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# **Dr. Bernard Nathanson: A Story of Metanoia**

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**ABSTRACT:** Bernard A. Nathanson (1926-2011), was a professionally well-recognized and successful New York obstetrician and gynecologist. An avowed atheist as a young man through his middle age, Nathanson was a co-founder of the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws, whose activities are credited with hastening the liberalization of abortion law in New York State. Intent on increasing the accessibility and promoting the acceptance of abortion on demand, Dr. Nathanson taught and published journal articles on the operative techniques and on the results from large numbers of these procures. During his tenure as director of the largest abortion clinic in the Western World, Nathanson presided over 60,000 abortions, and he performed more than 1,500 in his own practice. His studies of embryology and evidence from emerging technologies to monitor and examine intrauterine fetal development led Nathanson to question the morality of voluntarily interrupting pregnancy, thence to rejecting abortion procedures from his own clinical practice altogether, and eventually to become involved in anti-abortion, pro-life activities. An influential writer, speaker and film maker, these experiences and witnessing the love and prayer of other pro-life supporters turned Nathanson to notions of God, and finally reading and personal prayer guided him from secular atheism to Christianity.

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Dr. Bernard Nathanson is a name, a man and a life story that we all should know, but too few do. I saw Dr. Nathanson around the hospital a few times and maybe at a medical meeting or so, when I was an Obstetrics and Gynecology resident at Columbia University-Presbyterian Hospital in New York during the late 1960's. But I never knew

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him; probably, we were never introduced. Then, when I was on the Gynecology Service in the Department of Surgery, across town at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center during 1969-1971, I heard rumors from colleagues that, anticipating repeal of the State's abortion laws, a lot of money was being made by surgeons doing abortions at the Hospital for Joint Diseases in Harlem. It was not until just a few years ago, some 50 years later, when I came across a photo of Dr. Nathanson on the dust jacket of his book, *Aborting America*, that I recognized its author who had so much to do with the movement to legalize and promote the practice of abortion on demand in New York and in the United States.

Bernard N. Nathanson was born in New York City on July 31, 1926. Had he lived beyond 2011, he now would be 92 years old. Too bad that he isn't alive, still; because Dr. Nathanson could share his story of *metanoia* better than anyone else can convey. According to his own account, Bernard Nathanson was the son of a secular Jewish father, a successful obstetrician and gynecologist, who practiced mainly at New York's St. Luke's Hospital.<sup>1</sup> Though from a desperately poor immigrant family in Montreal, Bernard's father by own wits and herculean efforts was able to study at McGill University and graduate from the medical school.<sup>2</sup> The marriage of Bernard's parents was conflicted, and the relationships between father and mother and their two offspring were stress filled.<sup>3</sup> Bernard Nathanson describes his father as profoundly suspicious, domineering and overbearing, implicating, somewhat, their father's traits and behavior in the suicide of Bernard's sister at age 49 years.<sup>4</sup> Bernard writes that his father celebrated the High Holydays and that Bernard, himself, had Bar Mitzvah, but in other ways the immediate family is not depicted as being earnestly religious.<sup>5</sup> And as a young and middle-aged adult, Bernard was a self-proclaimed atheist.<sup>6</sup>

Ambitious for his son to follow him in the profession of Obstetrics and Gynecology, when the time came, the senior Dr. Nathanson, through close connections since graduation and continued contributions to McGill University, saw to it that Bernard was admitted there to study medicine.<sup>7</sup> During the years of these studies, young Bernard became involved with what sounds to be a mutually caring, intimate and ultimately sexual relationship with a young Canadian woman who became pregnant.<sup>8</sup> Confiding this predicament to his father, Bernard was advised by him to secure the services of a

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<sup>1</sup> Nathanson, B. N., and R. N. Ostling. 1979. *Aborting America*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company. pp. 3, 5-6; Nathanson, B. N. 1996. *The Hand of God*. Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc. pp. 69-70.

<sup>2</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 1-4; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 6-12.

<sup>3</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 11-19, 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> Nathanson and Ostling. 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 2-6; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 13-15, 18-21, 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 5-6; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11, 16-20, 26-31, 33.

<sup>6</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 187, 191.

