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WHAT DOES "WOMEN'S RIGHTS" MEAN?

"Can feminists bounce back from reverses?" was the provocative headline over a recent news article in U.S. News & World Report. The page detailed a list of recent political, legislative, and litigating setbacks suffered by the feminists, and then asked whether their movement can be put "back on track."

The article is typical of many similar articles reappraising the feminist movement which have appeared in newspapers and magazines over the past month. Perhaps they were stimulated by Geraldine Ferraro's book and the Betty Friedan New York Times Magazine article. The comment from male reporters and columnists has been largely negative.

A survey of these recent pieces indicates that it is apparently impossible for any man or woman to write about these issues (in news reports as well as in commentary) without including his or her own attitudes toward gender relationships (and, yes, I include myself in that generality). The bias of the reporters (even when they pride themselves on their pristine objectivity) shows itself in choice of semantics, in selection of issues, and in ranking of priorities.

For example, the U.S. News & World Report article accepts as a "given" that abortion is an essential part of the definition of "women's rights." The truth is that abortion is a "right" demanded by feminist women but certainly not by pro-family women.

Instead of looking at feminist issues through the eyes of reporters and commentators who include their own attitudes, let's let the feminists speak for themselves. Last July 19-21, the leading feminist group, the National Organization for Women (NOW), held its annual convention in New Orleans and passed a number of resolutions. Here is the text of some of them so you can make your own evaluation.

1. "Be it resolved that the National Organization for Women opposes legislation and judicial practice that threaten the rights of lesbian and gay parents and other lesbian and gay people who work with children; ... that NOW shall actively work to repeal state sodomy statutes; ... that NOW supports and urges its state and local chapters to work for

adequate and effective sex education programs that present a positive view of women's sexuality, and of lesbianism and homosexuality, and for the development of programs to support lesbian and gay youth..."

2. "Be it resolved that the National Organization for Women refocus the debate about abortion by ... linking the anti-abortion movement (through their cut-back in international family planning and the failure of our anti-abortion national government to provide adequate funds to feed those who are starving) to death and starvation in the Third World, especially Africa; and organizing Vatican Embassy Days of Outrage to protest the Pope's continual interference in our political arena and the Catholic Church Hierarchy's work to outlaw abortions..."

3. "Be it resolved that NOW recommend to the NOW/PAC that it develop an additional electoral strategy for 1986 to take advantage of the unique opportunity to make changes in the anti-abortion composition of the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, a committee crucial to the preservation of abortion rights..."

4. "Be it resolved that the National Organization for Women incorporate child care as an important element of its national agenda by assigning a paid staff member to facilitate federal child care legislation and to assist state and local chapters in developing strategies to encourage and support comprehensive quality child care policies, programs, and facilities."

5. "Whereas, the Reagan administration is threatening an illegal invasion of Nicaragua, where attacks by CIA-backed 'contras' have already caused over 8,000 casualties in their effort to forcibly overturn the 1979 revolution, which with the active participation of Nicaraguan women has achieved important feminist goals, including equal rights under the law, low-cost child care facilities, child support legislation, public health care, literacy, and human rights, ... Therefore, be it resolved, that the National Organization for Women go on record as opposing United States intervention in Central America."

These resolutions make clear that it is irresponsible for journalists to use the term "women's rights" without identifying how the feminists themselves define "women's rights." Clearly, the feminists have an activist agenda that is outside of mainstream America.