

# Reluctant radical rejects abortion as betrayal of women

By Teresa A. Parsons

On paper, Sidney Callahan comes across as a bundle of contradictions.

She's a Catholic mother of six who opposes "permissive abortion," yet she's also a feminist. She advocates ordination for women, yet harbors no desire to be a priest. She's been termed a "fearless intellectual," yet she doesn't enjoy conflict.

An associate professor of psychology at Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., Callahan was one of three panelists to speak last Tuesday on the Creation of Life forum, which took place during the University of Rochester's Creation Conference.

conflict if I could. It's not a pure issue; it's not fun."

Though many members of the pro-life movement are unwilling to acknowledge any validity in their opponents' arguments, Callahan readily admits that there is a human cost to reversing the Supreme Court's decision to legalize abortion.

"There are arguments on both sides, and I recognize that there are costs to both," she said. "I just think there would be less fetal death and less of every other kind of suffering (if abortion were no longer easily available). Many, many women are suffering from having had abortions."

**'Pitting women against their own offspring is not only morally offensive, it is psychologically and politically destructive ... Despite temporary conflicts of interest, feminine and fetal liberation are ultimately one and the same cause.'**

Sidney Callahan

Although she's now part of a growing movement that combines some traditionally conservative Christian and Catholic teachings with other traditionally liberal and feminist views, Callahan found herself very much alone in 1965, when she published her first book.

"It was a strange and unusual synthesis at the time, but Christianity is one of the best supports for feminism," she said. "I like to think I was one of the first people to put them together."

More people may share her views today, but it's still not easy to be a feminist who opposes abortion. Callahan doesn't relish what she considers her call to speak out on such a controversial issue. "I had fun just being a feminist," she recalled. "This is much harder. It's an issue in which you can't avoid conflict, and I would always avoid

Callahan argued that women have actually been betrayed by the inclusion of abortion on the feminist agenda. Rather than freeing them from "compulsory pregnancy," this agenda has caused women to feel weaker and more powerless while at the same time legitimizing male irresponsibility, she claimed.

"Pitting women against their own offspring is not only morally offensive, it is psychologically and politically destructive," she said. "Despite temporary conflicts of interest, feminine and fetal liberation are ultimately one and the same cause."

Western societies are just beginning to recover from what Callahan termed "a debilitating dualism of mind and body" that despised women's "unique, life-giving female reproductive power" as "passive, debilitating, animal-like."

"Abortion is perhaps solving some problems by making a woman's body more like a man's, but it doesn't serve to empower women in the long run," she said.

Instead, as the most recent "immigrants from non-personhood," women ought to be the first to defend others from receiving that designation. "Human value and rights cannot be granted by individual will," she said. "Human life from beginning to end has intrinsic value which does not depend on meeting the selective criteria or tests set up by powerful others."

While she opposes abortion in all but the tiny percentage of "hard cases" wherein the mother's life may be threatened, Callahan does not believe that violence in defense of unborn life is justified. Nor is she certain whether even the politics of non-violent resistance — such as recent local demonstrations at the homes of physicians who are said to perform abortions — ought to be used in the abortion debate.

"I don't see that as the way of love and peace," she said, "and I'm not sure that picketing someone's house is a way of moving them toward some other position."

Instead, she believes, society and particularly the Church need to offer more support for family life and to help break

down the isolation imposed by the demands of career and family.

"The Church's most important social outreach is helping women and children," she said. "For instance, there is a very strong commitment on the part of the Archdiocese (of New York) to give full support to any woman with a problem pregnancy. We need to do more of that."

The Church also needs to promote better prenatal care and day care, according to Callahan. "That one single change, I believe, would help family life more than anything else," she said.

Overall, she believes, the Church needs to become more feminine and maternal in its outlook. "We need to think more about God as mother, to promote those kinds of reforms of liturgy and imagery, and to cultivate an understanding of the Holy Spirit that leads us toward peace and peace loving," she said.

Callahan isn't dismayed by unlikelihood of such a change amid the Church's current conservative climate. "After every revolution, there is an effort at a counterrevolution," she said. "I think Vatican II was the revolution, and Pope John Paul II represents an effort at a counterrevolution."

## Retrouvaille offers help for troubled marriages

Hurting couples in troubled marriages are invited to the next Retrouvaille program offered in the Rochester area Friday through Sunday, February 28, to March 1.

Retrouvaille or Rediscovery focuses on communication to help those who have a sincere desire to rebuild their relationships, whether

they are separated, divorced, or still living together. Although it is Catholic in origin, Retrouvaille is open to people of all faiths.

In addition to the weekend gathering, the program includes six follow-up evening sessions. For information or to register, call (716) 663-2983.

## Discussion guides available for program on teen issues

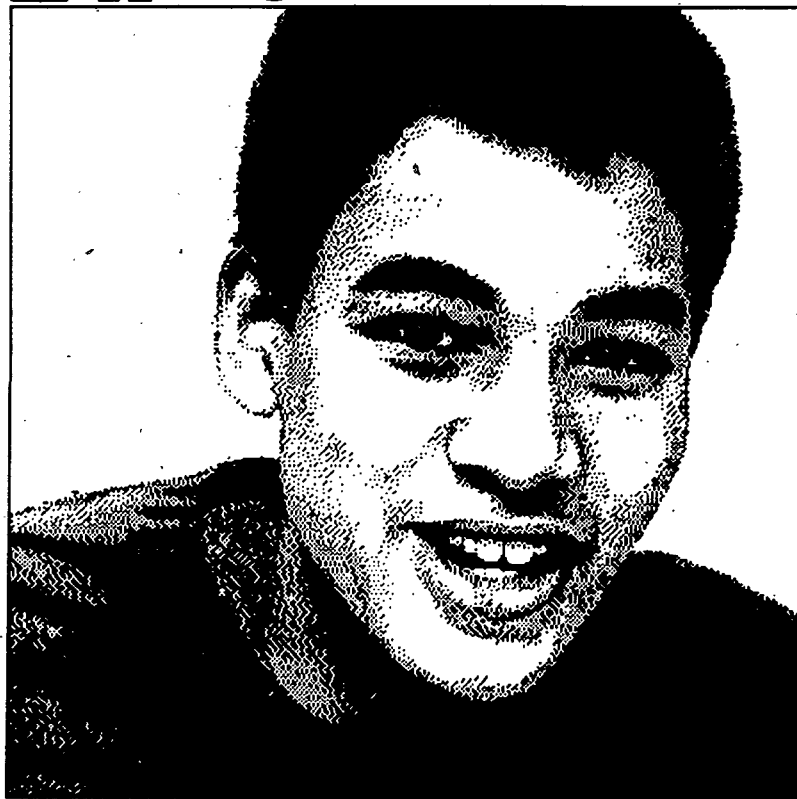
The diocesan Department of General Education is offering discussion guides for the television program "Chemical People II: A Generation at Risk" to Catholic elementary and high schools, as well as families and church groups. Scheduled to be shown on (Channel 21) at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, January 28, the program deals with issues of teen suicide, preg-

nancy, drug and alcohol abuse and school dropout rates.

Following the program, WXXI will broadcast a panel discussion and call-in program from 9-10 p.m. Videotapes of the program will also be available. For information, contact Evelyn Kirst at the diocesan education office, (716) 328-3210, or WXXI at (716) 325-7500.

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