<sup>7</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5, 9; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>8</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 11-15; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 54-58.

competent abortionist.<sup>9</sup> Even though direct termination of pregnancy was illegal in Montreal at the time, Bernard's father provided sufficient funds for the operation.<sup>10</sup> Despite complications following the procedure, Bernard's lover expressed her pride in saving his money by negotiating with the abortionist for a lower fee.<sup>11</sup> Thereafter, though the couple continued their liaison, the relationship, it seems, was never quite the same.<sup>12</sup> Once again Bernard met his Canadian girlfriend for a brief sexual encounter in a shabby New York hotel, but by then the relationship had mutually cooled.<sup>13</sup> After medical school, Nathanson continued postgraduate studies at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago and in an Obstetrics and Gynecology residency at New York's Women's Hospital, during which he served an interlude as a medical officer in the U.S. Air Force, 1953-1955.<sup>14</sup>

Following his residency in 1957, young Dr. Nathanson entered the private practice of Obstetrics and Gynecology, affiliated with Women's Hospital.<sup>15</sup> During the course of his medical education and training experience and his thriving early practice in New York, where elective voluntary interruptions of pregnancy (VIPs) were then illegal, Nathanson describes his unexamined but honestly growing sense of injustice that while well-to-do women were able to secure so-called "indicated" abortions on the basis of often somewhat dubious psychiatric claims or by going abroad for VIPs in countries where the practice was tolerated, women without resources—poor women—were not.<sup>16</sup> In his own practice, Nathanson eventually included abortions for "psychiatric" indications and, when feasible, he referred other patients to professional abortionists for VIPs.<sup>17</sup> While working with poor patients, he was genuinely distraught seeing the morbidities and learning of deaths that sometimes could follow illegal abortions.<sup>18</sup>

In the culture of the 1960s, attitudes concerning authority, morality and promiscuity were changing, especially in cosmopolitan cities.<sup>19</sup> Through social connections, Nathanson met Larry Lader, a Harvard graduate, Marxist cum socialist, avid supporter

<sup>9</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, p. 12; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 55-57.

<sup>12</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, p. 14; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.* pp. 16-17; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 67-70.

<sup>15</sup> Nathanson BN 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

<sup>16</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 19-27, 39-41, 63; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>17</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 39-41, 63.

<sup>18</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11, 19-21; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80; Grimes, W. 2011. B. N. Nathanson, 84, dies; changed sides on abortion. *The New York Times*, February 21. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/22/us/22nathanson.html>) (accessed September 18, 2018); Vincent, S. 2011. Bernard Nathanson Dead at 84. *National Catholic Register*, February 21. (<http://www.ncregister.com-news/bernard-nathanson-dead-at-84>) (accessed September 4, 2018.).

<sup>19</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.

of legal birth control and abortion and the author of several books on these topics.<sup>20,21</sup> Their conversations and Nathanson's personal sense of unfairness which allowed women with financial means to procure "indicated" abortions or travel to other countries for VIPs convinced Nathanson that he was on the right side of the controversy regarding political demands to legalize elective abortions.<sup>22</sup> Meeting in Chicago, together with Lader, Betty Friedan and other advocates for legalizing abortion on demand, Bernard Nathanson by his professional credentials and expertise gave some credibility to the founding of the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) in 1969.<sup>23</sup> Dedicated to "the elimination of all laws that would compel any women to bear a child against her will," the NARAL campaign focused on their concept of a woman's right to control what happens to her own body, going so far as to mutilate and kill innocent, helpless human beings harbored in the woman's uterus.<sup>24</sup> NARAL's tactics involved frenzied staged demonstrations to gain intensive media attention; incessant criticism of Catholic Church hierarchy, which the association's propaganda falsely attributed to a male clergy's supposed misogynistic teachings on matters of birth control and abortion; developing talking points and distributing "educational materials," that Nathanson later vouched had grossly exaggerated the numbers of women who suffered morbidity or mortality from illegal abortions; and "political action," including lobbying candidates to gain support for the association's positions.<sup>25</sup> Responding to the activities and advertising of NARAL and the burgeoning radical feminist movement, in less than one year the New York Legislature passed a bill, that was signed into law by Governor Nelson Rockefeller on April 11, 1970, thereby overturning the State's previous legal restrictions on abortion.<sup>26</sup> Already engaged in a busy private practice, which included

