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CELEBRATE LIFE !!

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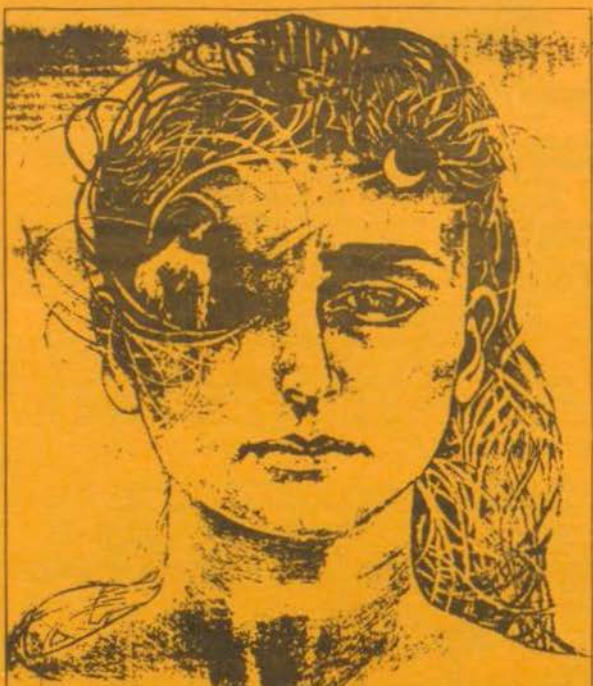
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Volume III Issue 5

October 5, 1986

Sunday, October 5



CHRISTIAN FEMINISM QUESTIONS
A VISION OF JUSTICE THAT PITS A WOMAN'S RIGHTS
AGAINST A CHILD'S RIGHT TO LIFE.

THIS IS THE WEEK TO CELEBRATE

LIFE, our life! It's **RIGHT TO LIFE SUNDAY** AND WE HAVE ANOTHER CHANCE TO RECALL OUR **LIFE AS GIFT!** The NDRB celebrates by sharing with you some reflective thoughts on Christian Feminism as expressed in the inside reprint from SOJOURNERS(3121 Otis St, NE, Box 29272, Washington, D.C. 20017.)

On Wed. Oct. 8 at 7:30 p.m. an open forum on the article will be held in the University Ministry Office in Badin Hall.

OCT 7 TUESDAY IS THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY. THE ROSARY IS A PRAYERFUL SUMMARY OF ALL THAT WE BELIEVE. SAYING THE BEADS IS AN EXPRESSION OF ONE'S LOVE FOR GOD AND HIS MOTHER. "Hail Mary...I love you ..."

Twenty-Seventh Sunday
of The Year
October 5, 1986

IF YOU HAD FAITH THE
SIZE OF A MUSTARD
SEED LK 17:5

This is the Lord for whom we looked.

CELEBRATE LIFE

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CHRISTIAN FEMINISM

To Preserve and Protect LIFE

A CHRISTIAN FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON ABORTION *by* GINNY EARNEST SOLEY



or a people that identifies itself as a Christian and feminist people, a necessary backdrop to the abortion question is dealing with the reality of the oppression of women in our culture. We live in a society in which sexism is an institutionalized, systematic, all-pervasive reality. We live in a culture that is patriarchal, which means much more than the rule of husbands and fathers over women and children.

Patriarchy involves a very complex system of class and race and gender hierarchies. Patriarchy also involves the rule of colonizers over colonized people, landowners over land workers, and light-skinned people over dark-skinned people. A part of that is male control over women—their work, their bodies, and their children. It is important to realize that in the system of patriarchy, children are considered primarily the result of the male seed and are valued mostly for that reason.

It is also important to note that women in this culture do not have a monolithic experience. Women are members of different class and racial groups, and, as a result, they don't all share the same kind of struggle or the same kind of oppression. Some women in our culture, in fact, benefit from the system of patriarchy and are privileged under that system. For that reason we need to realize that when we talk of oppression, we are referring to some men and some women. That whole complex makes it difficult to make general statements, but we should not allow that to mask certain realities. In a patriarchal culture like ours, women as a class of people are oppressed.

To recognize that women are an oppressed class of people is a necessary step when we are talking about abortion, an issue that involves freedom and choice and justice. These are very, very important words and concepts to people who are oppressed.

In the United States, women are under-represented in all areas of government and in the legal system. The lawmakers are men, by and large. Women have the right to vote but are not elected or appointed to decision-making positions in any substantial numbers. The laws in this land reflect that reality. Our constitutional rights are not guaranteed as they are for some men.

In the area of education, the discrimination is obvious. Women's wage-earning potential is markedly different from that of men. White men, with the greatest wage-earning potential, earn close to twice as much money as black men, who are followed by white women, with black women earning the least in this country. Moreover, women, white and black, are relegated to what we might

call job ghettos—areas of work that are mostly service-oriented and extensions of domestic work, such as child care and food services.

Many women live in relationships with men who are coercive, abusive, and hostile. In the culture at large, women are objectified as products, in the areas of prostitution and pornography, and as sales devices for everything from cars to alcohol to clothing. Women are exploited as workers, both in the labor force and at home.

