

BOOK REVIEW

## Post-abortion trauma, a path to healing

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**Marcello  
Riccobaldi**



Fr. Jorge Maria Randle\* was born in Buenos Aires (Argentina) in 1978; he became priest of the *Institute of the Incarnate Word* in 2003. From 2003 to 2015 he lived in the USA where, for his pastoral ministry, he has dedicated himself to accompanying people wounded by post abortion syndrome. From this experience he wrote the book “*Cuori spezzati. Un cammino per guarire dalle ferite dell’aborto*” (Broken Hearts. A path to

healing from the wounds of abortion).

**During his pastoral work in the USA, Fr. Randle** met many people who have had abortions and was able to experience firsthand the deep wounds left by abortion. For this reason, the book is not academic but has a pastoral focus for priests who are engaged in the delicate task of following women who have had abortions through the delicate and painful healing process.

**The first part of the book defines what abortion is** and reaffirms the seriousness of this crime, recalling the Catholic Church's position on it that involves excommunication on all those who take part in it.

Abortion has two sides: it is first the effect of a series of factors that lead to it and the cause of a series of problems that result from it. Factors leading to abortion may include the trivialization of human sexuality, loneliness, problematic family context, abandonment by the biological father, social context, and various fears related to the thought of motherhood.

**The trauma of abortion is the cause of post-abortion syndrome**, a special type of post-traumatic stress disorder derived from being part of an abortion, characterized by depression, anxiety, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, suicidal thoughts and attempts. These problems can affect not only the mother, but also other people involved in the abortion, like the father, the relatives, the friends and those who cooperated in the abortion. The book analyzes precisely the aftermath of abortion. The wounds produced by abortion are very deep and can last for a long time: these wounds may not even manifest themselves in the period immediately following the abortion, but the symptoms may emerge even years later and last until the problem is faced and resolved. For example, he reports the case of a 70-year-old woman who had an abortion 40 years earlier.

**When meeting a person who has had an abortion**, the guiding principle must be binomial truth-love. Loving others, showing them empathy is as necessary as making them understand the true nature of abortion. But truth imposes itself, not by force; having only words of condemnation all the time does not help the person. That's why in post-abortion retreats the first meditation is on the Gospel episode of the adulterous woman.

**Father Randle offers a path divided into three steps**, which are not indicated according to their importance, but rather following their natural path. First, the reconciliation of the person with the aborted child, then reconciliation with God, and

third, reconciliation with herself.

The three steps of the healing path also have their own chronological reason: the starting point is that the mother must understand that the person she killed was a human person, a child.

**In this process, it's of great importance** to give a name to the aborted child. During post-abortion retreats, a kind of "ritual" is performed, such as lighting a candle or laying a rose in front of a sacred image, during which is given a name to the murdered child. When the person becomes aware of this, that she is dealing with a human person, then she understands that she can establish a relationship with that person and obtain his forgiveness.

So, the recognition of motherhood (or fatherhood) is the first fundamental step in the healing process. Then very important questions arise: Can I reconcile with a person who is no longer in this world? Where is this person? These are distressing questions, and the answers are not always easy: without going into the complex issue of the fate of children who die without baptism, however, one can suggest the *hope* of their salvation, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also does.

**The second step, reconciliation with God** generally comes after reconciliation with the son, but hierarchically it's the most important. This is a key step in the healing process and to arrive at this is essential to be able to transform the sense of guilt into repentance: otherwise, the risk is falling into desperation.

True repentance rests on truth and recognition of one's responsibility without extenuating or aggravating anything. Thus, repentance marks the beginning of a new life. It is important to understand the meaning of sin as an offense done to God as well as an evil action toward the child. At this point the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes essential. After absolution, it sometimes may be necessary to assure some penitents about the forgiveness they have received from God. When forgiveness is accepted, joy and hope are reborn, as in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

**So, she can now forgive herself, that is the third and last step of the healing path.**

This last step is also very important, because the person who has aborted has lost her self-esteem: she needs now to forgive herself and find the lost self-esteem. In post-abortion therapy, forgiving oneself means first acknowledging and analyzing the abortion event. This presupposes intellectual honesty, objectivity and self-acceptance understanding by this the acknowledgment of one's faults and the assumption of responsibility. But the healing process presupposes a moving forward, a leaving behind

the evil done and opening oneself to the possibility of change. Choosing the opposite of what was done in the past. Accepting oneself, including the evil done, implies a desire for change.

**Of course, some pain and suffering will always remain;** it is a utopia that it will cease altogether. But this has to do with carrying the cross and the salvific value of suffering.

*\* **UPDATE 8th March 2025:** a month after the publication of this article, we learnt that Jorge Maria Randle left the priesthood a couple of years ago. We are reporting this now, for the sake of completeness and accuracy of information. This, however, in no way detracts from the effectiveness of the programme described in the book, which has helped several women recover from the wounds of abortion.*