

The Feminist Case Against Abortion

By Cecelia M. Cody

Serrin Foster, President of Feminists for Life, recently visited the Bay Area to proclaim that being pro-life means being true to the founding principles of the feminist movement. She suggests several ways to help women facing problem pregnancies. Below is a synopsis of her talk.

The feminist movement was born more than two hundred years ago when Mary Wollstonecraft wrote "A Vindication of the Rights of Women." After decrying the sexual exploitation of women, she condemned those who would "either destroy the embryo in the womb, or cast it off when born." Shortly thereafter, abortion became illegal in Great Britain.

The feminists of the 19th century were also strongly opposed to abortion because of their belief in the worth of all humans. Like many women in developing countries today, they opposed abortion even though they were acutely aware of the damage done to women through constant child-bearing. They opposed abortion despite knowing that half of all children born died before the age of five. They knew that women had virtually no rights within the family or the political sphere. *But they did not believe abortion was the answer.*

The early American feminists condemned abortion in the strongest possible terms. Anti-abortion laws enacted in the latter half of the 19th century were a result of advocacy efforts by feminists who worked together with the male-dominated medical profession and the mainstream media. The early feminists understood that, much like today, women resorted to abortion because they were abandoned or pressured by boyfriends, husbands and parents and lacked financial resources to have a baby on their own.

Ironically, the anti-abortion laws that early feminists worked so hard to enact to protect women and children were the very ones destroyed by the Roe v. Wade decision 100 years later - a decision hailed by the National Organization for Women (NOW) as the "emancipation of women."

With this drastic change, a highly visible faction of the women's movement abandoned the vision of the early feminists: a world where women would be accepted and respected as women. There are now 1.3 million surgical abortions per year in the United States. The Alan Guttmacher Institute (the research arm of Planned Parenthood) reports that women have abortions for two primary reasons: lack of financial resources and lack of emotional support.

Abortion is a symptom of, not a solution to, the continuing struggles women face in the workplace, at home and in society. The first step towards a solution is to empower young women and men to make life-affirming choices. No one wants to see a teenage girl drop out of school and face a lifetime of poverty because she became pregnant. Nor should she suffer the pain and anguish of abortion. Public

and private funding for comprehensive programs that emphasize abstinence for teen pregnancy prevention must be increased dramatically.

Pregnancy resource centers should be eligible for federal funding. Nearly 4,000 pregnancy care centers and maternity homes guide women in crisis through the maze of available support services, all at no charge. Some specialize in bilingual/bicultural services, adoption and/or post-abortion counseling. These centers are where many pro-lifers "walk their talk" to help women in need.

Women have a right to make informed decisions about their pregnancy. We can empower women to exercise this right by passing "Right to Know" legislation. As with any other medical procedure, women have a right to full disclosure of the nature of the abortion procedure, risks and potential complications and alternative support services, as well as the father's responsibility. A woman has the right to know her doctor's name, whether he/she will be available if a medical emergency emerges, any history of malpractice in any state or revocation of a medical license; she has the right to a fully equipped clinic and/or ambulance nearby in case of complications, and the right to redress if she is hurt by the abortion.

Employers and educational institutions can also implement policies that ensure meaningful options for parents. Women in the workplace should not have to choose between their child and their job. That is no choice at all. Employers who have not already done so should consider flex time, job sharing, on-site child care and telecommuting. Women need maternity coverage in health care; men and women need parental leave. Living wages would enable parents to support their children.

Similarly, women should not be forced to choose between their education and life plans and their child. College and university officials should be challenged to provide housing, on-site child care and maternity coverage within student health care plans, and inform women about their hard-won right to child support. Feminists for Life has developed comprehensive Pregnancy Resources Kits to give women the "rest of the choices.

Feminists for Life is a grassroots, non-sectarian organization that opposes all forms of violence including abortion, infanticide, assisted suicide, child abuse, and exploitation of women and children.

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