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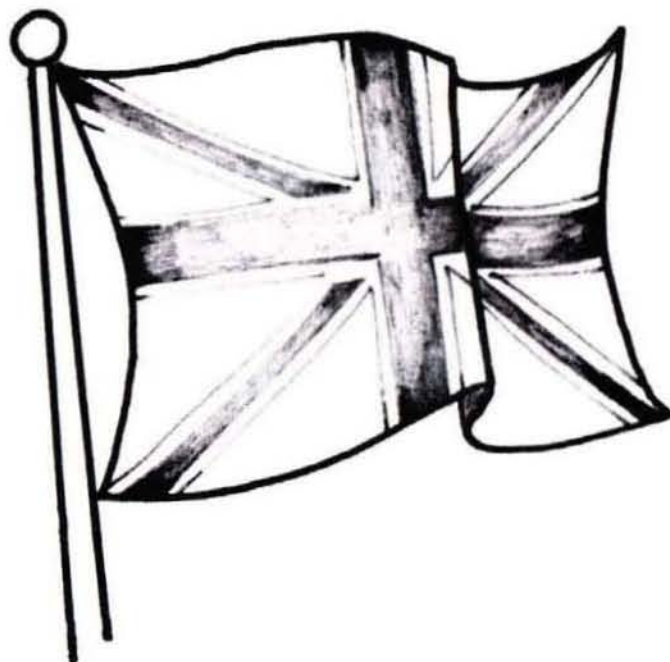
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THE TRAGIC RESULTS OF ABORTION IN ENGLAND

by Norman St. John-Stevas

Norman St. John-Stevas has been a member of Parliament since 1964. He was educated at Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Oxford and Yale Universities. He is the author of a number of books. Among them are: Life, Death and the Law; Obscenity and the Law; The Right to Life; The Agonizing Choice. Mr. St. John-Stevas is a widely travelled lecturer both here and in Europe. He led the unsuccessful fight against liberalizing England's abortion law.

From his viewpoint as a Member of Parliament, Mr. St. John-Stevas analyzes the effects of England's abortion law and draws on his experience to offer suggestions for those involved in the right to life campaign in the United States.

It is strange that the century which has witnessed more talk about human rights, in general, and the right to life in particular has seen more violation of that right than any century in our history. And, yet, I think it is important that however much the right has been violated, we should maintain belief in the principle. Other centuries, of course, have violated the right to life, but it has been left to our century to have the dubious distinction of denying the existence of that right altogether. And, if one asks oneself, what is the basis of civilization, it certainly is not a technology, important as that is, because that is a means not an end. It is not even the odds which reflect the higher spirit of man, but rather it is the agreement to live together in concord and amity respecting certain basic moral values. The

possession of those moral values constitutes the life of a society just as their denial constitutes its death and dissolution. So we should, I think, be on our guard when we see the right to life under this massive, unprecedented attack in our own time. It should make us anxious about the fate of our civilization, where it is going and where it is carrying us. The most prominent attack on the right to life, the trend toward easier and easier abortion, is part of a wider problem in our society. Technology, like Janus, the ancient Roman God, has two faces. One is a benevolent face offering to mankind the chance to escape for the first time in history the dreadful treadmill of famine and want and disease and suffering, which, we should never forget, has been the lot of the majority of the human race throughout the ages and, indeed, is still the lot of the majority of the human race today. Technology offers, in that respect, a benediction.

But the other face of this contemporary Janus offers us not a paradise but a hell: because we are faced with problems that no other age has faced; because powers are being placed in the hands of men which have never been there before; choices are opening to mankind which were not presented to previous generations. And this challenge is facing human beings at a time of almost unprecedented moral confusion in society as a whole. If we can get a humane and sensible and rational attitude on the question of abortion, we shall be making a major contribution to the maintenance of civilized life as we know it.

Abortion, Euthenasia — the two are connected. We have seen in Great Britain how the abortion act was so speedily followed by a Euthenasia bill. It was the same stage army, of course, which marched on and supported both in the

interests of what they mistakenly think of as advancing humanitarianism. But there are terrible things happening in our society today, things of which we should be deeply ashamed. Earlier this week, I was in Washington taking part in a symposium on the question of care of handicapped and mentally retarded children and we discussed a case there that took place in John Hopkins Hospital. It concerned a child who was born a mongoloid and with an obstruction in the digestive tract, which made it impossible for the child to be fed. That second defect could have been put right by a very simple operation, but the parents of that child, who already have two children, decided that they did not want the operation to be carried out because they felt it would be unfair to the existing children to be brought up with a defective child. The doctors, fearful of a suit, and because the consent of the parents is legally required for such an operation, refused to carry out the operation. The law courts, too, turned aside. The judges refused to intervene. And so, what to me seems almost incredible, happened; this child was put into a room on its own and left there to starve to death. Fifteen days this child survived before it finally became so dehydrated that it died.

