THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE

Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics

Dr Bernard Nathanson's Pro-Life Legacy Endures

Dr. Bernard Nathanson, an obstetrician who died in 2011 at the age of 84, was and continues to be a powerful figure in the pro-life movement and the Catholic faith. **His conversion, leadership, and passion to follow truth has given a voice to the voiceless, and is remembered to this day as we commemorate the tenth anniversary of his passing.**

As a young adult, Nathanson found himself involved with the pro-abortion movement. As a medical student, he assisted his girlfriend in obtaining an abortion. He would carry on an infatuation for the legalization of abortion, later becoming an abortionist himself. Over 60,000 children were aborted under his two year practice as the Director of the Center for Reproductive and Sexual Health. In the 1960s, Nathanson co-founded the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL). He was determined to destigmatize abortion and eliminate all legal restrictions to it. The Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision was heavily influenced by Nathanson's abortion propaganda, a strategy which shifted public sentiment, particularly by painting the Catholic Church as oppressive towards women. His vision for this demonic cause was not limited to the U.S., but would soon be globalized. **Convinced by the veracity of his conscience, he promoted abortion as a medical issue and a solution to financial instability, detaching it from morality and God. He even performed the abortion of his second child, which he confesses in his second book, *The Hand of God.***

Later in life, Nathanson, was faced with serious doubts about the decisions that had granted him his fame, power and wealth. He accredits this realization to the technological advances made in the field of obstetrics and fetology. Nathanson is quoted saying, **"As a scientist I know, not believe, know, that human life begins at conception. Although I am not a formal religionist - there is a divinity of existence which commands us to declare a final and irreversible halt to this infinitely sad and shameful crime against humanity."** Thus, with conviction, he would conclude "the unmistakable humanity of the unborn child." By 1979, the weight of this very truth drove him out of the practice of abortion and with a new found zeal, **Nathanson dedicated his life to fighting against the pro-abortion movement, particularly through his chilling documentary, "The Silent Scream," and other writings.**

Shortly after his conversion to the pro-life movement, came another conversion; this time to the Catholic faith. Under the guidance of Cardinal John O'Connor and many others in the pro-life movement, alongside Our Holy Mother, Nathanson was drawn to Catholicism.

In 1996, he converted from atheism to the fullness of the truth through the reception of Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and Confirmation.

There is great respect to be had for those who have the humility to seek truth, accept it, and change even an obstinate heart. Dr. Nathanson was neither concerned with what the world thought nor his own self-regard, therefore his humility and commitment to honesty are what inspire me the most. His life is a modern example of the lives of Saints such as St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Paul, both of whom have inspired people with their relentless search for the truth. The study of Dr. Nathanson's life can invigorate those who are lukewarm and those trapped in fallacies. As Elie Wiesel, who saw the beauty of our human dignity through the horrors of the Holocaust, once stated, "We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." I hope that those reading his story can appreciate his impact on the world and recognize that knowing the fullness of the truth is our greatest asset to the pro-life movement.

Sonali George is a senior Biology Major at Stony Brook University. She converted from Protestantism to Catholicism (Syro-Malankara) and from pro-abortion to pro-life when she was nineteen. In her junior year of college, she started the first chapter of Students for Life of America at Stony Brook, and prays to see an end to abortion in her lifetime.