<sup>20</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30; Nathanson BN. 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87; Martin, D. 2006. Lawrence Lader, champion of abortion rights, is dead at 86. *The New York Times*, May 10. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/10/nyregion/10lader.html>) (accessed July 26, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> Lader, L. 1979. *Power on the Left: American Radical Movements Since 1946*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company. pp. 223-226, 342-343; Lader, L. 2002. *Ideas Triumph: Strategies for Social Change and Progress*. Santa Ana, CA: Locks Press. pp. xi-xiv, 168-171; Lader, L. 1955. *The Margaret Sanger Story and Fight for Birth Control*. Garden City, NY: Double Day & Company; Lader, L. and M. Meltzer. 1969. *Margaret Sanger: Pioneer of Birth Control*. New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell Company; Lader L. 1966. *Abortion*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press; Lader, L. 1971. A guide to abortion laws in the United States. *Redbook* magazine 137(2):51-57, June; Lader, L. 1973. *Abortion II: Making the Revolution*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

<sup>22</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, p.31.

<sup>23</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 34-36, 49-51; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>24</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88, 99-101, 140-140-143; Nathanson, B. N. 1971. Suction curettage for early abortion: experience with 645 cases. *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology*. 14(1): 99-106.

<sup>25</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33, 50-53, 69-70, 85, 148-150, 155-156, 172, 193; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 89-92; George R. P. 2011. Bernard Nathanson: A life transformed by truth. *The Witherspoon Institute Public Discourse, the public discourse.com*, February 27. (<http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2011/02/2806>) (accessed September 4, 2018); Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70; Kovach, B. 1970. Rockefeller, signing abortion bill, credits women's groups. *The New York Times*, April 12. (<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/04/12/archives/rockefeller-signing-abortion-bill-credits-womens-groups.html>) (accessed September 18, 2018).

“indicated” *and* elective abortions on his own patients, voluntarily teaching medical students and resident physicians and serving as Chief of Gynecology at the Hospital for Joint Diseases in Harlem, Dr. Nathanson was prevailed upon by abortion proponents to increase the accessibility and acceptance of VIP by undertaking the direction of a dubitable outpatient abortion facility in midtown Manhattan.<sup>27</sup> Renamed the Center for Reproductive and Sexual Health (CRASH), under the credible direction of Nathanson, the Center quickly improved hygiene, safety, equipment, professional standards and the surgical proficiency of those abortionists who were retained, and still they were able to lower the fees.<sup>28</sup> In his capacity as the director at CRASH and serving as a clinical faculty member, Dr. Nathanson arranged university affiliations to provide student exposure and practical experience with abortion, and he personally taught “state-of-the-art” abortion techniques to medical trainees and other physicians.<sup>29</sup> The procedure and results of 26,000 ambulatory abortions done between July 1, 1970 and August 1, 1971, at CRASH, which had become the largest abortion clinic in the Western World, were published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*.<sup>30</sup> During the time of his short year and a half tenure as director at CRASH, Nathanson later estimated that he had “presided” over the performance of 60,000 abortions.<sup>31</sup>

Some other states followed New York’s liberalizing law permitting abortions by choice, but not the State of Texas.<sup>32</sup> In 1969, 21-year-old Norma McCorvey found that she was pregnant with her third child, and falsely claiming that she had been raped, Norma sought to terminate the pregnancy.<sup>33</sup> Seeking a case to challenge the State’s abortion statute, young attorneys Linda Coffee and Sarah Weddington filed an action on behalf of Norma McCorvey, using the pseudonym Jane Roe for the plaintiff, against the State of Texas, then defended by Dallas County District Attorney Henry Wade.<sup>34</sup> Working its way through the District and Circuit Appeals Courts on the grounds that

<sup>27</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 31, 77, 93; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 87, 92-93, 102-108.

<sup>28</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 93-145; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 102-108, 120.

<sup>29</sup> Nathanson BN. 1971. *loc. cit.*; Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, p. 144; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 91; George 2011. *loc. cit.*; Grimes 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Nathanson, B. N. 1972. Ambulatory abortion: Experience with 26,000 cases (July 1, 1970 to August 1, 1971). *New England Journal of Medicine*. 286(8): 403-407.

<sup>31</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 134.; Nathanson, B. N. 1974. Deeper into abortion. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 291(22): 1188-1190; Grimes 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> McCorvey, N. 1994. *I Am Roe. My Life, Roe v. Wade, and Freedom of Choice*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc. pp. 73-74, 119-120.