What sort of a society is it that can tolerate such a happening?² One sees the evasion of moral responsibility and the lack of humanity, the selfishness, exhibited by everyone in this particular case. No one can avoid censure who was involved. Nor can we, responsible as we are for the form of society we have, avoid being involved as well.

Grounds for Abortion in England

Now, as to our experience of revised abortion laws in England. We have had, for three years, a liberalized abortion

statute. It passed into law in 1968 and it allowed abortion on three principal grounds: First of all, the threat to the life or health of the mother; secondly, on eugenic grounds, if there is a risk that the child born would suffer from some physical or mental defect; and thirdly, on social grounds, if the child would constitute a threat to the health or well being of other children of the family. Three defined and very broad grounds for abortion.

It also contained a requirement that two doctors should be in agreement that one of these conditions was fulfilled before an abortion could be carried out. But all they had to show was that they were of the opinion, formed in good faith, that this was so. So you can see, in fact, what a very sweeping measure that was since who can disprove the good faith of another person? Who can look into the minds of men and see what is there? When you get an approval of abortion on the grounds of health, that is so broad a concept, taking in as it does both the physical and mental indications, that it offers no real check at all.

The effects of the statute have been, first of all, that the abortion rate has soared in England. It has gone up in each of these three years on a steeply rising graph, and is still going up, so that certainly we have not yet seen the end of the matter. Abortions are now running at the rate of 90,000 a year, which is the equivalent of 400,000 abortions a year in the United States, if one takes into account the difference in the total populations of the countries. And of those abortions, the majority (56%) have been carried out not on married, as we have been told would be the case by the sponsors of the act, but on unmarried women. And the fastest growing category of abortions is that carried out on girls under the age of 16.

That last horrific fact is one of the things that has caused the greatest public anxiety about what is happening.

Those figures are important. Of course, we don't know the number of illegal abortions that were carried out before the act came into the courts but I doubt very much if there were more illegal abortions than something between 10,000 and 20,000 a year. The legal abortion rate was about 10,000 so you can see we have had probably an increase in the order of 50,000.

Let me say this about the figures that were used of illegal abortions carried out in the United States. One gets this figure of 1,000,000 abortions a year which are carried out in the United States. That figure has no respectable statistical basis whatsoever. It is a figure that was invented by a member of the abortion lobby and has been repeated quite uncritically in the press and elsewhere so that by the mere fact of repetition it has become generally accepted. But it is impossible to find any statistical evidence that could be accepted by anybody looking at the question objectively and scientifically. One should immediately challenge that type of figure when it is presented to one and say, "On what evidence is that based?"

Becoming Abortion Minded

Apart from the actual rise in the number of abortions, the effect of altering the law has been that it has made people abortion-minded. This, I think, is the chief evil effect of a liberalized law, that all the pressure of society is for an unmarried mother to get rid of her child. Society provides the means of doing so. It removes the legal and social stigma from abortion. And the pressures of the family, too, which will not want to be encumbered with the

difficulty of looking after an illegitimate child, all that pressure, too, is brought against the mother. You have a situation where unless there is a woman who is extremely strong-minded and determined, she will, in fact, give way in these circumstances and take the short cut and get rid of the child. One can see, I think, how abortion is an attack on both mother and child. Both, in fact, are losers. Society, in fact, in a very real sense is treating the mother punitively by denying her the opportunity of bringing up her own child or refusing to help her to do so.

Because of the very broad nature of these categories, particularly the health category, we have had all sorts of rackets in the private sector. Because you get crooks, you know, in every profession. You get crooks amongst lawyers — that won't be news to anyone — you get crooks in Congress and in Parliament, and, of course, you get crooks in the medical profession. What we have are doctors who are being paid \$100 a time for a second signature on a form without ever seeing the patient. The woman may sign the form and authorize the abortion and they are paid \$100 for going so. They say they were in good faith, this women needed the abortion and that is that. So we have had coming into the country all sorts of people from abroad and, until the time New York liberalized its abortion law, a great many from the United States coming to take advantage of these facilities.

