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THE IRISH HIERARCHY'S 1978 STATEMENT ON CONTRACEPTION

The Irish Bishops' 1978 statement on contraception is substantially a repetition of what they said in 1973. Its essential argument is that since there are many sins against which it is inexpedient to invoke criminal legislation, it does not necessarily follow that the sale and distribution of contraceptives must be legally prohibited, simply because contraception as such is morally wrong.

A non sequitur

This however is a *non sequitur*. All that can be licitly inferred from thus distinguishing between sin and crime is that there need not be legislation prohibiting the practice of contraception as such. And in fact, of course, there is no such legislation, any more than there is legislation against fornication or adultery. ¹

What is at present under consideration by the Irish Government is something entirely different. It is legislation which would positively authorise the provision of facilities for the practice of contraception, legislation which could not possibly fail to lend the imprimatur of Government approval to a practice which, as can be seen from contemporary experience elsewhere, is so intrinsically evil that it inevitably brings in its wake such unprecedented contempt for all Christian values as to imperil the very foundations of civilised society. ²

The lesson of the UK

Even at the height of the Depression, when poverty stalked the land, or even during the wartime blackout, one could walk right through the worst city slums in the U.K. with reasonable security. Now, alas! such carefree behaviour is no longer possible even in many of the smaller towns of our affluent but amoral society. And it is particularly during the last two decades that our society has plummeted towards moral degeneracy: in effect since the advent of permissive legislation which lent the cachet of respectability to various forms of moral perversion.

Yesterday

As recently as 1960, in a work entitled *A Synopsis of Public Health and Social Medicine*³ which carried a foreword by a World Health Organisation official describing it as 'a carefully balanced book', the author expressed the regret: 'Unfortunately, the subject of contraception is not one which can be freely approached in Britain. Instruction in contraceptive techniques may offend religious observances and is said, by some persons, to favour moral laxity and promiscuity.'

Today

How justified were these fears! Although, in time, that was a mere 18 years ago, in moral atmosphere Britain 1960 seems light years removed from Britain 1978. Britain today has nothing to learn from Sodom and Gomorrah. Today promiscuity is rife among teenagers. Pornography is everywhere. There is mass abortion, accompanied by traffic in the organs of aborted fetuses. Unnatural vice of all kinds is flaunted publicly, including even a demand for a 'right' to have sexual relations with children under school age. And, still more ominous, there is also a plummeting

¹ Prior to 1973 Irish legislation banned the sale or importation of contraceptives, but not their use.

² Cf. excerpt from article by Professor Ian Donald in the *Daily Telegraph* of 10th April 1978 and cited at the end of this article.

³ by A J Essex-Cater, MRCS, LRCP, DCH, DPH, DIH, FRAI, John Wright & Sons Ltd Bristol, 1960.

birth rate which has already resulted in wholesale redundancy among young teachers. In Scotland, Catholic baptisms have dropped from an average of nearly 24,000 per annum in the sixties to 14,005 in 1976. In South Wales, whereas the estimated number of children per Catholic family was 2.5 in 1968, today it is down to half a child per family.⁴

Ireland too

The same is true of France. And the same will be true of Ireland if, God forbid, the Government legalises the sale and distribution of contraceptives. Indeed, if this should happen in 1978, it can be taken for granted that by 1984 Ireland too will have legalised abortion, as well as all kinds of unnatural vice.

The logic of sin

For once the human mind accepts one form of unnatural sex as licit, the natural law floodgates are down and it is the entire sewer of unnatural vice that comes through. Nor is this altogether surprising, particularly when it is borne in mind that, as often as not, 'contraception' today implies abortion (as is the case with the IUD and forms of oral contraceptive). Once one's mind no longer rejects the possibility of murdering one's own child to gratify one's concupiscence, one is thereby immunised against squeamishness in all such matters.

The warning of John Charles

The essential truth concerning the legalisation of contraception was stated by Archbishop McQuaid [of Dublin] in his Pastoral Letter dated March 28, 1971:

'It may well come to pass (he said) that in the present climate of emotional thinking and pressure, legislation would be enacted that will offend the objective moral law. Such a measure would be an insult to our faith; it would without question prove to be gravely damaging to morality, private and public, it would be, and would remain a curse upon our country.'

If Ireland is not to suffer this curse, these words must now be taken seriously to heart by all Irish people, but particularly by all members of the *Dail* and the *Seanad*.

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(The following letter, minus the added paragraph headings, was published in the *Irish News*, 17-2-1978; *The Irish Catholic*, 23-2-78; and the *Irish Press*, 28-2-78.)

Dear Sir,

The voice of Rome

There is nothing new in the 1978 episcopal statement cited recently by Bishop Kavanagh to the effect that 'the principles peculiar to our faith should not be made binding on people who do not adhere to the faith'. Pope Pius XII, for example, conceded this without hesitation, even as a 'necessity'. But the same pontiff also insisted: 'Above all it must be clearly stated that no human authority, no State, no community of States, whatever be their religious character, can give a positive command on positive authorisation to teach or to do that which would be contrary to religious truth on moral good. Such a command or such an authorisation would have no binding force and would remain without effect. No authority may give such a command, because it is contrary to nature to oblige the spirit and the will of man to error and evil, or to consider one or the other as indifferent. Not even God could give such a positive command or positive authorisation because it would be in contradiction to His absolute truth and sanctity.'

⁴ Cf 1978 Lenten Pastoral by Archbishop Murphy of Cardiff.

(Allocution to Italian Jurists, December 6 1953)

Humanae Vitae

It is one thing for the State to tolerate the practice of contraception by private citizens. But it is quite another matter for the State positively to authorise doctors, pharmacists, family planning clinics or any agency of a public health authority to supply the means whereby an intrinsically evil practice may be facilitated. For that would constitute doing and positively encouraging what is contrary to moral good. As Pope Paul has stated, public authorities must not 'permit that by legal means practices contrary to the natural and divine law be introduced into that fundamental cell, the family'. (*Humanae Vitae*, 23)

The question facing Ireland

The question facing contemporary Ireland is therefore not whether principles peculiar to Catholics should be made binding upon Protestants, but whether atheistic principles repugnant to all Protestants prior to 1930, and to all Catholics prior to the post-Conciliar moral collapse, should be substituted in Irish legislation for the Christian principles characteristic of the integral Irish tradition.

Similarly, the question for Irish Bishops is not whether legislation should be left to the politicians (whose responsibility it always has been), but whether the Hierarchy will have the courage, individually and collegially, to insist on the inescapable moral duties of both Churchmen and politicians. The question is whether they will betray both Church and State by an unprecedented abdication of responsibility.

I am etc,

Hamish Fraser

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Observation by Ian Donald, Professor of Midwifery, Glasgow University, in the *Daily Telegraph* 10th April 1978 – referred to in footnote 2 above.

'The paradox of today is that, in spite of the Pill effectively segregating sexual activity from responsibility for its designed consequences, namely pregnancy and motherhood, nevertheless the illegitimacy rate is rising as never before, and the abortion rate per number of liveborn children continues to rise as even members of the Family Planning Association admit, and in some quarters even extol. It is a sad fact that the more contraception is used the more does the abortion rate increase as a long-stop method in the event of failure or neglect particularly in the immature.'

The sex crime rate was never higher, this in spite of more so-called sex education available today. Perhaps the most disturbing feature of all is that it is the youngest teenager groups who are suffering most, not only numerically but in terms of venereal disease, pelvic ill-health, attempted suicide, disillusionment and misery predominantly female. One might well ask if this is what we want for our children.'