

The Seductive Power of Abortion

This Short-Term Solution Causes Long-Term Problems

**Respect
Life**

By OLIVIA GANS

Something about abortion makes it seem to the immediate crisis solution to the immediate crisis of an unexpected pregnancy.

Its seductive power is its promise to eliminate a "problem" neatly and simply, as if that problem — the child — never existed.

In succumbing to the pressure to use abortion to solve her problems, a woman must become totally removed from the thought of herself as a woman, mother and life-bearer. She cannot allow herself to bond with her child at all. She is not supposed to connect with the truth that from this moment on she is someone's mother.

Abortion is appealing because it allows so many — boyfriend, husband, parents — to remain removed from any responsibility to this new member of the human family.

Abortion is for many men the way out of a sticky situation. For some it is also a weapon to hold over a woman's head. "Have an abortion or I'll stop loving you," is the spoken or unspoken message that many women hear when they tell their mates about the result of their loving. It all seems so clear and easy.

On the other hand, the abortion mentality offers no place for the man who wants to act responsibly towards the mother and their son or daughter. This has been reinforced by recent court cases in which fathers sought to prevent a wife's or a girlfriend's abortion. The law so far has closed them out.

Public Perception

The greatest feat of abortion on demand has been to make American society content — if uneasily so — with accepting death as a way to solve problems. All across the United States there are basically good people who feel that abortion is not good, but that nothing else can be done when a mother is poor or a baby is severely handicapped, or the result of rape or incest. Yet, public opinion polls show that American opposition to abortion remains as strong as it was in 1973.

For more than 15 years abortion has been portrayed as a simple outpatient surgical procedure with few complications. Mounting evidence, however, is disproving this. Scientific studies of post-abortion syndrome are demonstrating the dangers of abortion to the emotional health of women, as well as to the men involved and the siblings and other relations of the lost infant. But the silence and secrecy that surround the pregnancy and abortion very often also attend the private and painful aftermath.

The Violence of Abortion

The ugliness of abortion is physically evident in films such as "The Silent Scream," "A Matter of Choice" and "Eclipse of Reason." There is little doubt about the physical brutality of abortion for babies and their

mothers. But what of the violence of that act upon our hearts and minds?

Women who do not believe they must pit their strength against one who is weaker in order to achieve their fullest potential are silenced in national, state and local women's organizations. The illusion of freedom based on rejecting one's biological make-up is the cornerstone of the major feminist organizations today.

Today the notion of motherhood as bondage and failure is beginning to raise many critics even from within feminist circles. However, this controversy cannot be resolved as long

not dealing with our own fear, anger and misperceptions; we add to the pressure on the woman to abort.

Changing Attitudes

It is time for society to assess its attitudes toward abortion, a process that demands both honesty and sacrifice.

Are we a society fit only for perfect people? Mothers are more likely to reject and abort their children because of social pressure today than in any previous generation. By not welcoming the less-than-perfect child we also abandon the child's mother.



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The Aftermath

It is curious that women who have bought into the notion that abortion will solve their problems are never really at ease with their decision. Most of us feel ambivalence, numbness, anxiety, fear and tension as the hour for the procedure approaches. The dominant feeling days or weeks later is either relief or more ambivalence. There is relief because the crisis appears to have passed. However, research indicates that feelings of regret, anger, despair, pain or loss associated with the abortion may surface five to 10 years later.

When dealing with a woman experiencing an unexpected pregnancy, most people try to be compassionate and, where men are concerned, even chivalrous. Men in particular fear being seen as unsupportive or insensitive. No one wants a woman to be in a situation so stressful or unmanageable that she cannot bear her life. This feeling is especially strong in cases of rape or poverty, or where the child might be born with a severe handicap. The most serious problems, however, are not the conditions of the child's birth, but our own fears and attitudes about those conditions. By

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We need to be challenged to take a long, hard look at how we fit into the abortion picture. We need to hear priests speak about the issue, and we need their support for our efforts to find answers to serious social problems. Laypeople need to roll up their sleeves and be there when it counts, providing shelter, instruction, time, and prayer to the lost and lonely.

We have great resources in talent and technique to draw on, but our greatest strengths are the sacraments. Those of us who have been restored to the sacraments know that even if things look dark or disoriented again, we have found the source of our hope in Christ. The seductive power of abortion cannot stand against that greater love that never rejects the less-than-perfect of us.

Post-Abortion Healing

During the past 15 years many of us resorted to abortion as a last chance out of a personal pro-

blem. It didn't solve our problems, but created long-term problems of its own that we are only now beginning to face. In recent years, facing those problems has become a little easier with post-abortion healing programs across our country. Women and men with abortion experiences have sought each other out to discuss their private pain and anguish over a wrong and irreversible decision. Names like American Victims of Abortion, Women Exploited By Abortion, Open Arms, and Post-Abortion Counseling and Education are familiar in many cities now.

One of the fastest growing programs today is a Catholic approach to healing known as Project Rachel. At the heart of the program is the sacrament of reconciliation. Often developed under the aegis of the Diocesan Respect Life or Family of Life Office, these programs involve a team approach to the healing experience. Teams consisting of priests, professional counselors and lay peers provide a powerful opportunity to help hurting individuals encounter God's healing love and to welcome the alienated home.

The healing process from abortion is much the same as it is for any other death experience. The reaction that greets an individual trying to communicate her frustration and pain will determine how well she copes with the healing journey. Often the problems that initially lead someone to seek help are not immediately or clearly attached to an abortion event. So powerful is the abuse of abortion that problems of violence, sexual dysfunction, relationship difficulties, sleep disorders and other forms of distress often are caused by long-buried memories of abortion.

As people start to deal with their pain, the most difficult issue to resolve is their sense of self-worth. Especially in mothers, there is a great sense of failure, not having protected their children. Women with a Christian or Catholic background often feel that the deed is so detestable that they don't deserve forgiveness — not from themselves, not from their Church, not from God. They need to hear from the Church about forgiveness for abortion.

In truth, because abortion is a death experience the healing never really stops. We can never forget, but we can be restored. The lessons we learned were bitter, to say the least, but by not forgetting we are truly free from being prey to the same seductions again.

Understanding brings new hope, and hope promises a brighter future for all of us. We must commit ourselves to better answers and work for them now — for the children and for each other.

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