

CAROLINE CHISHOLM

Australia's early settlers had many hardships to endure. The voyage to Australia took months in crowded, dirty conditions, and outbreaks of disease were common. Some died on the way. Many new immigrants arrived in Australia, sick, exhausted, and penniless with no friends or family to welcome them and with nowhere to live.

On arrival, new immigrants could only remain on board the ship for a few days, then they were on their own. Some unscrupulous settlers were ready to take advantage of them. Single women were particularly vulnerable to exploitation by brothel madams or men who promised them romance only later to abandon them.

When Caroline Chisholm, her husband and two young sons arrived in Sydney in 1838, many homeless immigrant women were living around the notorious "Rocks" area and Hyde Park. These women, unable to find accommodation or work had to choose between prostitution or starvation.

This situation greatly troubled Caroline Chisholm. She took some immigrant women into her own home, cared for them and found them work. But hundreds were in need of her help and protection. Settlers beyond Sydney were desperate for help but often these new immigrant women had no way of travelling to find work and were frightened to leave the city.

Caroline knew that she would need public help to be of any real assistance. Yet she was a newcomer in the colony, a Catholic and a woman. She knew she would have to overcome public prejudice, and for a time she hesitated. Hardest of all was the opposition from some elements in her own church who were afraid she would fail. Initially Governor Gipps rejected her request to set up the old army barracks as a shelter. One night feeling dejected Caroline decided to travel to Parramatta to spend some time alone which she hoped would restore her peace of mind.

As history has it, Caroline missed her boat and wandered past Petty's Hotel where she came upon a woman, who appeared to recognise Caroline but was trying to avoid her. Caroline caught up with the woman, Flora, a very beautiful Highlander whose striking good looks had previously brought her to Caroline's attention. The last time Caroline had seen Flora she was living with other immigrants in a tent near the Immigration Barracks. Caroline had noticed that a wealthy married settler had taken an interest in her and tried to warn Flora that his intentions were not honourable, but Flora would not listen.

Caroline now found Flora drunk, abandoned by the settler, and ready to commit suicide. Caroline stayed with Flora until she promised not to throw herself into the river as planned. This experience heartened Caroline's resolve and made her even more determined to assist as many vulnerable women as she could. From that time on, she said that she never felt fear again.

Caroline was eventually granted use of the army barracks by the Governor, which she turned into a home. It has been estimated that she went on to personally assist thousands of women find good accommodation and work. Caroline's compassion for vulnerable women had an enormous effect on the new colony. Many of the women she helped later married and had families of their own.

CONTINUING IN THE FOOTSTEPS: THE CAROLINE CHISHOLM SOCIETY TODAY

Today the Caroline Chisholm Society, Moonee Ponds, carries on Caroline Chisholm's tradition of care and support for vulnerable women and children. It provides free and confidential pregnancy counselling, support throughout pregnancy, family support, parenting programs, information as well as short and medium term accommodation. The Society relies on community support to help offer women alternatives to abortion.

You can assist its work by donating baby goods, equipment and clothing for their Material Aid Service by making a donation, or by volunteering.

Contact:

Caroline Chisholm Pregnancy and Family Support Service
03 9370 3933 or
1800 134 863 (Toll Free)
www.carolinechisholmsociety.com.au

Other organisations offering support to pregnant women;

Open Doors, Ringwood **03 9870 7044**,
1800 647 995 www.opendoors.com.au
Karyina House for Mothers and Babies,
Canberra **24 hours 02 6259 8998**
<http://www.karinyahouse.asn.au/>

Stand UP Girl
www.standupgirl
Pregnancy Helpline
24 hours 1300 139 313
Pregnancy Counselling
Australia **24 hours**
1300 737 732



Caroline Chisholm, wife, mother and friend of the Immigrants.

