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Who's Afraid of the Fetus?

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In the paper's February 2, 2005 edition, reporter Neela Banerjee reported on the use of ultrasound technology by crisis pregnancy centers. In an article headlined, "Christian Groups Turn to Sonogram to Turn Women from Abortions," Banerjee offered a unique glimpse into one of the most transformative developments in the struggle against abortion.

The article began by introducing Andrea Brown, who at age 24, "desperate for an abortion," came across the Bowie Crofton Pregnancy Center and Medical Clinic, a "church-financed organization that provides counseling and education about sexual abstinence" in Bowie, Maryland.

When she called the center, Ms. Brown was told that the facility did not perform abortions or provide abortion referrals, but that she could come in for an ultrasound that would ensure the viability of her baby. As Banerjee reported, "When she did, everything changed."

"When I had the sonogram and heard the heartbeat—and for me a heartbeat symbolizes life—after that there was no way I could do it," Ms. Brown recalled. Once she had seen the image of her unborn baby, abortion was no longer an option.

Andrea Brown's testimony is hardly unique. That fact explains why The New York Times decided that the emergence of ultrasound technology in the abortion debate is front-page news. As Banerjee explained, "In the battle of abortion, opponents say they have discovered a powerful new tool: sonograms. And over the last 18 months, they have started major fund-raising campaigns to outfit Christian crisis pregnancy centers with ultrasound equipment."

The ultrasound technology now employed by these crisis pregnancy centers offers unprecedented views into the womb, providing a three dimensional image of the baby as it develops. At some stages of pregnancy, the images come close to representing a real-time video image of the baby at play, at rest, and in motion.

According to the Heidi Group, a Christian organization that advises crisis pregnancy centers, up to 90 percent of women visiting the clinics who see their babies through the use of ultrasound technology change their minds and no longer seek an abortion.

Make no mistake—pro-abortion advocates understand what this new development represents. Susanne Martinez, Vice President of Public Policy at the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, told The New York Times that the use of such images by pregnancy centers "is coercive."

In an amazingly candid statement, Ms. Martinez put the issue in perspective. "From the time they walk into these centers, they are inundated with information that is propaganda and that has one goal in mind. And that is to have women continue with their pregnancies."

Got it? Ms. Martinez clearly believes that something dreadful has happened when women are persuaded to continue with their pregnancies and not to seek abortions. Of course, all that makes sense when the Planned Parenthood Federation of America comes into closer view, and its real agenda is made clear.

Dr. Sandra M. Christiansen, Medical Director of the Carenet Pregnancy Center of Frederick, Maryland, countered Martinez's argument. "Women have a right to know what is going on inside their bodies," she insisted, "and we want to provide women with critical information as they face a life-altering procedure and decision. Women will be empowered to choose life."

Dr. Christiansen made no effort to hide her motivation. "The motivation is that man and woman are made in God's image, that life is precious."

Nevertheless, Banerjee explained that pro-abortion advocates "see the technique as a pressure tactic." The reporter quoted Nancy Keenan, President of Nara Pro-Choice America as saying that ultrasounds have medical legitimacy, but "shouldn't be misused to badger or coerce women by these so-called crisis pregnancy centers."

Of course, the women whose hearts are turned by the experience of seeing their unborn children are not being "coerced" by the pregnancy centers. They are being transformed by the sudden awareness that a living human being resides within their wombs.

As for Andrea Brown—who appeared with her smiling baby in a moving photograph published in the paper's print edition—she intends to practice sexual abstinence until she gets married. Smiling at her daughter, she added, "I have a constant reminder of what can happen if I don't."

The national media have been watching the development of these crisis pregnancy centers and the impact of ultrasound technology for some time. Writing for the Newhouse News Service, reporter Mark O'Keefe traced the experience of Rebekah Nancarrow, a 23-year-old woman who visited a faith-based pregnancy center in Dallas, Texas. According to O'Keefe's report, Nancarrow went into the clinic "95 percent certain I was going to have an abortion."

Nevertheless, once Nancarrow saw her baby through an ultrasound technology, everything was changed. "She was moving, she was kicking, she had legs." Nancarrow made a promise to her baby on the spot: "I will take care of you."

