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Abortion Pain

By Fr. John Breck

This past summer we ran a column in this space on the theme “Torture in the Womb,” which spoke of the acute pain a child in utero experiences during an abortion. Recently a significant number of articles have appeared, in medical journals and in the popular press, providing further evidence that unborn children are sentient beings from at least the 20th week of the pregnancy, and probably much earlier. For them, abortion can only be experienced as “cruel and unusual punishment” for the simple fact of being alive.

A number of Orthodox Christians have been especially concerned with another aspect of abortion pain: the anguish experienced by so many “aborted mothers” who suffer from what is now called “post-abortion syndrome.” Vera Faith Lord of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese has dedicated herself to providing both information and consolation to women who, like her, have undergone an abortion. She has founded “Alpha-Omega Life,” an organization that recognizes that there are “aborted fathers” as well. Vera travels the country, speaking to groups who are open to her vital message. She can be contacted by the following means—phone: 410-761-8027; e-mail alphaomegalife@pghmail.com; mailing address: 343 Gatewater Court #202, Glen Burnie, MD 21060.

For many years Father Jason Kappanadze has been active in the Orthodox pro-life movement. Recently he posted the following item on an internet forum list. Its insights regarding the pain experienced both by aborted infants and “aborted mothers” should be of interest to “Life in Christ” readers, as to anyone who is concerned with the social, medical and moral consequences of *Roe v. Wade*.

Norma McCorvey's (Jane Roe's) hope of reversing *Roe v. Wade* by appealing the original Supreme Court decision, was denied in federal court this week. But certain new realities have been made their way into the mind of at least one federal judge and emerged in the written decision. This excerpt from a recent "National Review" article describes this:

What was surprising, though, was Judge Edith Jones' powerful five-page separate opinion. While Judge Jones agreed that the court had no power to reopen the original *Roe* decision, her opinion assures that McCorvey's arguments did not fall entirely on deaf ears. Calling the original decision, an "exercise in raw judicial power," Judge Jones observed that McCorvey's voluminous new evidence "goes to the balance *Roe* struck between the choice of the mother and the life of her unborn child." Citing both the testimony of post-abortive women and scientific studies, Judge Jones reasoned that the evidence "suggests that women may be affected emotionally and physically for years afterward and may be more prone to engage in high risk, self-destructive conduct as a result of having had abortions." The same evidence took aim at the myth of a close collaborative relationship between abortionist and patient. Testimony of workers at abortion clinics showed that "women are often herded through their procedures with little or no medical or emotional counseling." Indeed, one former abortion clinic worker described how abortion physicians she worked with would work on commission and perform 10 to 12 abortions per hour.

Judge Jones further cited evidence showing dramatic advances in the sociological status of women—especially unwed women—that undermine the necessity of abortion. "No longer does the unwed mother face social ostracism, and government programs offer medical care, social services, and even...the option of leaving a newborn directly in the care of the state until it can be adopted."

But perhaps most importantly, Judge Jones cited evidence showing that neonatal and medical science "now graphically portrays, as science was unable to do 31 years ago, how a baby develops sensitivity to external stimuli and to pain much earlier than was then believed." The evidence reviewed by Judge Jones on the issue of fetal pain was similar to that produced by the federal government in recent trials on the constitutionality of partial-birth abortion. There, an Oxford-educated specialist in neonatal pain, Dr. Kanwaljeet Anand, testified that unborn children are likely to feel pain in the womb by 20 weeks of gestation—

perhaps even earlier—and that abortion could therefore cause excruciating pain for an unborn child. Reviewing similar evidence before her, Judge Jones concluded that “if courts were to delve into the facts underlying Roe ‘s balancing scheme with present day knowledge, they might conclude that the woman’s ‘choice’ is far more risky and less beneficial, and the child’s sentience far more advanced, than the Roe court knew.”