

the brunswickan

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Opinion

A Victory?

A victory was scored with the Supreme Court decision on abortion handed down on January 28, 1988. Strides were made in acknowledging the rights of women. The pronouncement was hailed as liberating.

That, at least, is the way in which ardent "pro-choicers" received the decision. "It's wonderful. It goes beyond my wildest dreams," cried one feminist. For the elated young women gathered in front of Dr. Henry Morgantaler's clinic in Toronto, screaming triumphantly with their clenched-fist salute, the entire controversy appeared to be a black and white issue: for or against the rights of women to make decisions about their own bodies.

The difficulty, however, is that few things in life are as simple as black and white. If the issue was merely about women's rights, the controversy would not be taking the dynamics it has. Was it a victory then?

When individual rights were enshrined in the Constitution, affirmed was the belief that individuals in this land have certain (God-given) rights by virtue of the fact that they are human. That was an advancement in Canadian history.

However, this so-called "advancement" has also served to fuel the fires of an increasing individualism. The irony is that when we think only in terms of our own individual rights, when we adopt a "me first" attitude, we lose sense of what it means to be human. For, to be human means being concerned about the health, welfare and preservation of "the other." It does not entail the selfish absolute "Stay out of my space."

That is why I have difficulty with the pro-choice campaign. It smacks too much of individualism. I have yet to hear a convincing argument from them regarding concern for the unborn. More often than not, that is entirely ignored. What sort of protection might they be given? Do they not have rights under the Constitution? Or, are they of no concern, when some women are faced with embarrassment or inconvenience? The conclusion of the 1977 Badgley Report stated that most abortions were done for "social" reasons. Do these sufficiently justify terminating a new life?

Let us be abundantly clear, and no longer dilly-dally, about when a new life begins. A fetus in any stage of the pregnancy is a human being. In the first tri-semester, it is not just potentially human, it is human. The new life, shortly after conception, takes visible human form. To speak about a fetus as if it was some sort of bio-chemical blob that may or may not become something human is only to ignore what medical science has even confirmed.

Dr. Morgantaler stated that January 28 was a "sweet day for women." In his own twisted logic, he added, "It is also a victory for children." There may be an element of truth in that, but it is not a victory for the unborn. Granted, children who are born ought to be those who are wanted and who will be loved. But, in what way will the right to abortion guarantee this? Abuse has been heaped upon many children who were once much wanted.

There is an extremely ironic twist to the entire issue. Some women who can conceive children, seek to abort them. Others who cannot, agonize over the harsh reality of their infertility. That is increased by the fact that there are few, if any, available for adoption. Where then is the victory, and for whom?

It would be heartless to insist that abortion must not take place under any circumstance. Conception sometimes occurs as a result of violence against a woman. Sometimes it is clear that the new life begun will have little hope for survival, or severely limited growth, outside of the womb. In these situations, abortion may be the lesser of two evils. Nonetheless, it continues to be an evil.

If we affirm the sacredness of life, taking it, in any form, is to be avoided. That is why all must be done to alleviate the circumstances that drive women to seek abortion as a solution to the difficulties in which they find themselves. This includes providing emotional and, if need be, financial support. We must all act compassionately to those carrying the unborn. But above all, we must not forget the unborn themselves.

John Valk
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