O'Keefe reported that "abortion rights groups oppose the practice, arguing that ultrasound becomes a manipulative weapon when put in the hands of religious activists trying to persuade pregnant, vulnerable women." Suzanne Martinez, also cited in O'Keefe's article, charged that the use of ultrasound technology by pregnancy centers "isn't a matter of providing more knowledge, but an attempt to manipulate women." In other words, the abortion industry doesn't want pregnant women to see inside their own wombs—and thus recognize the humanity of their unborn children.

Just how powerful is this new technology? Tom Glessner, President of the National Institute of Family and Life Advocates, headquartered in Fredericksburg, Virginia, argues that the use of ultrasound technology promises to change the entire landscape of abortion in America.

"I'm not a prophet," Glessner told the reporter, "but I do have an educated feel for this thing and the bottom line is this: By the end of this decade, we want to have 1,000 pregnancy centers becoming medical centers with ultrasound. If those 1,000 medical centers provide, on the average, 1,500 ultrasounds for abortion-minded women per year, we will see the number of abortions in this country plummeting to 500,000 a year, compared to the current 1.3 million."

In the Newhouse News Service article, Rebekah Nancarrow recalled that she had first visited Planned Parenthood in 2001, when she discovered she was pregnant. She went because her boyfriend was pressuring her to have an abortion. Nancarrow received an ultrasound test at the Planned Parenthood clinic, she related, but was not allowed to see the results because, as she was told, "that will only make it harder on you."

This was just too much for Nancarrow, who then visited the Dallas Pregnancy Resource Center, where she recalls telling the personnel, "I'm only here to give you one shot to get another view on this."

That one shot was all it took. Once she saw the image of her living baby, she lost all interest in an abortion.

"I honestly have to say that had I not had the sonogram (ultrasound), I would have had the abortion. But that sonogram just confirmed 100 percent to me that this was a life within me, not a tissue or a glob."

The panic setting in among the abortion rights crowd is understandable. Once women see the baby living in their womb, abortion is revealed for what it is—the murder of a living human being.

Needless to say, this gets in the way of the abortion rights agenda and cuts into the profits of the abortion industry. Once the image of the baby is on the screen, the writing is on the wall for the abortionists.

The logic of panic is the only explanation for many pro-abortion responses to the use of ultrasound technology. Writing for *The American Prospect*, one of the nation's most liberal political journals, Matthew Nisbet accused General Electric of promoting the pro-life agenda by advertising its new "4D Ultrasound" imaging system.

Back in 2002, GE ran a series of television advertisements demonstrating the use of the powerful imaging technology. As Ewan McColl's ballad, "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" played in the background, a couple viewed their baby's face for the first time.

The pro-abortion movement fears the impact of ultrasound technology the way Howard Hughes feared germs.

The Web site of the Feminist Women's Health Center, a group that operates abortion clinics in several states, warns women that they should stay away from crisis pregnancy centers altogether. "Some of these centers offer ultrasound (also known as sonograms). But that does not mean the personnel operating the equipment are medically trained." In truth, most states require a licensed physician to be present as the test is administered, but what the abortion advocates really fear is that the ultrasound technicians will be medically trained.

When all else fails, the Feminist Women's Health Center shifts to scare tactics. "If you discover you are seeking help from an anti-abortion facility, protect yourself from further harassment. Leave the premises immediately and do not return. When you do locate a professional clinic that offers information about all options, be sure to share your . . . experience with your new counselor so that whatever distortions and misinformation you may have received can be corrected."

There you have it. The abortion rights movement has finally met its match. The abortion industry is scared to death of the fetus, knowing that the mere image of a living baby in the womb is the refutation of every argument they can assert and all the coercion they would employ.

We stand at the threshold of a transformation in the struggle for life. In time, the impact of this one powerful technology may utterly reshape the abortion debate in America.

As Rebekah Nancarrow came to understand, she was carrying a baby, not a glob of tissue. That vision of life changed everything. Now, the question comes down to this: Who's afraid of the fetus?

