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 traveling 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 Highland woman. Caroline 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 Society
Parramatta for mothers and Babies
24 hours 02 6259 8998
http://www.karinyahouse.asn.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.karyinahouse.asn.au/

Stand UP Girl www.standupgirl.com.au
Pregnancy Counselling
Australia 24 hours
1300 139 313

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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 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 Faetus, 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 1,000 Australian women at a key meeting in Sydney in December make it clear we are now in a new situation. The time — when 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.

Foes 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.” 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 when 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 legalisation of abortion.2

3 “Hillery wins conservative role on abortion,” The Age 2/11/2000
4 As quoted in, Real Choices Respect Life Program 1995, USCCB
5 ibid
6 ibid
7 ibid
8 Vicki Thorn, http://www.afterabortion.org
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 7 December 2004
12 Natasha Wallace, “New law to protect unborn as killer father jailed,” SMH 17/6/04
13 ibid
14 Melissa Tankard Keal, Giving Somme Wins (Sydney: Duffy and Snellgrove, 2000) p. 29
16 ibid
17 John Paul II, Caring the Threshold of Hope, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994)
19 Rom 12:2
20 Daniel Allott, “Changing hearts is the most effective method for eliminating abortion”
21 2 Peter 3:11
22 For example, “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.”
23 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 when 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.