

A TALE FROM THE FRONT LINES OF THE ABORTION WAR

A new book by Monica Miller, Ph.D tells the story of a life fighting abortion

Reviewed by Mark Sullivan (Catholic World Report: December 4, 2012)

“The time may come when we date the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet system from the appearance of *Gulag*,” wrote a German reviewer of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s masterpiece, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*. It may sound crazy, but the time may also come when we date the end of legalized abortion in the United States from the publication of *Abandoned: The Untold Story of the Abortion Wars* by Monica Migliorino Miller (Saint Benedict Press, 2012).

I recently began reading the abridged version of *Gulag*, and I was stuck by Solzhenitsyn’s descriptions of the injustice and the powerlessness of the people in communist Russia — in particular, by how fittingly his descriptions of the power structures of the Soviet system could be applied to the institutions that promote and protect legalized abortion in this country. I thought it would make an interesting story, so I requested a review copy of *Abandoned*. I thought it would make a good point of departure to talk about Solzhenitsyn.

I’ve never read a whole book about abortion. I’m a “good” pro-lifer who will on occasion pass out pro-life voting guides to his friends. I have a pro-life bumper sticker on my car, and I’ve been to the March for Life in Washington, D.C. a few times. I thought I knew all I needed to know about abortion, and that if I learned anything more, I’d just get more upset and frustrated. At least that is what I thought until I read *Abandoned*.

I couldn’t put it down. It wasn’t what I expected. It is not an abstract book of philosophy, biology, ethics, politics, or theology — even though Miller has her doctorate in theology and teaches at Madonna University in Michigan. It’s not a rehash of the same old pro-life rhetoric or arguments. This is the story of Miller’s involvement in the pro-life movement in Chicago and Milwaukee from 1976 to 1993. Her activities were controversial and sometimes shocking, but she never tells the reader what to do or think. The reader is forced to face the ugly truth of abortion and then decide what he is going to do about it.

Miller has her undergraduate degree in theater. She knows drama. She knows how to build scenes and hold the reader’s attention. She kept a journal during her years of pro-life work, so in writing this book, she was able to recreate scenes and conversations that give you the “you are there” feel.

I keep thinking, “This book would make a great movie.” It is the classic story of the underdog fighting the big bad bureaucracy to save the innocent. It would be America’s version of *Schindler’s List*, or *Erin Brockovich* with more modest clothing. It may be a tough sell, but I’m hoping a pro-life movie

director will give it a try.

The movie would open with a group of people digging through a dumpster behind a Chicago abortion clinic, collecting the remains of aborted children and then bringing them back to the garage of pro-life pioneer and activist Joe Scheidler. *Saving Private Ryan* won all sorts of awards, and it had a gory beginning.

I would be a liar if I said the beginning of the book didn't shock me. I was also shocked when Miller talked about taking pictures of the aborted babies. The *New York Times* ran a spread of her pictures a few years ago. As this book has sunk into my mind, I've realized that the natural aversion to the gruesome reality of abortion is the great ally of those who support legalized abortion. Planned Parenthood can then hide behind "cancer screenings" and "providing nutritional services" for poor women because everyone else would rather avert their eyes.

How different is collecting the remains of unborn babies from reverencing the remains of saints and martyrs? You could say the saints and the martyrs made a *choice* to be holy or to give up their lives rather than their faith. Therefore, they merit a certain amount of special treatment. The unborn weren't able to make that choice. They could have chosen *not* to be saints or martyrs.

Maybe that's making the issue too abstract. The real problem is that digging boxes of aborted babies out of the dumpster is disturbing. Did they wear gloves or big wetsuits or something? Miller doesn't tell us. But it must have been gross for the early Christians cleaning up and collecting the remains of the martyrs after a persecution. Performing a work of corporal mercy of that caliber requires a special grace. If it makes me uncomfortable, maybe that is a sign that I need to do something.

I could keep a copy of *Abandoned* or some of Miller's pictures at my desk at work just in case the topic of abortion comes up. I could say, "Would you like to see the results of a woman's choice or the type of 'health care' Planned Parenthood provides? The camera doesn't lie." I'm sure I won't have many takers, but nobody wants to be accused of living in a fantasy world. If you think having an abortion is like deleting an e-mail — it just disappears like it never existed — then tell me about your pet unicorn or the dragon that lives in your basement. Collecting aborted babies and taking their pictures is extreme because the injustice of abortion is extreme. The question then becomes not only, "What do you do about it?" but, "How far do you go?"

In 1995, Blessed John Paul II wrote in [*Evangelium Vitae*](#), "*Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection (73).*"

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that "it is legitimate for [citizens] to defend their own rights and those of their fellow citizens against the abuse of this authority within the limits of the

natural law and the law of the gospel” (CCC: 2242).

In some cases the action is clear. If the government made it illegal to have more than three children and you are pregnant with your fourth, you are obligated not to follow a law requiring you to have an abortion.

Miller participated in “rescues” — blocking the entrances to abortion clinics, preventing women from having abortion. She also participated in activities that prohibited abortion doctors from getting to work. Are these activities a legitimate defense of the unborn against the abuse of authority and within the limits of the natural law and the law of the gospel?

On trial in 1991 for blocking access to abortion facilities, Miller said, “We have to treat unborn children like human beings, and if a human being was on the street being pulverized and torn limb from limb, I wouldn’t just write my congressman, I wouldn’t just get a picket sign and say please stop doing that, I wouldn’t just try to persuade an assailant from beating and tearing limb from limb this helpless child.... I’d put my own body between the assailant and the victim.”