<sup>33</sup> McCorvey, N. 1994. *op. cit.*, pp. 104-122; Alpert Reyes, E., and M. Rourke M. 2017. Norma McCorvey, Once-anonymous plaintiff in landmark Roe vs. Wade abortion case, dies at 69. *Los Angeles Times*, February 18. (<http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-norma-mccorvey-snap-story.html>) (accessed September 7, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> McCorvey 1994. *op. cit.*, pp. 57-58, 74-75, 117-124; Alpert Reyes and Rourke 2017. *loc. cit.*; Langer, E. 2017. Norma McCorvey, Jane Roe of Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion nationwide, dies at 69. *The Washington Post*, February 18. ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/norma-mccorvey-jane-roe-of-roe-v-wade-decision-legalizing-abortion-dies-at-69/2017/02/18/24b83108-396e-11e6-8f7c-d4c723a2becb\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.865c6a92131d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/norma-mccorvey-jane-roe-of-roe-v-wade-decision-legalizing-abortion-dies-at-69/2017/02/18/24b83108-396e-11e6-8f7c-d4c723a2becb_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.865c6a92131d).) (accessed September 7, 2018).

the Texas law violated the Ninth Amendment of the United States Constitution, *Roe v. Wade* finally made it to the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) in 1970-1971.<sup>35</sup> By a 7-2 decision, SCOTUS found against the State of Texas and in favor of Jane Roe on January 22, 1973, based on the Court's majority interpretation of the plaintiff's "right to privacy" from "the Fourteenth Amendment's concept of personal liberty and restrictions upon state action, as we feel it is, or, as the District Court determined, in the Ninth Amendment's reservation of rights to the people."<sup>36, 37, 38</sup> Besides this pivotal case, a companion case *Doe v. Bolton*, decided the same day, and several related SCOTUS decisions pragmatically legalized abortion on demand in the USA, at least until the time of fetal viability.<sup>39, 40</sup>

Overworked with his private practice of Obstetrics and Gynecology and appointment as chief of the Obstetrics service at New York's St. Luke Hospital, Dr. Nathanson resigned the directorship of CRASH towards the end of 1972; though in practice he continued to do abortions for patients he judged to have a "compelling need."<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, Nathanson acknowledged personally performing with "no feelings, aside from the sense of accomplishment, the pride of expertise" more than 1,500 abortions, including the destruction of his own fetal son or daughter, who was conceived during an out-of-wedlock affair.<sup>42</sup>

With the emerging technologies available to obstetricians in the 1970s and having witnessed cardiac activity by Doppler in "embryos as early as six weeks" and electrocephalographic evidence of "human brain activity in embryos at eight weeks," Nathanson recognized that "life must be present," and he began to reassess his understanding of the nature and beginnings of human life.<sup>43</sup> This led him to propose and author an invited essay published also in the *New England of Medicine* on November 28, 1974.<sup>44</sup> Here, Nathanson concludes that in the "spectrum" of human life, "since the vast majority of pregnancies are carried successfully to term, abortion must be seen as the interruption of

<sup>35</sup> McCorvey 1994. *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127, 137-140.

<sup>36</sup> *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

<sup>37</sup> *The Constitution of the United States. The Bill of Rights & All Amendments.* (<http://constitutionus.com/>) (accessed August 5, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> By the time this decision was published, Ms. McCorvey had given birth and her 2 ½ year old baby girl had been adopted. (McCorvey 1994. *op. cit.*, pp. 126-131; McCorvey, N. 1997. *Won by Love*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers. p. 29; Alpert Reyes and Rourke 2017. *loc. cit.*; Langer 2017. *loc. cit.*).

<sup>39</sup> *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973); *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U.S. 179 (1973); *Planned Parenthood v. Danforth*, 428 U.S. 52 (1976); *Colautti v. Franklin*, 439 U.S. 379 (1979); *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, 492 U.S. 490 (1989); *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

<sup>40</sup> McCorvey 1994. *op. cit.*, p. 150; Langer 2017. *loc. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 126, 128.

<sup>42</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, p. 248; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 59-62; Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169, 196-197; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 125-130.