It is also important to realize, although probably a little more difficult to understand, the way in which women are excluded from the myths and the symbol systems in our culture that make us less than fully human. That seems to indicate that we are less than full participants in human history.

One of the most obvious symbol systems from which women are excluded is language. We find ourselves excluded when, for example, "man" is meant to represent all humanity, and that has a strong impact on our psyches.

GIVEN THE REALITIES of the oppression of women in our culture, it has been very difficult for many feminists to participate in the abortion debate and identify themselves as pro-life. Many people who participate in that debate from a pro-life position do not acknowledge the oppression of women in our culture or the rest of the world. Even though women live in the most unequal of circumstances, when it comes to the issue of abortion, women are assigned equal moral responsibility and are assumed to be equally empowered. That is a frustrating fact for many women and for many feminists.

In order to deal with abortion, we must deal with the reality of the oppression of women as a class of people within a patriarchal culture. From that perspective the question of abortion really becomes a question of justice. What does it mean to do justice? What does it mean to bring forth justice for women and their children?

This way of looking at abortion is characteristic of the liberal feminist perspective, which puts forth an agenda with which I am not in complete agreement. However, I am deeply grateful for the work that women have done through the centuries and continue to do toward its goals; it is because of that liberal feminist agenda that I have the right to vote and that many points of discrimination have been challenged, both legislatively and constitutionally.

The limitations of the liberal feminist agenda become particularly clear in relationship to moral issues. It attempts to deal with questions such as abortion in a moral vacuum. This agenda says



ACCEPTING CHILDREN INTO OUR LIVES IS AN ACT OF FAITH

that each individual has the right to determine for herself what is the path to fulfillment and happiness, and that somehow we do that apart from relationship with the rest of humanity. The focus is on the individual.

This kind of analysis leads feminists such as Betty Friedan—whom I greatly respect—to say that we've made great strides as women because now women as well as men have their fingers on the nuclear button. That perspective misses the moral question as to whether there ought to be a nuclear button. It basically says that whatever have been advantages for white, propertied men are desirable for everyone else.

When we look at the question of children, we realize that men have had great control over their time, money, career choices, and options for leisure because they have been free from the burden of responsibility for children. I don't mean at all to say that some men haven't chosen to be responsible for children; they have, but it has been a choice. It is equally true that many men haven't been responsible for the children they fathered and have, in fact, walked away from them. Many men, even when they have remained present, aren't responsible for children to the extent that women are.

Liberal feminism looks at this and says the problem is that women have been responsible for children and that burdening women solely with this responsibility is a way that men control women. The solution they arrive at is a logical one—that the way for women to gain greater freedom is to remove the responsibility for children, particularly children who are unplanned. In the framework of liberal feminism, it makes sense to assume that since men have had this option, women need the same option. It's a response that says that where there is inequality, women should gain equality.

The decision to abort a child is often seen as an issue of a woman's right to self-determination. The question of self-determination for women is an important one, because history has taught us that men, particularly when in positions of power, do not always have women's best interests at heart. When a woman is faced with an unplanned pregnancy, she is not likely to trust legislators. She is not likely to trust judges. She is often unable to trust a clergyman, and too often she doesn't trust her husband or male companion.

THE PARTICULAR AND unique contribution of Christian feminism is to question two assumptions. The first assumption it questions is that the individual's self-interest is, in fact, the highest value. The second assumption it questions is the vision of justice that pits a woman's rights against a child's right to life, that forces us to see only one victim over and against another victim.

What we need to find is a way that is good for both mother and child. In the Christian worldview, the highest value extends beyond individual self-interest to what is good for the whole of the community. The responsibility for anything we do also extends beyond the individual to the whole of the community.

A Christian perspective, therefore, would broaden our circle of trust. It would say that as women we can depend on other people and that as Christians we intend to take responsibility for other people as well. It is very important that we not be naive about the real sufferings of women who face a crisis pregnancy and the possibility of raising a child without sufficient resources. As Christ-

ians we have the capacity to look at suffering and call it suffering, to look at pain and know that it is real pain and not blind ourselves to it.

It's important as well that we don't romanticize women who have abortions. Women don't have a monolithic experience in this culture, and women choose to have abortions out of a number of different contexts. But when we look at the question "What does justice require?" we need to look at the woman in the situation who is the most victimized, who has the fewest options, and apply our perspective on abortion to see if it bears up in that worst of circumstances. Then we ask the question, "What is an agenda for justice that would respond to her needs?"

Justice requires that all young men and women have good educational opportunities, that they have some hope for meaningful work in their lives, that they can expect to be paid a fair wage for the work that they do, that they be in situations that increase their sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. Justice requires that we work for healthier relationships between boys and girls, between men and women, relationships that are mutual and not coercive. At the same time, we should work against violence, the unilateral violence by men toward women.

Justice requires clear education about human sexuality, research for more safe and effective contraceptive methods, better prenatal and postnatal medical care, and support for women experiencing unplanned pregnancies. Justice requires support for family systems as well—for families who are trying to cope with a crisis pregnancy, for any man and woman who are trying to stay married in the midst of a difficult time, for people who have children with birth defects. It requires quality day care for children and adequate paternity and maternity leave.