The Act also has had a very unfortunate affect in the medical and nursing professions themselves. And I want to say a word about this because the Catholic Physicians' Guild is so well represented here tonight and has kindly joined together with the Right to Life to make this meeting possible. The medical profession and the nursing profession in England never wanted this Act at all.

They, in fact, opposed it; and neither the British Medical Association nor the Royal College of Gynecologists have at any time supported the provisions of this measure. In fact, in my campaign to get the law amended I have had the full support of both those organizations. What has happened is that we are getting a revolt in both the professions and particularly in the nursing profession against carrying out this act. Because nurses and doctors say, "Well, we came into this profession to heal people; we did not come into this profession to kill."

Somebody has to clear up the mess. For a legislator a question of passing an abortion law is a question of passing a printed clause in a statute. But for a nurse in an operating theater after an abortion has been carried out, it is a question of disposing of the fetus, which, in so many cases, is a perfectly formed human being and recognizable as such. She has to throw into the incinerator the limbs, the body, the head of the child that has, in fact, been destroyed. So, no wonder nurses are saying we will refuse to take part in this operation — this is not anything we were ever intended, by our calling, to do. As a result of this situation of abortion on demand in the private sector, provided the price is right — and you may have to pay as much as \$500 for an abortion now in a private abortion clinic — the government has had to appoint an inquiry into the whole working of the abortion act under a judge, a woman judge, Mrs. Justice Lane, which is investigating all the effects of this act.

I hope that you will be warned by this experience not to rush into a situation of changing the law without heed for the consequences which are likely to come about. And that before any change in the law can be contemplated

there must be the most thorough investigation of the existing situation and a prognostication of what is likely to come about if the law is changed and the effect it will have on medical resources which are scarce in every country in the world.

But now I turn from the particular situation in England to raise an important question which is of concern to all of us who are involved in this struggle. Why is it that so many people are so careless about this particular aspect of life? The people who are agitating for reform of abortion laws, as they call it, are not, in fact monsters. They are people we know — they may be our own neighbors. They are people who are not immoral. Perhaps, they are more moral, in many respects, in the sense that they are more concerned about the state of society than the average person. What is it, then, that motivates them in this way? If we can answer that question satisfactorily, we can prepare ourselves for the answers to the propositions that are being put forward.

There is first of all the point I made about illegal abortions and the concomitance that goes with it, that the standard of medical care is very low in illegal abortions and therefore it is beneficial to the health of the mother to legalize the situation, because she will go and have an abortion anyhow. That argument is a powerful one. It is a difficult argument to counter. But, I think, you must take that statistical point and look at that, because the figure that we were given for illegal abortions in Britain was 100,000 illegal abortions a year. But if you looked at the maternal mortality statistics, the deaths of those women who had lost their lives in abortions, you found that this was very low indeed. So low, that if you looked and compared the Swedish figures for

maternal mortality rates, one would conclude that if the number of illegal abortions was 100,000 a year, then the standard of medical care of the illegal abortionist was as high as the standard of medical care that was being given by the legal abortionist in an advanced country like Sweden. Clearly here there was something wrong, if you look at these maternal mortality figures. Either the account of the bad medical care that was being given illegally was inaccurate or else the number of illegal abortions was very much lower than it was said to be. I think it is the second factor that is erroneous. I do not think you do get a high standard of medical care in an illegal abortion; but it is that figure of 100,000 or 1,000,000 illegal abortions that is wrong and that must be challenged. If that is so, then the pressure for legalizing abortion becomes very much less because the social need is reduced. I have convinced myself that many people have been taken in by these phony figures and it is this that has made them so anxious to bring about a change in the law.

There is also the point which concerns human equality. It is said there is one law here for the rich and one law for the poor; that if you are rich you can go and pay for an abortion and get some doctor to do it for you; but if you are poor you cannot do this. What is the answer to that? I think the only answer one can give is a generalized one. That, of course, money is power and money is opportunity. If you are rich, then your power for doing good or doing ill is proportionately increased over those who are poor. But one surely cannot make that an argument for facilitating the doing of evil so that everyone will have, as it were, an equal opportunity to do wrong.

Abortion and Womens' Liberation

There is also this question of womens' rights. The whole issue of abortion has become confused with the issue of womens' liberation — so much so that on two previous visits to the United States the Womens' Liberation Front demonstrated against me and appeared outside my meetings with slogans and banners telling me to go home. One of the banners that appeared at Minneapolis had written upon it "Norman St. John-Stevas has never had an abortion." I said to the lady waving it at me that if I had had an abortion that would be something to write on her banner and it would have been worth waving about.