<sup>44</sup> Nathanson 1974. *loc. cit.*; Grimes *loc. cit.*



a process that would otherwise have produced a citizen of the world.”<sup>45</sup> In the end, “lies the infinitely agonizing truth, we are taking life.”<sup>46</sup> Nathanson offers no answer to the philosophical, political and moral dilemmas, but worries that post-*Roe v. Wade*, “With a completely permissive legal climate (‘that abortion must be unregulated by law’)...there is danger that society will lose a certain moral tension that has been a vital part of its fabric. In pursuing a course of unlimited and uncontrolled abortion over future years, we must not permit ourselves to sink to a debased level of utilitarian semiconscious.”<sup>47</sup> Nathanson resigned from the NARAL Board of Directors in early 1975.<sup>48</sup> Although he continued to endorse “abortion on demand” and to perform elective abortions in his professional practice, later that year Nathanson found himself arguing against aborting an “unplanned pregnancy” that was being sought by a long established patient with a residual limp after orthopedic surgeries to correct congenital skeletal deformities.<sup>49</sup> When this patient resisted his “pleas,” Nathanson writes that he “regretfully” went through with the abortion, but he began to ponder whether this operation should be included in a “religiously neutral, biologically informed” clinical practice.<sup>50</sup>

Nathanson wrote his seminal book, *Aborting America*<sup>51</sup> while he was still a proclaimed atheist.<sup>52</sup> In this book, Nathanson provides self-revealing autobiography about his personal and professional life and the development of his ethical views, and he discloses firsthand details about the movement to legalize and spread a notion of the general acceptability of abortion on demand.<sup>53</sup> At the time of this composition, Nathanson lists, discusses and rationalizes maternal conditions that he then believed could medically justify “indicated” abortions, a practice he continued through 1978;<sup>54</sup> but also he presents a well-reasoned treatment of the bioethical and social issues that argue against the conclusions put forth in the *Roe v. Wade* decision.<sup>55</sup> As he continued to study and rethink reproductive biology, embryology and fetology, he soon thereafter concluded that “there was no reason for an abortion at any time,” and in 1979, Nathanson did his last abortion.<sup>56</sup> He is quoted as stating: “No obstetrician practices with only one patient in mind.”<sup>57</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>49</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>50</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>51</sup> Nathanson, B. N., and Ostling RN. 1979. *Aborting America*. Garden City, NY; Doubleday & Company.

<sup>52</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>53</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 1-15, 46-79, 146-158, 160-179, 195-239.

<sup>54</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 242-248.

<sup>55</sup> Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, pp. 197, 207-210, 260-261; 280-281; Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>57</sup> McCombs, P. 1985. The ‘scream’ of Bernard Nathanson. *The Washington Post*, March 24. ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1985/03/24/the-scream-of-bernard-nathanson/ab86bd62-b5d9-4beb-b317-efbe21a73726/?utm\\_term=.bc3f0fe7e659](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1985/03/24/the-scream-of-bernard-nathanson/ab86bd62-b5d9-4beb-b317-efbe21a73726/?utm_term=.bc3f0fe7e659)) (accessed July 26, 2018).

Real-time prenatal ultrasound scanning became clinically available to obstetricians in the early 1980s.<sup>58</sup> Wanting to know what happens when the abortionist “puts an instrument into a uterus and he turns on a motor, and the suction machine goes on and something is vacuumed out,” Nathanson in 1984 convinced a colleague, respected for his surgical skills, to permit ultrasound scanning and recording of the intrauterine fetus during performance of a direct abortion.<sup>59</sup> Although the abortionist already had done some 10,000 abortions,<sup>60</sup> when he viewed the recorded ultrasound tapes after this operation, he was so affected by what he saw that he never did another abortion.<sup>61</sup> The product of these tapes formed the basis for Bernard Nathanson’s 1984 documentary, *The Silent Scream*.<sup>62</sup> In this film, Nathanson narrates about “a child being torn apart, dismembered, disarticulated, crushed and destroyed,” as we see a 12-week fetus at first drawing away, then frantically retreating from the advancing vacuum suction device being inserted into the gravid uterus. Heart rate rising. One limb is torn away, then the other... Few will have the grit to watch the entire procedure unfold.<sup>63</sup>

By that time, referring to the incontrovertible evidence from the technologies of fetal ultrasound and fetoscopy and the findings of the newly founded medical subspecialties Fetology, Fetal Surgery and Neonatology,<sup>64</sup> Nathanson, who still described himself as a “stiff-backed Jewish atheist,”<sup>65</sup> had come to recognize the normal autonomous human “vector of life” from conception until natural death.<sup>66,67</sup> Henceforth, he became involved

<sup>58</sup> Nathanson, B. N. 1983. *The Abortion Papers: Inside the Abortion Mentality*. New York, NY: Frederick Fell Publisher. pp. 127-130.