CHANGING HEARTS & FINDING NEW ALTERNATIVES

A NEW DEBATE

The debate over abortion has changed and changed for good. Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott courageously challenged the status quo last year when he described abortion as a "national tragedy." He argued that "even those who think that abortion is a woman's right should be troubled by the fact that 100 000 Australian women choose to destroy their unborn babies every year." The screening of Julia Black's controversial film *My Foetus*, the recent interfaith meeting of senior religious leaders, the establishment of the Australian Catholic Bishops Taskforce on Pastoral Responses to Abortion, the creation of the Sydney Centacare Pregnancy Support Program and the personal witness of around 1000 women at a key meeting in Sydney in December make it clear we are now in a new situation. The time - where abortion was seen as the woman-friendly option and anyone who opposed it as a benighted fool - has passed. The debate, which had to happen, is now taking place.

For over 30 years abortion proponents claimed that making abortion freely available would improve women's lives. We became all too familiar with the slogans "a woman's right to control her own body" or "a private matter between a woman and her doctor," or "stop women dying from backyard abortion." Abortion access became the badge of honour of the feminist movement.

Few who called themselves feminists dared to question abortion. "To do so risked being called anti-woman, according to the extraordinary powerful dogma of our time brought about by the tireless efforts of abortion advocates."¹ For too long any public discussion of abortion was dominated by a loud vocal minority. Today, some advocates of abortion claim that the mere questioning of the status quo threatens to return us to the days where women died from "backyard abortions." Yet data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics clearly shows that the dramatic fall in maternal deaths from illegal abortion had far more to do with the introduction of antibiotics in the 1940's rather than the liberalisation of abortion.²

1 Erika Bachiochi (ed) *The Cost of Choice: Women Evaluate the Impact of Abortion* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2004) p xiii

2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Causes of Death, 1931- 1996*; David van Gend, *Online Opinion*, (<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=2741>)

3 "Hillary woos conservative vote on abortion," *The Age* 27/1/2005

4 Susan Willis, *Real Choices* Respect Life Program 1995, USCCB

5 *ibid*

6 *ibid*

7 Vicki Thorn, *Reflections on post abortion healing and reconciliation*, (Milwaukee: Project Rachel)

8 Theresa Burke and David Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, (Springfield: Acorn Books, 2002)

9 "SAS corporal jailed over bashing plot," *AAP* 10/08/04

10 Natasha Wallace, "New law to protect unborn as killer father jailed," *SMH* 17/6/04

11 "Assault on pregnant woman sparks law reform," *ABC News Online*

(<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200412/s1259829.htm>) 7 December 2004

12 *Forced Abortion in America*, The Elliot Institute, www.afterabortion.org

13 *ibid*

14 Melinda Tankard Reist, *Giving Sorrow Words*, (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2000) p. 29

15 John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, (Sydney: St Paul's, 1995) p.147

16 *ibid*

17 John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994)

18 Patricia Heaton, *The American Feminist*, (Washington: FFL, Spring 2003)

www.feministsforlife.org

19 Rom 12:2

20 Daniel Allott, "Changing hearts is the most effective method for eliminating abortion"

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RESPECT
LIFE
SUNDAY

CHANGING HEARTS & FINDING NEW ALTERNATIVES

Pro-choice advocates have resisted attempts to challenge the status quo, claiming that debate is “pointless” or “a waste of time,” or that the abortion issue has already been settled. The events of 2004/ 2005 have, however, proved them wrong.

A NEW GENERATION

A whole new generation of women and men is emerging and questioning abortion. There is a growing realisation that the “right” to choose abortion has become an obligation to “choose” abortion. If women are not given any alternative then it is not really a “choice” at all. Members of this generation have often watched friends and sisters suffer the trauma of abortion and have decided enough is enough.

Leading feminists too are beginning to realise abortion is not a solution for women. Even Hilary Clinton, a long time supporter of a woman’s “right to choose” has recently admitted that “there is an opportunity for people of good faith to find common ground in this debate. We should agree that we want every child in this country to be wanted, cherished and loved...We can all recognise that abortion in many ways represents a sad, even tragic, choice to many, many, women.”³ Hilary and others in the women’s movement are recognising that many women in vulnerable positions are simply offered no other choice.

