

Abortion decision has obligation to all involved

In the midst of the current struggle over the issue of legalized abortion, the Right to Life coalition would have us believe that respect for life is a moral characteristic possessed only by those who oppose abortion. There are, however, many of us who have not forgotten the horror stories of countless women who desperately sought illegal abortions prior to legalization.

The following quote from a recent New York Times article should serve to jog our

Commentary By Sharon Ellison

memories: "He was far more concerned about the carnage he saw in the hospital most evenings: the women — primarily poor, black and Hispanic — who came into the emergency room bleeding from the vagina, running high fevers, in severe pain, the victims of hacks and coat hangers. The danger wasn't confined to the poor either. . . . The hypocrisy of this situation was staggering, not to mention the potential danger."

Carnage is defined as "extensive and bloody slaughter or massacre." The situation is described as staggering and fraught with potential dangers. The man interviewed by the Times was Dr. Bernard Nathanson. While Nathanson is now a supporter of the Right to Life movement, his concerns and his words have not lost either their impact or their validity.

Concern for life must include a balanced and compassionate view of the whole picture when considering the issue of abortion. Advocating legalized abortion is not like suggesting a good movie. It is done with the serious recognition of the moral need to consider the health of all parties potentially involved: the woman, her existing children, and the unborn fetus.

There are a number of issues to be considered. First, abortion has been with us for centuries. Making it illegal will not eliminate it, only drive it underground. This will create a desperate and dangerous situation for millions of women; some are children themselves and too young to be mothers; some too old to start again; some too poor to feed the children to whom they have already given birth.

The level of desperation felt by women in need of an abortion can be further exemplified by Nathanson's experiences in the first legal abortion clinic in New York in 1970. "We were getting women from every state east of Mississippi, California was getting the ones from the west. There was chaos in the waiting rooms. Women sitting on suitcases with no place to go, and in some cases, two and three week delays before the operations could be performed." Such women would certainly consider more drastic and unsafe methods of abortion if safe, legal abortions were not available.

Second, the most drastic effect would fall on the young and the poor. They would be the most likely to attempt unsafe, illegal abortions. Of those who failed to obtain one, the child-mothers would have little prospect for a stable home and the education needed to support a family. The poor families would become larger and poorer. Women and children already comprise 63 percent of the poverty-stricken human beings in the United States. Their ranks would increase by the millions. The wealthy would have more resources for obtaining safe abortions and would not suffer to the same extent.

Third, much of the legislation proposed to ban safe, legal abortions would even eliminate abortions in cases of rape, incest, and medical problems expected to result in a brain damaged or deformed child at birth. The life long traumas which would result for both mother and child would be devastating.

Fourth, while the Right to Life coalition proclaims that adoption is an alternative to abortion, it frequently does not fall in the realm of a woman's choice. To abort an undeveloped fetus is difficult but still the most reasonable and healthy choice for many women; to give away a living child is often not within the realm of acceptable choice.

The ultimate result of anti-abortion legislation would leave millions of women to return to dangerous methods of abortion, bringing back the "carnage" of the past. The fate of many of the millions of unwanted children who would be born also strikes a terrifying cord.

In response to the need to publicly jog the memory of the American people to remember the compassionate effort which created safe abortions for women 15 years ago, the Nation Abortion Rights League is holding nationwide SPEAK OUTS. NARAL is collecting letters written by individuals who are willing to share personal stories about abortion.

Women who have had an abortion experience are asked to write letters describing their own need for a safe abortion. Relatives and friends may also write. The letters may be signed with full names, first names, or assumed names. They should be addressed to President Reagan care of Oregon NARAL, P.O. Box 40472, Portland, Ore., 97240. The letters will be read in Oregon and then delivered with letters from all states in the union to Washington, D.C., for a national SPEAK OUT event.

Through these letters we can speak in a voice loud enough for all Americans to hear. We must protect our women and children from the destruction of the past, at the hands of what we commonly called "the butchers" before the era of safe and legal abortions.

Ellison is a private counselor and consultant in Eugene.

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