<sup>59</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141.

<sup>60</sup> Nathanson, A. R., and B. N. Nathanson. 1987. *Eclipse of Reason*. Atlanta, Georgia: Life Productions RosaryFilms. (<https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=tightropetb&p=eclipse+of+reason+bernard+nathanson#id=4&vid=a4d4996a44d73baef7108f4359b13374&action=view>) (accessed September 10, 2018).

<sup>61</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141. Nathanson, B. N. 1984. *The Silent Scream* high quality (The ultrasound of abortion).. American Portrait Production Films Educational Production. <https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=tightropetb&p=the+silent+scream+abortion+video#id=2&vid=a2d521c50aa781af6898c068732f0d68&action=view> (accessed September 10, 2018);

<sup>62</sup> Nathanson, B. N. 1984. *The Silent Scream* high quality (The ultrasound of abortion).. American Portrait Production Films Educational Production. <https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=tightropetb&p=the+silent+scream+abortion+video#id=2&vid=a2d521c50aa781af6898c068732f0d68&action=view> (accessed September 10, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> Nathanson 1984. *loc. cit.*; McCombs 1985. *loc. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> Nathanson 1983. *op. cit.*, pp. 116-136, 148-149, 174-175; Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 125-126, 128-129, 146.

<sup>65</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>66</sup> Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> Nathanson defined and described the vector of life as an “unbroken series of quantifiable, noncontingent, scientifically verifiable and reproducible events that signifies the beginning of a new human life” initiated with fertilization of the mother’s egg by the father’s sperm. Thereafter, the unique one cell zygote autonomously divides into two, the two into four, the four into eight, until the embryo differentiates into three well-defined layers of cells just seven to eight days after fertilization. From these, the internal organs, appendages and other anatomic organs begin to grow thirteen to fourteen days after conception. The first seventeen to nineteen days after conception is the period of steepest slope in the embryo’s weight and pro-



with anti-abortion activities.<sup>68</sup> With the publication of his second book *The Abortion Papers: Inside the Abortion Mentality* in 1983, Nathanson exposed the pro-abortion interests' exploitation of inherent anti-Catholic bias and of the mass media to further their cause, and he revealed some of the financial incentives that supported abortion on demand.<sup>69</sup> In 1987, he produced and narrated another anti-abortion film, *Eclipse of Reason*.<sup>70</sup> Introduced by Hollywood actor Carleton Heston, this film demonstrates the progression of fetal development and the late-term destruction of a human fetus.<sup>71</sup>

Early in 1989, while witnessing a pro-life Operation Rescue event with hundreds of demonstrators shivering in the bitter cold and risking arrest for blocking New York City traffic in front of a Planned Parenthood abortion facility, Nathanson realized, "they must be answering a higher call."<sup>72</sup> It was "the sheer intensity of the love and prayer that astonished me."<sup>73</sup> "For the first time in my adult life, I began to entertain seriously the notion of God..."<sup>74</sup>

Over the next several years, "reading voraciously," Nathanson was greatly influenced by Dr. Karl Stern's conversion story from Judaism to Catholicism, *Pillar of Fire*,<sup>75</sup> and by the writings of several other Christian authors.<sup>76, 77</sup> Nathanson was well aware that a great many Catholics and Protestants in the ranks of the pro-life movement were praying for him, and he was "not unmoved" by this.<sup>78</sup> Examining his past "vile bog of sin and evil," indicting himself for "high crimes against those who had loved me, and against those whom I did not know," he held hope in "a growing belief that Someone had died for my sins and my evil two millennia ago."<sup>79</sup> In about 1991, Nathanson was referred to Father C. John McCloskey, a Catholic priest of the Prelature of Opus Dei and then at the Catholic Information Center in Washington, DC.<sup>80</sup> He continued to visit

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tein content. After that, growth of the fetus is not so much by cell division as it is by growth of individual cells. The final phase of human growth is by hypertrophy, which continues through birth, adolescence into adulthood (unless there is a fatal developmental error, disease, accident or intentional destruction), until the geriatric phase, when cells shrink and the human being, consequently, is severely physically diminished. (Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 135-138).

<sup>68</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 135-139; George 2011. *loc. cit.*; McCombs 1985. *loc. cit.*; Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>69</sup> Nathanson 1983. *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> Nathanson and Nathanson 1987. *loc. cit.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 191-193; Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>73</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 192.