UNWANTED ABORTIONS

While each woman’s story is unique, many women describe the experience of feeling compelled to choose abortion. They act under pressure from others. Becky explains her “choice.”

My Mum was saying, “How could you do this to the family, what a disgrace,” and so on.

My Dad said, “I made an appointment for you to see a counsellor at the abortion clinic this afternoon...”

I was fifteen...when I found out I was pregnant...You talk about choices and alternatives, and I’ve thought about that a million times. But I was so afraid that, if I lost my parents, I would die...I believed that I had to sacrifice my child so that I wouldn’t lose my parents.”⁴

Women describe the pressure that comes from husbands and boyfriends, with many being given the ultimatum “it is me or the baby.” Eunice’s story helps us understand these pressures.

“I had been married a short time, and became unexpectedly pregnant. My husband shut down. He said, ‘I don’t want it.’ I was so afraid of being alone and abandoned. So I went to the abortion clinic, hoping for some kind of counselling but, they only told me what physical effects to expect afterwards...When I was at the clinic waiting for the abortion, I kept hoping my husband was going to show up. I kept hoping he would come in and say, ‘Don’t do this! I changed my mind!’ But he didn’t show up.”⁵

Eunice’s relationship with her husband deteriorated following the abortion. Within months they were divorced.⁶ In the aftermath of abortion, the woman and the baby’s

father are less likely to stay together, with around 70 percent of couples breaking up.⁷ Abortion may also so deeply wound the woman that she may find it difficult to maintain lasting relationships in the future and is more likely to divorce.⁸

Sometimes threats and coercion can turn into violence. Particularly troubling are recent cases where boyfriends have bashed their pregnant girlfriends. In August 2004, a Western Australian SAS soldier was convicted for conspiring to beat a woman to induce an abortion. The young woman was pregnant by another soldier and they allegedly conspired to bash her in order to terminate her pregnancy.⁹

Another young woman, Kylie Flick, lost her unborn child after she was attacked by former boyfriend Phillip Nathan King, in the front yard of her home. He stamped on her abdomen six or seven times after knocking her to the ground. King “had repeatedly demanded that she have an abortion, and had also told two friends he would give them \$500 dollars if they punched her in the stomach.”¹⁰ Doctors have told Kylie that she may never be able to have children as a result of the attack. This case has helped to convince the NSW Government to amend the definition of grievous bodily harm to include the loss of an unborn child.¹¹ More common, however, is simply an implied lack of support for the woman by her boyfriend if she does not have an abortion. The threat of withdrawal of support to a newly pregnant woman is itself coercive.

"It is necessary to become courageously 'pro-woman,' promoting a choice that is truly in favour of women."

REASONS GIVEN FOR ABORTION

What might drive women to seek abortion? There are possibly many reasons why women submit to abortion but too few studies have been done and women are often reluctant to talk about their abortion experience. However, surveys carried out by the Elliot Institute give us some insights.¹² They found 60 per cent of abortions are coerced. The women gave the following reasons for their abortions:

- Forced by mother
- Husband or boyfriend persuaded me
- Father opposed
- No other option given
- Would have been kicked out
- Loss of family support
- Lack of support of society
- Clinic persuaded me

The Elliot Institute found that “coercion came from parents (including the boyfriend’s parents), husbands, boyfriends, doctors, counsellors and others. They may beg, threaten or blackmail a woman until she agrees to the abortion. In some cases, an abusive partner or a molester will force her to have an abortion.”¹³ The male partner played a central role in the abortion decision in 95 per cent of cases. Yet they also found that 70 per cent of women believed having an abortion was morally wrong and if they had been given appropriate support and encouragement from family and friends 80 per cent would have given birth.

Some women also describe being unsure about the abortion and hoping for some guidance from the counsellors. One woman Laura, when asked by the counsellor at the abortion clinic if this was what she wanted replied that she was unsure, only to be told, “well you’re here so it must be.”¹⁴

CALL TO CHANGE THE CULTURE. A CALL TO BE UNCONDITIONALLY PRO-WOMAN.

