

Question of Abortion

By GERALD LATHAM

It seems that we are all struggling with the issue of abortion. The topic is such a controversial one that the dialogue often turns to verbal imagery designed only to evoke our humanitarian sympathies. The images of the "back street butcher", or the pain inflicted by "coat hanger" surgery are used by one group to promote their support. The imagery of an unborn foetus in a jar of formaldehyde, or perhaps that of a life cast casually into a garbage heap, would be used by those holding the opposing view. These images are used solely to shock the reader into taking a side. I suspect many others have, like myself, been vacillating between the two opposing views. Well I have finally made up my mind, and I have done so because of the way both groups have tried to manipulate my sympathies in order to garner my support.

The author of the article, (Women Fight for Reproductive Rights, Dalhousie Gazette, Nov 20) Amanda de Rougetel, says that "women must have the right to choose whether and when to bear a child." She further says of birth control that "not a single one of them is 100% effective and safe." The author believes that a woman's body is her sole property and that only she has the right to decide how best to utilise and care for that body. It is inconceivable, that in our present society, a woman should be forced to submit to any procedure on her body that she did not agree to, and there would be few of us indeed that could find fault in that logic were it not for the question of abortion. It has been said, however, that by performing the sexual act, the woman gave tacit approval of the use of her body for the purpose of bearing a child. This of course is a generalization that is considered offensive, and rightly so. However, there is some merit in that generalization that cannot be so easily dismissed.

The author says that there are no 100% effective means of birth control. I can think of two, abstinence and sterilization. These may not be options for most people, but by ignoring their existence the author discredits her own findings and makes it easy for those who are so inclined to dismiss the subject of the article.

The author goes to great lengths to point out that the laws concerning abortion in Canada are antiquated and inadequate to meet the needs of those they are to serve. There are women in smaller communities that either have to bear the financial brunt of seeking an abortion in a community where those services are offered, or lacking those funds, seek an abortion from those "back street butchers". That anyone should have to submit to anything other than the best of medical treatment simply because they do not have easy

access to the service is a crime.

By now you must have guessed that I am not totally for abortion. Well I definitely am not for the indiscriminate use of abortion. When it is indicated for medical reasons, either physiological or psychological, an abortion should be easily available. This unfortunately does nothing to eliminate the "coat hangers" for the pro-choice groups, nor does it eliminate visions of wasted lives for the pro-life groups. The pro-life groups are not saying that a woman should not have control over her body in other areas. They only want that choice taken away when there is another possible life concerned. The pro-choice groups are not against childbirth, many of them either have children or would like to in the future, and many would not consider abortion an option if they believed life began at fertilization. They want to use the option of abortion only when it is in the best interests of the mother to do so, for either physical or psychological reasons. It would be hard to deny that an unwanted pregnancy would be physiologically, psychologically and economically destructive, to both the child and the mother.

The question seems to hinge

on when life begins. That is a question we have not been able to answer with complete satisfaction and probably never will be able to. We spend a lot of time trying to shock others into our beliefs, rather than putting our energy into a possible solution. There is no short term solution to the question of abortion that I can see. I think the answer ultimately lies in the education of the sexes in social responsibility.

Earlier in this letter I may have given the impression that sexual acts and their consequences are the sole responsibility of the female participant. This may seem to be the general feeling of the male population about the matter, either tacitly or not. I see the solution of the abortion issue resting with the education of the population, with particular emphasis on the need for male education about their physical and emotional part in the birth process. For too long have fathers considered themselves as somehow separate from the childbirth process, both within the context of marriage and without. Males and females are socialised differently; yet perhaps if we were both socialised in the same way we could accept the responsibility for our actions together.

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