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There's a life at the heart of the matter

By Andrea Mrozek
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There's some irony in the passing away of Dr. Henry Morgentaler. Regrettably, Morgentaler, whose name will forever be connected with opening Canada up to abortion on demand, cannot be celebrated. Making abortion mainstream is something few can celebrate.

Instead, some will celebrate the word "choice." This neutral term is now a universal euphemism for abortion. People will freely say, "I'm pro-choice." Yet the term holds in it another irony: That for so many women, abortion was only an answer in the absence of real choice. The father left, there's no money, I can't tell my parents, I can't cope, we'll never be able to make it work, and so on.

Abortion is the "choice" in that critical moment in a woman's life when hope went on holiday.

This is Morgentaler's legacy: The death of a child, renamed a choice, and without limit in Canada.

He deserves neither all the credit nor all the blame, of course. When the Supreme Court of Canada heard the now infamous Morgentaler case in 1988, their intention was not to bestow abortion as an unfettered right. Instead, the court went so far as to acknowledge a legitimate public interest in restricting abortion, and then threw the question back to Parliament — which has been holding the ball ever since.

As a result, we have no law at all and abortion is used in ways it was never intended. About one-quarter of pregnancies in Canada end in abortion.

Initially, for its advocates, abortion was a measure of last resort. Though statistics are sorely lacking, in Canada we turn a blind eye to more than 100,000 abortions annually. The genuinely tough cases, don't make up more than two or three per cent.

Though abortion is rare in the third trimester, there is in fact no law against abortion at any time, for any reason. Doctors and bio-ethicists acknowledge cases of abortion for cleft palate, for Down syndrome and for other reasons that can only be diagnosed late term.

Abortion is also used to eradicate one gender: Women. While this unique form of barbarism is late to Canada, we do have firm evidence it is happening here. And in other countries it's just a matter of counting the millions of missing girls.

Perhaps the richer irony is that in face of this injustice, Morgentaler's supporters maintain abortion as central to women's rights. How can surgically circumventing women's natural reproductive cycles advance the cause of women's rights? How does this advance the lasting well-being and dignity of women?

Sex can result in pregnancy. If carrying a pregnancy to term is a "choice," it reduces our responsibility to help mothers who face difficult circumstances. Certainly, it's all the more difficult to justify any number of programs to help mothers if they didn't have to have children in the first place. A community can now abdicate responsibility from caring for children by declaring them to be "not my problem," but rather, "her choice."

Under choice rhetoric, whether children are punishments or gifts to be welcomed or resented, depends entirely on the woman. So total is the woman's right to decide that the other party to the pregnancy — the man — gets only the choice to walk away. Small wonder then that so many do.

Vicky Green is a social worker living in Ottawa, who has had three abortions, the last one done by Henry Morgentaler. Vicky told me of how she cried in front of him and said "I don't want to do this to my baby." To which Morgentaler replied it wasn't one and she'd have more.

It's too convenient to simply ignore the life at the heart of the matter. Ultimately, the choice is whether to keep a child, or not. There's a life who, granted, is growing within the woman, but has a heartbeat. That heartbeat was something Morgentaler chose not to hear.

It's a dance to celebrate Morgentaler for introducing choice, without referring to the choice itself. A bit like celebrating Steve Jobs, without ever once mentioning an Apple computer.

And it's ironic, because for so many women, the abortion clinic is at the end of a road on which all other choices have faded from view.

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