But the question of abortion is something quite distinct from the movement for womens' emancipation. One can be fully in favor of greater equality for women and be totally against abortion, because it isn't a question of a woman's right to do what she wants with her own body. Nobody is questioning that. Of course, a woman has a right to do what she wants with her own body just as a man has, but what she doesn't have a right to do, or no one has a right to do, is to dispose of the life of another person. And the fact that the life in the unborn child is within the womb really makes no difference to the qualitative situation. The child happens to be inside the womb instead of outside it. But there is no more justification in disposing of the life in the womb, putting it at the disposal of the parents than there is of putting the life of the child after birth at the disposal of parents which, of course, some civilizations have, in fact, done.

People seem to be very concerned about population problems and rightly so, because there are the most immense problems which the world is facing particularly in under-developed countries

through the growth of population. But, let us not have cant about this in hypocrisy. You don't relieve the population problem in Calcutta by having an abortion in Manhattan. The two situations are quite different. Whatever justification can be put forward for an abortion in Manhattan it is surely not that this in any way is a help to the people in India or South America.

Finally, I think, one is faced with a kind of mentality that rejects what I call the costing principle: that people refuse to accept nowadays the result of their actions, the consequences of their actions — they won't be faced with them. If they are faced with suffering and trouble which they can avoid, they will avoid it at almost any price. That is the mental and moral climate in which we live. In that kind of climate, an abortion is apparently quick and easily compared with all the trouble there would be in raising a child or helping the mother to do so.

What are we to do in this situation? Those of us who are concerned and feel that momentous issues are involved, I think, can do two things. Our action is twofold: in the sphere of law and in the sphere of morals. I think you are right to resist changes in the law even though I freely admit that illegal abortions under inadequate medical conditions are highly undesirable. But you have to weigh against that, and those of us who are legislators have to weigh the possibility, that in getting rid of one evil we will create a greater evil by changing the law and creating an abortion-minded society. That seems to me, and, I think, is proven by experience, a greater evil than the one gotten rid of. The cure, in other words, is worse than the disease. But if you cannot resist changes in the law altogether, then have a law which is as limited as possible and has effective limitations built into it; so that you do

not have the situation of abortion on demand. I think, also, one must distinguish sharply between abortion on the one hand and contraception on the other.

Whatever one's views on contraception may be, I think everyone can be agreed that it is a pre-life situation whereas abortion is a post-life situation. So, the order of ideas within which to discuss the whole abortion problem is not in the order of sexuality as such; it is the order of human rights. And that is where the discussion must be kept because that is where the weight of the argument lies. After all, what is abortion but a form of discrimination?

We are all very sensitive about racial discrimination today; but discrimination against the fetus is discrimination on just as arbitrary a criterion. It is discrimination on the grounds of size. It is because the fetus is so very small that it can be treated in this way. It is because people don't see what a fetus is like, because it's hidden away in the darkness of the womb, that they are able to dispose of it with a stroke of the pen with no feelings of remorse or compunction for what they are doing. It is extremely important in the campaign to keep these issues distinct. If you, in fact, confuse them, I think you will lose on both fronts and it is of notable importance that the whole thrust now of the abortion campaign is to get abortion accepted as merely one more means of family planning. If that is accepted then, indeed, the whole battle in this sphere will have been irretrievably lost.

I want to say one word about the ecumenical aspect of a campaign. It is extremely important that this campaign should be as widely based as possible, and that it should not be presented as a Catholic campaign as such. Of course, the Catholic Church has given a witness

on this issue of which we should all be proud and we should be grateful, I think. After all, the Catholic Church must be right about something. But the pro-abortionists want to present this as a Catholic campaign because, in doing so, they move the whole discussion out of the realm of humanity into the realm of sectarian theology and ethics. Once that is done, then the case against abortion is very seriously weakened. Do seek, and I'm sure this is a point of which you are aware, the cooperation of those of other religions and those of none. Of course, you can't always find them. This is one of the difficulties. I have also found the added difficulty that if you do find them, they become so impressed with the witness that is being given by the Catholic Church on this subject that they then demand entry into the Catholic Church themselves.

The Campaign and Prophetic Witness

I want to conclude by saying a word about the morality and the moral campaign on this issue. Law and morals are connected, it is true, but they are not the same. What is needed in the moral sphere is a prophetic witness as to the value of life. Prophetic witness is not needed in those areas where people are agreed about the goodness of an axiom. You don't need prophetic witness on those issues where the right and wrong can be plainly seen. You need it in those areas where society is missing something. In this sphere of abortion many people are not seeing the evil that is being done, and it is the duty of those who can see it to raise their voices loud and clear.