How might we help break the cycle of abortion, abandonment and despair? There can be no simple answers to such a complex problem. Yet God has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light to be a people of life and for life.¹⁵

We are to bring the Gospel, our source of joy and salvation, to those still caught in darkness. We are guided and sustained by the law of love and have been sent as a people. Everyone has an obligation to be at the service of life. Every member of the Christian community is called to welcome new life, and to welcome the vulnerable and the stranger.¹⁶

Pope John Paul II has given us some great insights to this problem, he suggests:

It is necessary to become courageously “**pro-woman**,” promoting a choice that is truly in favour of women. It is precisely the woman, in fact, who pays the highest price, not only for her motherhood, but even more for its destruction, for the suppression of the child who has been conceived. The only honest stance, in these cases, is that of **radical solidarity with the woman. It is not right to leave her alone.** The experiences of many counselling centres show that the woman does not want to suppress the life of the child she carries within her. If she is supported in this attitude, and if at the same time she is freed from the intimidation of those around her, then she is even capable of heroism.¹⁷

If we want to care for the unborn, the children who are yet to bring their own special gifts to the world, then we must care for their mothers. We cannot care for one without caring for the other.

Prayer

Heavenly Father

You are the Lord of all life.

Help us to recognise that every human life is a precious gift, Worthy of our love and respect.

Lord Jesus,

You have destroyed death and darkness forever.

Help us to bring your light to a world trapped in the darkness of abortion.

Increase our love and compassion for vulnerable women and unborn children.

Of course it is no new thing for Australians to take the lead in criticizing the status quo and adopting pro-woman initiatives. Even in the 1830’s a young pioneer woman, Caroline Chisholm (see box) whom we claim as one of our unofficial saints, was questioning life in the colony. Caroline felt great compassion for vulnerable women faced with a choice of prostitution or starvation. Her vision and passion for justice led her to strive for a more compassionate Australia. With the support of her husband and family she inspired others to work with her, to offer women positive alternatives and to challenge society. Some of that same passion led nearly 1000 women to come together in Sydney last December to develop strategies for the new millennium. This meeting has seen the emergence of a new network of young women – Women’s Forum Australia (www.womensforumaustralia.org) - who believe that pregnant women should be offered something better than abortion. And that same passion for justice has led others to bear witness— often heroic witness—to life. We are living in exciting times and together we can make a real difference.

We need to “show care” for all life and for the life of each individual. We need to work together to find new and effective programs to support new mothers and fathers so that young parents are not afraid to bring their child into the world and to raise him or her. We must work together and look for new ways to build a culture of life and love in which every pregnant woman might be welcomed, honoured and loved, no matter what her circumstances. “Women with unplanned pregnancy deserve to experience unexpected joy.”¹⁸

Pope John Paul II quoting the words of St. Paul, reminds us: “Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.”¹⁹

The cycle of abortion, violence and despair that is destroying our country will be broken with the message of the Gospel. We believe that love is stronger than hate, stronger even than fear. We are called to be witnesses of hope and love and to work to bring about a cultural change through prayer and action. Many people are already actively working to bring about a change in thinking, but we must all do more. The Australian Catholic Bishops have set up a national taskforce to look into new ways in which the church can assist pregnant women and sponsor alternatives to abortion.

Now is the time to consolidate all that has been gained in the early years of this new century by giving people new hope and a new heart. “Changing hearts is the most effective method for eliminating abortion. A true culture of life cannot be sustained solely by changing laws. We need, most of all, to change hearts.”²⁰ We must think of how we can offer practical help and support. Do pregnant women and their children deserve any less?

Holy Spirit.

You inspired our pioneer Caroline Chisholm.

Guide us as we search for new alternatives to abortion,

And unite us, as we work together to change hearts.

May all pregnant women be welcomed,

And find love, acceptance and support in our Community.

May the people of life grow in number,

To bring about a transformation of our culture,

And the renewal of society.

For you are the Lord of all life

Now and forever,

Amen.