

Pro-Life Leaders Mourn Passing of Bernard Nathanson

by Steven Ertelt | LifeNews.com | 2/22/11 11:49 AM

The news that former abortion practitioner turned pro-life educator and hero Bernard Nathanson has passed away has been tough for the many pro-life leaders who knew him well and respected his work. Today we feature a sample of some of the heartfelt statements LifeNews.com received about him.

Nathanson, 84, [died early Monday](#) morning after a long battle with cancer.

As a fellow New Yorker, Jeanne Head, NRLC Vice President for International Affairs and United Nations Representative, knew Dr. Nathanson first as a foe and then as a friend.

“Dr. Nathanson was probably one of the individuals most responsible for Roe v. Wade and, once he realized his error, he dedicated the rest of his life to reversing it,” Head said.

She explained that she heard about “Aborting America” when it was in galley form and may have been the first pro-lifer to speak to him after he had finished co-writing the book with Richard Ostling.



Head added, “It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of his book, “The Silent Scream,” and his later video, “Eclipse of Reason” in driving home the sheer horror and brutality of abortion.”

Christopher Slattery, the head of a collection of pregnancy center sin New York City, told LifeNews.com, “a great advocate of Life, who was a foremost abortion doctor in the late 60s and early 70s in NYC, passed away in Manhattan.”

“I worked very closely with him in the 80s and 90s. He helped us with Expectant Mother Care, providing pre-natal care, looking after my wife’s pregnancy with our third child, running a fundraiser for us in his home, and even graciously asking me to be his confirmation sponsor into the Catholic Church, at St. Patrick’s Cathedral,” he said. “His films, books and talks have inspired many of us in the pro-life movement.”

Fr. Frank Pavone, the national director of Priests for Life, also remembered the converted pro-life leader.

“My own life has intersected with his since the mid-80’s, and our last time together was just last week,” he

explained to LifeNews. “Years ago, Dr. Nathanson said, ‘I uncaged the abortion monster in the United States,’ and then he told us priests that he and his former colleagues ‘would never have gotten away with what we did if you had been united, purposeful and strong.’ That assertion is at the core of our ministry of Priests for Life.”

Fr. Pavone continued, “I will never forget the workshop at which I introduced him at the 1994 Human Life International Conference in Irvine, CA. He was supposed to talk about chemical abortion, but at the last minute decided instead to speak of his spiritual journey. At the end of the talk, he said that he was standing on the brink of conversion to the Catholic Church. The room exploded. People were leaping into the air. He said that he hoped God could forgive him, and I said, ‘Dr. Nathanson, he already has.’ And I reminded him of that exchange just last week.”

“He called Priests for Life the ‘Paul Revere’ of the pro-life movement, and said that he was always immensely grateful for our work, because though he caught the Church asleep on the abortion issue in the late 60’s, he believed the Church could be re-activated to build the Culture of Life. In memory of Dr. Nathanson, we will redouble our efforts to do just that,” Pavone concluded.

Kristan Hawkins of Students for Life added, “Today the pro-life movement mourns the death of Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a true pro-life hero. I’m saddened by that fact that this generation of pro-life activists will never get to meet Dr. Nathanson, but inspired to know that because of his work this generation has been filled with the truth and will help end abortion in America.”

And Stephen Phelan of Human Life International responded, “Human Life International — and indeed, the entire pro-life movement — will sorely miss Dr. Bernard Nathanson. He was our good friend for many years.”

“He spoke at many of our conferences, and our founder, Fr. Paul Marx, attended his baptism by Cardinal O’Connor in New York City’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral. We still constantly use his groundbreaking pro-life films “The Silent Scream” and “Eclipse of Reason,” especially overseas. His courage, knowledge and humor brought light to a difficult struggle, and his knowledge of the inner workings of the abortion industry were priceless,” he said.

For many years, Dr. Nathanson described himself as a Jewish atheist; but, in 1996, Nathanson was baptized a Catholic by Cardinal John O’Connor.