The message we have to give to society is that life is worth living. We are living in a kind of antiseptic society based on a view that unless a life is perfect it isn't worthwhile. There is a terrible

falsity here, a falsification of life. It's not life as it is, it's the life of the television commercial, the life of the advertising man's dream where everyone is beautiful, and everyone is intelligent, and everything is comfortable and there are no problems. That bears no relation to life as it is. Of course, life is a struggle and a challenge and we are not all beautiful, and there are defects throughout the whole of the human race. Defects which we all have and some of us manage to hide, which are present in everyone, and some people are unfortunate enough that the defects are so obvious they cannot be hidden.

Let us reject this view of the perfectibility of human life and conquer it with the view that it is a good thing to be alive, that the gift of life is the foundation for everything else. And it is this gift for which we should be grateful and for which we should give praise and thanksgiving every day of our own lives. Let us think, also, when this question of relieving human suffering comes and ask ourselves this question, "Whose suffering is being relieved? Is it the suffering of the possibly deformed child or is it our own suffering in having to behold this deformity?"

I was given an example of this not so long ago when I was visiting an orphanage in North Carolina. The nuns there had started this orphanage because somebody had left a deformed child literally on the doorstep of the convent. They took the child in and from this they built up a home caring for children. But I went in there with one of the Sisters — she took me. She left me, I may say, at the door. She wouldn't come into the home. But I went in and I spoke to the Sister who was in charge of the orphanage. She took me in and we met a little child watching television. She was mentally retarded. There were, of course, considerable signs of this but

she seemed to me a perfectly normal little child. We went further into the orphanage and there came across the really terrible cases of deformity: the children with deformed legs and hands and children with deformed heads. I shall never forget one little boy, who had been abandoned by his parents, with an enormous hydrocephalic head, so hideous to look upon that I could hardly suppress a visible shudder at seeing this child. But this was not the reaction of the Sister who was looking after the child. She picked the child up. She called the child by his name. She kissed the child and she put him back in his cot. To her, he was not a thing of horror and deformity. To her he was a child and she gave him the one thing that he needed, love and care. I have never forgotten that because she was looking at the same child as I was; she was seeing in a totally different way. And it is that need for love and care that is so common in our world and which abortion undercuts.

The Principle of Caring

I also recently had the wonderful experience of meeting Mother Theresa of Calcutta, in Washington, who has devoted her life to the care of the poor. A remarkable woman who has visibly and tangibly the love of God around her. One knows, I think, having met her, what the love of God is like. She has been given this great gift which is now known throughout the world, a gift which was hidden for over 30 years, because for over 30 years she served the poor in Calcutta in obscurity and poverty. An essential part of her message is that the worst thing that can happen to any human being is not to be cared for; and it is that principle of caring for which she stands.

It is that same principle that is oper-

ative here in the abortion field; so that the work you are doing is, in a very real sense, God's work. It is a work of the love of God. It is arousing people to a sense of their responsibility in this regard. It is, I believe, a work which will be crowned with success. There are many battles one fights and loses. This is a battle, which I don't think will be lost and because there is such unease in ordinary peoples' minds when they see the results of what is happening, that it only needs a courageous witness to dramatically alter the situation. Do not be dismayed by the strength of opposition; do not be dismayed by the apparent quality of resources at your disposal; because you are drawing in this battle on powers that are very great indeed.

I'll just leave you, if I may, with this thought. I remember going, two years or so ago, to that terrible concentration camp, Auschwitz in Poland, where 6 million people perished, many of them Jews, many of them also Christians. Father Kolbe has only this week been

beatified in the Vatican, the priest who gave his life to save the father of a family. It is a most terrible place, where the horror and evil was as tangible to me there as was the goodness of Mother Theresa. The magnitude of the crime, which is the crime of our century, was such that one could only stand in silence in remembrance of those who had perished. I looked up at the wall and saw a little drawing scratched there by someone about to be taken to his death in the gas chamber. It was a representation of Christ, but not of Christ crucified, which one would have expected in those surroundings, but the Christ so beloved in the Eastern Church, Christus Sanctaerita, Christ Triumphant Over the World. So there, in the midst of that evil, the human spirit was still alive still unconquerable even at the worst moment. I think it is in parallel with our own struggle. You are being called upon to give light. The darkness is gathering, but if you are faithful and generous in what you give to this cause, the light will not be extinguished and it will illumine the paths of many other people.