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Curriculum Mortae

Sometimes Indoctrination Is a Matter of Life and Death

by Karen Swallow Prior

In 2005, according to an annual survey of college freshmen by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, "only" 54.5 percent of first-year students agreed that "abortion should be legal." What this tells us is that when college kids first arrive on campus, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed with idealism, they exhibit a relative enthusiasm for life—that is, until the leftists and secularists who overwhelm academia dig their claws into them. Once this happens, research indicates that even the sizable minority who go so far as to actually count themselves pro-life is doomed to diminish. (And this surely can't be the result of learning per se, since virtually all of history's great thinkers—from Hippocrates to Maimonides to Mary Wollstonecraft—have opposed elective abortion.)

A 1996 Gallup poll of women's attitudes toward abortion showed that women with only a high-school education are more pro-life (47 percent) than pro-choice (37 percent). Among women who attend college without completing a four-year degree, the percentage who are pro-choice jumps to 59 percent. And among those who complete a four-year degree, the percentage identifying themselves as pro-choice skyrockets to 73 percent. You can imagine what happens in graduate school. Actually, you don't need to imagine what happens to pro-life attitudes in graduate school because I can tell you.

Signs of Life

Having undergone a rather abrupt and atypical shift to the pro-life view the summer after completing college, I entered my PhD program with all the enthusiasm of the newly converted. Noticing the posters, stickers, and flyers promoting various causes that adorned the other office doors in my department, I engaged in some interior decorating of my own. Soon, half of the door to the office I shared with another graduate student was gilded with my cleverest pro-life propaganda. I had to admit that it looked a bit odd next to the gay-themed flyers on the other half of the door, but hey, I thought, this is grad school, land of tolerance and diversity.

Unfortunately, my officemate didn't agree. The pro-life signs were "embarrassing," she said. She didn't want her students—or worse, her professors—to think that she was "anti-choice." ("So should I be worried about everyone thinking I was a lesbian?" I wondered.) My colleague resolved the problem the way all good liberals solve the problem of differing points of view: by silencing them. We "agreed" to denude the door and use only the space above our own desks for personal expression. Such was my welcome as an out-of-the-closet pro-lifer at a bastion of liberal learning. But this was merely a foreboding of even worse things to come. Ê

Some years later, I served at the same university as advisor to a pro-life undergraduate club that, as part of a week of pro-life activities on campus, sponsored a display of 4,400 white crosses memorializing the daily number of abortions in America. In response, a student writer for a campus newspaper had this to say about us pro-lifers:

Now it's up to us to fight back. If that means guarding the clinic doors with Uzis, then that's what will have to be done. Just once, I'd like to see someone blow up one of their churches . . . If you see one of [the pro-life students] showing their disgusting videos or playing with toy fetuses, do your part and spit at them. Kick them in the head. Give them the name of your therapist.

Fortunately, no physical harm was done to the pro-life students (or the churches) that week, but one-fourth of the crosses in the display were vandalized. And while the university affirmed the free-speech rights of the newspaper columnist, the next time our pro-life group planned an event, *our* free speech came with a price tag attached. Permission for another display, which had been granted through the proper administrative channels, was pulled by the university president, who demanded that we put up a hefty bond as "insurance" for any damage that might be inflicted by opponents of the display. If this sounds unconstitutional—a minor matter to radical liberals—it was. Our group sued the university, and although the school admitted no wrongdoing, it "agreed" in a settlement to pony up an amount many times that of the original bond and to change its policies so as to eliminate "viewpoint discrimination."

Facts of Life

Of course, viewpoint discrimination isn't the worst thing that can happen in an academic environment that's hostile to the protection of innocent human life. Although no studies on the rate of abortion among college students have been conducted, we do know that college-aged women obtain more abortions than any other age group. The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), the research arm of Planned Parenthood (America's largest abortion provider and the most thorough keeper of abortion statistics), reports that the rate of abortion among women aged 20-24 is 47 abortions per 1,000 women. AGI indicates that the high abortion rate among these women reflects not only an above-average pregnancy rate (which might be expected for reasons both sociological and biological), but also a higher proportion than in other age groups of pregnancies ending in abortion (29 percent). Furthermore, while the abortion rate overall has been declining steadily—and fairly dramatically in recent years—this age group has seen markedly less decline than other groups: While between 1994 and 2000, the rate dropped by as much as 39 percent among teenagers, the rate changed by only 10 percent or less among women aged 20 or older.

Anecdotal evidence paints an even starker picture. At one campus in one year, according to figures provided by Feminists for Life of America (FFLA), "of 3,000 college women, 600 had pregnancy tests; 300 of these tests were positive; and 6 women had babies." You don't need sophisticated research to verify this phenomenon. You need only spend some time on any college campus—where, at least if Tom Wolfe and your neighbor's frat-boy son are to be believed, the coeds are humping like bunnies—and just try to find one visibly pregnant student. You might as well look for health food at KFC. And the lack of pregnant students on campus can't be attributed to the wonders of contraception either, since according to AGI, 54 percent of women who have abortions used some form of contraception during the month they became pregnant. So what is happening to all the pregnant women and their babies?

Plainly—even taking into consideration students who might have miscarried or dropped out of school—abortion is largely the answer to this question. Indeed, women aged 20-24 obtain 33

percent of all abortions, according to AGI. But significantly, 75 percent of women who have abortions report that they do so because continuing the pregnancy would interfere with other responsibilities, including school. And while many high schools have programs to assist pregnant and parenting girls, America's colleges provide arguably the least supportive of any environment for a pregnant woman.

Life Support

Recently, one college student faced firsthand not only the predicament that an unplanned pregnancy can bring, but also a glimpse into what it means to be pregnant on a typical campus where support for such students is nowhere to be found.

Shortly after completing an internship at FFLA, Chaunie found her strong pro-life stance put to the ultimate test. At the campus health clinic where her pregnancy was confirmed, Chaunie was left sitting alone in a chair, she says, "crying hysterically while the nurse examined her chart." As Chaunie reports on the FFLA website, "after a minute or two," the nurse "stood up and said, 'I have other patients to see, you can stay here if you want.' She left me crying and alone to see the only other patient in the center, a young man with a sore throat."

Despite her pro-life views and a supportive family, Chaunie admits that she felt the same kind of fear and pressure that drive many women in her situation to choose abortion. These feelings were only exacerbated over the following weeks as she discovered the lack of any tangible support for pregnant students on her college campus. Chaunie reports:

My struggles continued after my visit to health services. I gathered all the information I could find about student insurance. Not one plan covered pregnancy. In fact, all of them specifically stated that they would not cover pregnancy. Though the university used to have daycare on campus, I learned the President got rid of it a few years ago. Housing was another disappointment; once again, the university used to have family housing but dissolved those dorms for the better-paying first-year students. I have to tell you, as president of my college pro-life group and an active advocate for women, it was frightening to see the complete lack of resources and support available for pregnant and parenting students at my school.

Despite finding herself in an academic environment hostile to her choice to have her baby, Chaunie—now married to the father of her baby—is still in school and nearing her child's birth. Clearly, her choice to have a child in such a climate is no less than a revolutionary act.

Viva la revoluci—n!

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