<sup>74</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>75</sup> Stern, K. 1951. *Pillar of Fire*. London, UK: Michael Joseph Limited.

<sup>76</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 42-46, 194-195; Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>77</sup> Among the influential authors, Nathanson also mentioned: Richard Gilman, Malcom Muggeridge, Walker Percy, Graham Green, C.S. Lewis, and John Henry Newman. (Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.* p. 194).

<sup>78</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 193.

<sup>79</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>80</sup> Nathanson 1996. *op. cit.* p. 187; Oppenheimer, M. 2016. An Opus Dei priest with a magnetic touch. *The New York Times*, June 12. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/13/us/rev-c-john-mcclos->

and be instructed by Fr. McCloskey, and one day in 1994, Nathanson announced that he wanted to become a Catholic.<sup>81, 82</sup>

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1996, Bernard Nathanson was baptized by John Cardinal O'Connor, and he was Confirmed and received his First Holy Communion during a private mass concelebrated with Fr. McCloskey at St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York.<sup>83</sup> His godmother was Joan Andrews Bell, a pro-life activist who had served more than a year in jail for blocking the entrances to abortion businesses.<sup>84</sup>

After his baptism, Bernard Nathanson practiced his faith with frequent reception of the sacraments and continued anti-abortion/pro-life work.<sup>85</sup> "He was a pro-life prophet," Father McCloskey said in a *National Catholic Register* interview, "He saw the whole culture of death coming, and knew that abortion was just the tip of the iceberg."<sup>86, 87</sup> For the rest of his life, Bernard spent periods of time in fasting and prayer.<sup>88</sup> Joan Andrews Bell, his godmother, spoke with Bernard shortly before his death by cancer on February 21, 2011, "He said he was praying for us, and I told him we love him and pray for him, too."<sup>89</sup> "He had a deep and tender heart," said Ms. Bell, "He will be remembered as a strong advocate for the babies. . .like St. Paul, who was a great persecutor of the Church, yet when he saw the light of Christ, he was perhaps the greatest apostle for the Gospel. Dr. Nathanson was like that after his conversion."<sup>90</sup>

Bernard Nathanson, married and divorced three times, was survived by his wife, Christine, with whom he was married by Fr. McCloskey soon after becoming a Catholic.<sup>91</sup>

key-iii-an-opus-dei-priest-with-a-magnetic-touch.htm) (accessed August 10, 2018); Pierce, C. P. 2003. When certain voices speak—Rome listens. *The Boston Globe*, November 2 reproduced in *Enlightened Catholicism*. December 18, 2008. (<http://enlightenedcatholicism-colkoch.blogspot.com/2008/12/when-certain-voices-speak-rome-listens.htm>) (accessed August 10, 2018); Salai, S. 2014. The convert maker: Questions for Father C. John McCloskey. *America* magazine, July 29. (<https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/convert-maker-questions-father-c-john-mccloskey>) (accessed August 10, 2018).

<sup>81</sup> George 2011. *loc. cit.*; Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>82</sup> Nathanson attributed scientific evidence, reason and truth to his becoming pro-life, and love and prayer to his journey from secular atheism to belief in God, and reconciliation, Redemption and hope to his embracing Catholicism. (Nathanson BN. 1996. *op. cit.*, pp. 187-196; George 2011. *loc. cit.*).

<sup>83</sup> Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> As early as 1979, Nathanson wrote: "The primary question with abortion is what it does to each human conceptus. The secondary question is the social one, not so much abortion's harmful impact upon society or that it will cause other moral failings (the general Right-to-Life line) but, rather, what it tells us about the way our society already is. It was the cheapening of life that led to mass abortion with social consent, not the other way around. Legalized abortion in the United States came *after* Lenin, Stalin, Hitler's Holocaust, and Hiroshima. Subliminally the massive governmentally sanctioned loss of life made abortion thinkable." (Nathanson and Ostling 1979. *op. cit.*, p. 250).

<sup>88</sup> Vincent 2011. *loc. cit.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Archbishop of New York Timothy Dolan celebrated the Mass of Christian Burial of Dr. Bernard Nathanson in St. Patrick's Cathedral on February 28, 2011.<sup>92</sup>

God rest his soul. *Deo gratias.*

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<sup>92</sup> George 2011. *loc. cit.*