

Echos

The following paragraphs report answers given by Mrs. Sonia Beiruti, journalist and radio-program director, to a set of questions presented by a group of secondary school girl students in Saida, Lebanon.

1. The first question dealt with the meaning of social equality claimed by women.

Answer: Social equality means abolition of the double standard which urges society to give women a different treatment from that of men and to adopt toward them a discriminatory attitude.

The traditional attitude may be either the romanesque, chivalrous one which idolizes woman in the manner of medieval knights, or the contemptuous attitude which treats her as an inferior. Both of these attitudes are wrong. The right attitude is to treat both sexes equally; hero-worship of males has served to spoil them and turn them into domineering and despotic individuals while the traditional treatment of females has suppressed their talents and crushed their personality.

2. The following clarification was given concerning women's organizations in Lebanon and other Arab countries.

First, we have two kinds of women's organizations: the charity associations which perform certain philanthropic activities, for example, village welfare, child welfare, Red Cross work, etc. Though they are headed by women, these associations are not concerned with the promotion of women's rights and demands.

Secondly, the women's organizations derived from certain political parties, which try to carry out the parties' programs and are not directly involved in woman's needs and problems.

There is a third type of women's organizations which we do not have in Lebanon. This type concentrates on the scientific study and treatment of women's problems. Some attempts have been made to create an awareness concerning the need for such organizations. Let us hope that the attempts will bear fruit in the near future.

3. Do you consider the western woman an example to be followed? Do you think that she has achieved true liberation?

The answers tended to be negative. Though the Western woman enjoys more freedom than her Eastern sister, she has almost as many problems to handle as the latter. Like her, she chooses work not as a means of self-

realization but because she is compelled to make a living. Like the Eastern woman worker, she is overburdened by a double load in and outside the home. Sexual freedom, which Western women are supposed to have acquired, has been given exaggerated proportions and, in any case, has been a source of trouble to them. On the other hand, many of our journalists who have discussed this question do not differentiate between sexual freedom and prostitution. A point to be considered is that a woman who practices sexual freedom in an environment which condemns it, will have to face contempt and social ostracism because people incriminate her alone while they justify her partner's conduct.

4. How do you explain sexual discrimination which parents still practice in relation to their children?

Answer: This attitude derives mainly from the parents' fear that equal treatment of girls and boys would lead the former to rebellion and turn them into social outcasts as a result of their independent behavior.

The harmfulness of sexual discrimination has been pointed out in the answer to the first question.

5. Women's work outside the home. Is it a real need?

Answer: It is an imperative need because it is a means of personal growth, economic independence and future security. It allows them active participation in their country's development, while restricting half of the population to household duties deprives society of their varied talents and multiple contributions.

Pithy Sayings

"All Knowledge is a process of borrowing."

Rashid-Uddin Khan U.N.U. Newsletter, vol. III,
no. 1, Jan 1979

Your rulers are replicas of yourselves. If they misbehave, you share the responsibility.

— Arabic Proverb —

Envy not the ignorant rich, ye men of knowledge; Your lot is more enviable. Money is bound to vanish, Knowledge is a permanent companion.

— Ancient Arabic Verse —

Practice rough living; a life of ease is sure to end in deprivation.

— Muslim Tradition —

"Even with consent, a life of dependency can be lived only in fear and servility."

Simone de Beauvoir

"A primitive, when unable to beat his enemy, will pine away and die."

— Modern Anthropologist —