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## