out of necessity went off to war but unfortunately came home with PTSD, killed a child, and ended up on death row. Now the same woman that saved this man earlier in his life supported the death penalty and advocated for his death at this later stage of life.

Aimee pointed out an important aspect of this: "Was this woman passionate about a cause, or was she recognizing the unique personhood of the young boy she saved and standing for his unique life?" Was this woman standing for a general, abstract cause or for individual lives that she cared very much about? Everything seemed to click with that single question. I had to be consistent and truly think all the causes through and rid myself of the inconsistencies and understand why I still struggled with individual life issues.

The rest of the weekend was stacked with speakers from To Write Love on Her Arms, Democrats for Life of America, Secular Pro-Life, Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty, the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition USA, the Coalition Against Reproductive Trafficking, and many more. All the speakers had direct experience working in their fields and were extremely knowledgeable about the work they do and why these injustices happen. What most deeply impressed me was how all of these various speakers within this single conference came together to stand for human dignity and not a single issue, including homelessness and the needs of those affected by war, was left out. Then, by the end of this conference, I was already removing the final strands of confusion that still kept me from being truly consistent on issues like war and capital punishment.

From Jewels Green's story of her transformation from post-abortive teen to abortion worker to pro-life activist and Katy Doran's talk about how reproductive trafficking has personally affected her life, I could not be more moved and spurred into action to be informed and work against the injustices facing humankind in our culture. People are not disposable, and it should never be the aim of a cause to stand for a purpose and not people. I stand proudly today telling others that I am consistent, knowing that I stand for every life, no matter what someone's sex, social status, story or ability/disability is; I am consistently pro-life.



Was this woman standing for a general, abstract cause or for individual lives that she cared very much about? Everything seemed to click with that single question.

Interested in getting involved?

Want to join the movement against aggressive violence? For information on volunteering or writing for the next issue of *Life Matters Journal*, send an email to info@lifemattersjournal.org.

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