Miller was arrested several times and spent several months in jail for putting her own body between the assailant and the victim. Once she got married and started having children, she couldn’t risk getting arrested and jailed. She had to put her family first, which complicates the matter of how far anyone can or should go in protecting the unborn.

Regardless, Miller says that the blocking of clinic entrances was a vocation for her and that others should assess their own consciences on the matter.

What we learn from her rescues and subsequent trials and incarceration is the stress put on the judicial system to uphold an unjust law. Injustice is compounded with more injustice, which has the unintentional consequence of making the story inspirational for pro-lifers.

Courtroom drama

Imagine you are on trial, like Miller was, for sitting in the entrance to an abortion clinic so that women can’t get in to have abortions. Before you testify the judge tells you, “You may not use the words ‘unborn children,’ and ‘abortion clinic.’ Furthermore you will not be permitted to use the words ‘fetus,’ ‘embryo,’ ‘killing,’ or ‘murder.’” You say that you can’t comply, and the judge says that you can’t testify.

The judge has already “corrected” a previous defendant: “Do you understand now that you just state what happened on March 8, 1986, what did you do, what did they do, and avoid what I would say is language that’s colored by opinion, and I think that...[words] like abortion mills should not be used. This is the Bread and Roses facility when you talk about the facility, the Bread and Roses clinic. Okay?” These quotes are from the official court transcripts, spoken by Milwaukee Circuit Court Judge Patricia McMahon.

When Miller was on trial in the early 1990s for resisting arrest during while blocking a clinic, a judge said that her crimes “victimize the unborn children the defendant is determined to save. To the extent that her strategy is perceived as fanatical and dangerous, it undermines support for the passionately reasoned arguments that others offer in opposition to abortion.” He added that she victimized the community by denying others the right to obtain medical services at those clinics and by wasting law enforcement resources that could have been used elsewhere but were instead required to arrest her.

Finally, “the defendant’s crimes victimize democracy. Her crimes convey a clear message: if you are certain you are right, you may break the law; if the Supreme Court says you are wrong, you may ignore it.” These words are from the official court transcript as spoken by Judge Charles Schudson. The case had been given to two other pro-life judges, Louise Tesmer and Dominic Amato, but each of them excused themselves citing their pro-life views. Schudson had no problem announcing he was “solidly pro-choice” when he took the case.

Miller received the maximum sentence.

Gory photos

What can you do when the judge thinks you are committing crimes against democracy? Show him the evidence of what abortion is. That’s how you get to collecting the remains of aborted babies from the dumpsters behind abortion clinics. (That’s not the only reason. The babies were given funerals and burials.) These babies don’t have a chance to write the *Gulag*, as Solzhenitsyn did. Their testimony against the injustice of abortion can only be captured by photographs of their broken bodies. Miller includes a few of these pictures in the middle of the book as well as a partial photo on the cover.

How “bad” are the pictures? It depends on how sensitive you are to such things. I am very squeamish. It’s an effort for me not to pass out when I’m having blood-work done. I’ve never watched a horror movie.

I barely glanced at the photos in the book. Last night when my two-year old daughter handed me one of her little plastic baby dolls, I jumped. It reminded me of one of the photos of an aborted baby.

But you can skip the pictures. The descriptions of women having abortions in the book are few and brief, and, I thought, necessary. I read the whole book. There are some tough spots, but not enough to make you close the book or skip pages. Ultimately, *Abandoned* isn’t about gore. It is about what it means to be pro-life — to fight spiritual crisis head-on. I would predict that if 1,000 people read this book, 1,000 people would start new pro-life initiatives — all non-violent.

“I wouldn’t advocate bombing an abortion clinic, for example, because you are not there for the woman. The bomber bombs the place but he is removed from the situation.... I do what I do

because I want to enter into the suffering of Christ. I don't want to be a person of violence. I want to lay down my life for my neighbor, and to do that I have to be one who becomes vulnerable in the situation involving a rescue," Miller said while on trial in 1991.

Miller's book is a reminder of the importance of individual initiative and participation. The law of the land may say that abortion is legal, and judges may be forced to uphold it for that reason, but Miller shows repeatedly that outside of the courtroom, in the more important arena of people's hearts, there is still much that is up for grabs. Sidewalk counseling outside abortion clinics was another activity in which Miller was involved. Although the practice is sometimes criticized for not often succeeding in preventing women from getting abortions, Miller explains that it's not necessarily the number of abortions that are prevented that is important in this case. What are important are the acts of love shown to the babies that will be aborted. It may be the only act of love and sacrifice those babies will ever know.

Sidewalk counseling is also limited in that it is late in the process. A woman going into an abortion clinic has already made the painful decision to abort and is looking to get things over with quickly.

Still, there are success stories. Miller tells the story of a mother of six whose doctor told her that she needed to get an abortion because she was too sick to carry the baby. Miller and a friend talked to her outside the abortion clinic and the woman and her husband — who were Catholics — changed their minds and kept the baby. It turns out that the woman's "grave illness" was morning sickness. Morning sickness! Morning sickness, while extremely unpleasant for the mother, is a sign of a healthy pregnancy.

While on trial in 1991, Miller said, "What's going to overcome abortion is not bombing clinics. It's not marches in the street. It's not even political action. Ultimately, we're dealing with a profound spiritual crisis of the human heart in this country. The only way to overcome something like that is love, through true sacrifice of the inner self in which you, myself, whomever, lay down their life." Miller has the formula, and it works.