When we look at this agenda for social change, we realize that it is overwhelming. We are far from having adequate support systems for women with crisis pregnancies. It is easy to see why people say that the simplest or easiest solution to an unplanned pregnancy is the solution of abortion—that the child not be born and that the young woman have the responsibility of that child taken from her.

But abortion leaves unaddressed the real issues and, in fact, adds a moral poverty to the physical poverty already present. It adds further psychological pain to the pain already suffered. We should not put women into a position without resources and then further damage them by encouraging abortions.

I believe that women are damaged by having abortions, psychologically, spiritually, and, often, physically. My word to women facing the difficult decision about abortion is not a word of condemnation but a word of encouragement that says that if we are really working at this together, we can do better. We don't have to settle for something that is life-destroying and painful.

We must be careful what we say to women who have had abortions and feel the guilt and the pain of that decision. What they need from Christians is a word of forgiveness. They need to be invited into a community that has room for them, to be encouraged to carry on with life, and to be healed.

From the words of the women interviewed in Linda Frankie's book *The Ambivalence of Abortion*, it is clear that they were not people who had a number of positive options and, out of moral insensitivity, chose to have an abortion. They were often women who conceived the child in a very unhealthy, unstable relationship.

These women felt that they could not bear the responsibility of the child alone. They did not have confidence in themselves, and they also did not have confidence in the man with whom they were in relationship. Often they said, "He did not want me to have the child, so I had an abortion."

The sense that we get in reading their stories is that they are women who have had abortions against their better instincts, and they are suffering for it. Their better instincts were to preserve and protect life. I do not want to imply that women have

STUDENTS RESPOND

inherently different instincts than men. But we live in a culture that intentionally numbs those life-preserving instincts in our future soldiers, generals, and corporate executives. I would suggest that the job of Christian feminism is not to numb those life-preserving instincts in women but to reawaken them in men and keep them alive in all of us.

ABORTION IS NOT a means of bringing about justice. Abortion is, finally, an act of giving in to despair. The decision to have an abortion reflects a woman's lack of confidence in herself. It means that she does not trust the man with whom she is in relationship. It means that she has no belief in long-lasting, long-term, stable relationships between men and women. In fact, it means that she has lost confidence in life itself.

By accepting the alternative of abortion as a society, we say that we don't intend to make any effort to bring about justice for women and that we don't intend to put forth any effort to guarantee a good life for children. The gospel challenges that despair with the declaration that life is essentially good, that God is still at work in the world bringing about redemption, and that healing and reconciliation are possible. As naive as it may sound in the face of overwhelming odds and very desperate situations, we need to speak of hope for the future and say that the lives of women and children can be lives of bearing good fruit, of justice, and of health and happiness.

Liberal feminists have stated that the problem lies in the fact that women have been responsible for children, and they have offered one solution: Women should not have to be responsible for children. What Christian people need to say is that there is another solution: Women and men can be responsible for children, and the community of faith can be responsible for children. But the society as a whole also can be made a place where children can be born and have a good life.

Children are a sign that life is still worthwhile. Accepting them into our lives is an act of faith. Protecting human life is a way of worshiping God, who is the creator and originator of life.

To destroy life in its very beginning is a statement that says there is no reason to have faith that life can work out for the good. It is a statement that life can't be fruitful and won't be worthwhile. That reflects a lack of trust and lack of faith in God and in what God has created and continues to redeem. I firmly believe that God intends that life be good and that all life be worth living. □

Ginny Earnest Soley is assistant pastoral coordinator of Sojourners Community and staff coordinator for Sojourners outreach ministries.

As Christians, and also as Christian feminists, we must consider the rights of the unborn. If abortion becomes a question of justice, shouldn't justice be served to the unborn fetus too?

Ours is a religion based on faith, we must take this faith and extend it into the community. A woman must be strong enough to turn to her fellow men and women to ask for help and support. The community, in turn, should be objective and understanding enough to offer support and encouragement. They must realize the moral dilemma a woman faces and should not chastise her weakening in a moment of despair, but respect and applaud her strength to overcome an obstacle and accept the responsibility. Perhaps if women were more certain that the support will be out there, less may choose the so-called "solution" of abortion. By bringing a child into the world, a woman brings forth her faith in God and that child is both an extension and a symbol of her faith.

- C. M.

CELEBRATE LIFE !!

RespectLife

Sunday, October 5



RETREAT

"Sexuality, Intimacy & Spirituality"

directed by Patricia Livingston

TOPICS:

Intimacy
Relationships
Masturbation

Homosexuality
Heterosexuality
Loneliness

Sexuality: Primary
Genital
Affective

- How do I relate to God in the context of the gift of my sexuality?
- How does intimacy in my life reveal God to me?
- How do the yearnings of my life tell me about God's love for me?
- How can I come to understand my sexuality more broadly and deeply?
- How does understanding my sexuality free me to choose what is most life giving at this time in my life?

WHEN: October 31 - November 2 (noon)

CONTACT: Office of University Ministry
(Badin Hall) 239-5242

SIGN-UP DEADLINE: October 17, 1986

COST: \$12.00