

Our Feminist Foremothers: Pro-Life Pioneers

Last year's candidacy of Sarah Palin raised the public profile of pro-life feminism, a concept which many in our society consider a contradiction in terms. Some wonder how a woman can seriously claim to be a feminist if she does not believe in "reproductive freedom," understood as unfettered access to contraception and abortion. Others believe that equality with men requires that women be liberated from the burden of bearing and raising children. What many people do not realize, however, is that the radical, secular version of feminism that most of us are familiar with today is far removed from the original vision of the 18th and 19th century founders of the movement, who were women inspired largely by Christian concepts of morality and justice.

In addition to insisting on their right to own property, participate in government, receive equitable wages and have equal opportunities for advanced education and employment, one of the major goals of the original feminists was to address the abuse of sexuality both within and outside of marriage. As David Reardon, director of the Elliot Institute for Social Sciences Research, recounts: "They condemned male promiscuity, and denounced the social injustices that induced their sisters to degrade themselves in lives of prostitution. They demanded that husbands honor their commitments to their wives, and that sons learn to honor the integrity of all women. Equal rights, they believed, could be achieved only by fidelity, mutual sacrifice and commitment. Self-control, not self-indulgence, was their solution to marital unhappiness."

These early feminists championed mutual fidelity and mutual respect in marriage. When they objected to "enforced motherhood," they meant that a wife should not have to submit to every sexual advance of her husband without regard for her own desires, health or the possibility of a pregnancy resulting. In a social and cultural context which heavily favored the husband's right to conjugal relations whenever he so desired, this demand was considered radical. This conviction on the part of the early feminists would later find explicit confirmation in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae*: "A conjugal act imposed on one's partner without regard to his or her condition or personal and reasonable wishes in the matter, is no true act of love,

and therefore offends the moral order in its particular application to the intimate relationship of husband and wife” (#13).

Far from insisting on contraception and abortion to regulate procreation, 19th century feminists condemned both. They considered contraception to be “unnatural,” “injurious,” and “offensive” to women, and feared that its use in marriage would relegate women even further to being regarded as sex objects by their husbands. More than a century later, Pope Paul VI sounded the same alarm in *Humanae vitae*: “A man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.” (#17). The early feminists also foresaw, as did Pope Paul VI, that widespread use of contraception would facilitate adultery and leave women even more vulnerable to being victimized and ultimately abandoned by their husbands.

These pro-life pioneers likewise knew that abandonment by a man often motivated a woman to commit the atrocity of abortion. But while they did not exonerate the mother herself, they placed even more blame at the foot of the father.

Susan B. Anthony referred to abortion as “child murder,” and wrote in her 1869 publication *The Revolution*, a radical women’s paper she published with Elizabeth Cady Stanton: “No matter what the motive, love of ease, or a desire to save from suffering the unborn innocent, the woman is awfully guilty who commits the deed. It will burden her conscience in life, it will burden her soul in death; But oh, thrice guilty is he who drove her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime!” As the paper's proprietor, she refused ads for patent-medicine abortifacients which were a lucrative source of revenue for most periodicals of the day, a principled stand which eventually forced her paper into bankruptcy.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, mother of seven, who in her spare time organized the first women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, classified abortion as a form of infanticide and described it as an affront to the dignity of mother and child alike: “When we consider that women are

treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit."

Mattie Brinkerhoff expressed a similar sentiment in 1869: "When a man steals to satisfy hunger, we may safely conclude that there is something wrong in society - so when a woman destroys the life of her unborn child, it is an evidence that either by education or circumstances she has been greatly wronged." *The Revolution*, 4(9):138-9 September 2, 1869

Sarah Norton, who challenged Cornell University to admit women, wrote in 1870 that she looked forward to the day "when the right of the unborn to be born will not be denied or interfered with."

Victoria Woodhull, the first female presidential candidate was a strong opponent of abortion: "The rights of children as individuals begin while yet they remain the foetus." (*Woodhull's and Claflin's Weekly*, 4 December 24, 1870).

