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NewsNote: Mugged by Ultrasound

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One of the most important books of the twentieth century was a memoir about an intellectual and moral conversion. The book was *Witness* by Whittaker Chambers, and in it he chronicled his abandonment of faith in communism. But Whittaker Chambers had not only believed in Communism — he had been a Soviet spy. The brutal realities of the Soviet regime became too much for Chambers to ignore or deny, and thus he abandoned Communism and wrote *Witness* as his testimony. Even now, more than a half-century after its publication, the book makes for compelling reading.



The same is true for an article that just recently appeared in *The Weekly Standard*. In “[Mugged by Ultrasound](#),” David Daleiden and Jon A. Shields reveal a reality becoming more and more common — abortion workers turning pro-life.

Abortion activists, they note, are usually detached from the actual process of abortion. Thus, they can hide behind arguments about a woman’s “right to choose” or “reproductive freedom.” But, as Daleiden and Shields explain, those who are actually performing the abortions cannot hide from the horrible reality, and some of them cannot handle the horror. Eventually, “a noteworthy number have found the conflict unbearable and have defected to the pro-life cause.”

Daleiden and Shields trace some of these defections to two developments that changed the experience of providing abortions. First, the usual means of aborting second-trimester fetuses around the time of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) was saline injection. But, that is no longer the case. Those abortions are now done by “dilation and evacuation” (D&E), which involves the dismemberment of the fetus within the womb. For doctors and others involved in a D&E abortion, there is no way to escape the horrifying reality of that procedure.

They write:

*Such studies are few. In general, abortion providers have censored their own emotional trauma out of concern to protect abortion rights. In 2008, however, abortionist Lisa Harris endeavored to begin “breaking the silence” in the pages of the journal *Reproductive Health Matters*. When she herself was 18 weeks pregnant, Dr. Harris performed a D&E abortion on an 18-week-old fetus. Harris felt her own child kick precisely at the moment that she ripped a fetal leg off with her forceps:*

Instantly, tears were streaming from my eyes—without me—meaning my conscious brain—even being aware of what was going on. I felt as if my response had come entirely from my body, bypassing my usual cognitive processing completely. A message seemed to travel from my hand and my uterus to my tear ducts. It was an overwhelming feeling—a brutally visceral response—heartfelt and unmediated by my training or my feminist pro-choice politics. It was one of the more raw moments in my life.

Lisa Harris charged that the abortion industry had “not owned up to the reality of the fetus, or the reality of fetal parts.” Amazingly, Harris remained in the abortion business, but she could not deny what she knew about the killing of the unborn

Daleiden and Shields tell of Paul Jarrett, a doctor who did leave the business after performing 23 abortions. Jarrett explained why: “As I brought out the rib cage, I looked and saw a tiny, beating heart . . . and when I found the head of the baby, I looked squarely in the face of another human being—a human being that I just killed.”

The second development that has changed the moral landscape of abortion is the ultrasound image. Bernard Nathanson, who at one time was performing more abortions than anyone else in the Western world, famously converted to the pro-life cause, largely prompted by seeing ultrasound images of unborn babies. Nathanson, who once aborted one of his own children, could no longer deny the reality. Daleiden and Shields make clear that Nathanson has been followed in this defection by others:

The most recent example is Abby Johnson, the former director of Dallas-area Planned Parenthood. After watching, via ultrasound, an embryo “crumple” as it was suctioned out of its mother’s womb, Johnson reported a “conversion in my heart.” Likewise, Joan Appleton was the head nurse at a large abortion facility in Falls Church, Virginia, and a NOW activist. Appleton performed thousands of abortions with aplomb until a single ultrasound-assisted abortion rattled her. As Appleton remembers, “I was watching the screen. I saw the baby pull away. I saw the baby open his mouth. . . . After the procedure I was shaking, literally.”

David Daleiden and Jon Shields have done a masterful job of explaining why these two developments have altered the landscape of abortion in America. The defection of so many abortion providers and of those involved in that industry is a story that must be told. At a very important level, this is truly heartening news in the midst of tragedy.

We must also see clearly that the revulsion toward abortion that marks these defections is based in truth — the truth that the inhabitant of the womb is not a mere “fetus,” but a baby. Paul Jarrett looked into the face of “another human being—a human being that I just killed.” Joan Appleton “saw the baby open its mouth.”

Similarly, the ultrasound image reveals the undeniable humanity of the baby within the womb. This remarkable technology saves lives — just by revealing the baby in all of its humanity.

From a Christian perspective, the recognition of the baby’s humanity must be traced to common grace and general revelation. The womb is revealed to be inhabited by a human being who deserves nothing less than our full protection and respect. The heart and mind cannot deny what the eyes have seen.

The late Irving Kristol once explained his own intellectual conversion as having been “mugged by reality.” Daleiden and Shields get it just right when they describe these former abortion providers and workers as having been “mugged by ultrasound.” May those muggings be multiplied — and may they spread to the American public as well.

I am always glad to hear from readers and listeners. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

David Daleiden and Jon A. Shields, “[Mugged by Ultrasound: Why So Many Abortion Workers Have Turned Pro-life](#),” *The Weekly Standard*, January 25, 2010.