According to Serrin Foster, president of *Feminists for Life of America*, "Anti-abortion laws enacted in the latter half of the 19th century were a result of advocacy efforts by feminists who worked in an uneasy alliance 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'."

Alice Paul, the author of the original Equal Rights Amendment of 1923, deeply lamented the later linking of "reproductive rights" with this amendment because she characterized abortion as "the ultimate exploitation of women."

How *did* the feminist movement come to be linked with the contemporary clamor for "reproductive rights"? Well, in what was a terribly ironic twist of history, the feminist movement was hijacked by a man. In the 1960s, population control zealot Larry Lader was not having much success with state

legislators, many of whom were horrified by his crusade to repeal abortion laws. Lader teamed up with a gynecologist, Bernard Nathanson, to found the National Alliance to Repeal Abortion Laws, the forerunner of NARAL. These two men set out to convince a reluctant Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* and the founder of the National Organization of Women, to adopt abortion as a central element of “neofeminism,” claiming that all of their demands hinged on women being able to control reproduction through legalized abortion. Nathanson later admitted that he and Lader made up the numbers of women dying from illegal abortions as a further selling point to Friedan. (One cannot help calling to mind here Satan’s label as the “father of lies.”) At its 1967 convention, Friedan pushed an abortion plank into NOW’s agenda, even though many delegates resigned in protest.

Lader would refer proudly to this symbiotic relationship in his later writings: “It was the surge and fervor of neo-feminism that paved the way for the abortion movement. Each was essential to the other.” Serrin Foster comments on the enduring success the efforts of these two men: “Lader's and Nathanson's strategy was highly effective. NOW has made the preservation of legal abortion its number one priority. Its literature repeatedly states that access to abortion is ‘the most fundamental right of women, without which all other rights are meaningless’.” Consider what an incredible perversion, a total inversion of truth that has happened here: instead of the right to life being the most fundamental right, without which all other rights are meaningless, the most fundamental right of women is access to abortion, without which all other rights are meaningless.

What we know today about the correlation between breast cancer and abortion provides further confirmation that the contemporary clamoring for “reproductive rights” is anti-woman as well as anti-child. The link between abortion and breast cancer was first brought to the attention of the medical community over 50 years ago. In April 1957, the first study published in a major medical journal found that Japanese women who’d had an abortion had nearly three times as high a risk of breast cancer as those who had not. By 1995, after abortion was widely legalized in the West, 17 studies worldwide showed a significant abortion-breast cancer link.

Needless to say, this research has not been welcomed with open arms or open minds in many circles committed to maintaining “reproductive choice.”

In 1994, Dr. Janet Daling was raked over the coals when she published her study in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* showing a statistically significant increased risk of breast cancer in women who had an induced abortion, especially young women with a family history of cancer. An accompanying editorial downplayed her findings, claiming that “it is difficult to see how they will be informative to the public.” Dr. Daling responded to critics by professing that she was adamantly “pro-choice,” and had hoped that her findings would be different, but that her data was “rock solid.”

Patrick Carroll, Director of Research for the Pension and Population Research Institute in London, conducted an analysis a few years ago in an attempt to account for the steep rise in breast cancer rates that many Western countries have experienced in the past 3 decades. His study, entitled “The Breast Cancer Epidemic: Modeling and Forecasts Based on Abortion and Other Risk Factors,” was published in the Fall 2007 issue of the *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons*. Carroll examined data from 8 European countries and considered 7 known risk factors as an explanation for these trends. His conclusion? “The increase in breast cancer incidence appears to be best explained by an increase in abortion rates, especially nulliparous abortions [abortions in women who have never given birth], and lower fertility...In most countries considered, women now over age 45 have had more abortions and fewer children than previous generations of women, and a further increase in breast cancer incidence is to be expected.”

There can no longer be any doubt that the modern, mainstream feminist movement has betrayed the ideals and convictions of its founders and in so doing, has sacrificed the well-being of millions of women and the lives of countless children. What the pro-life movement needs now more than ever are women imbued with the spirit of the Gospel who know that their ability to bear and nurture new life is not a liability, but a gift.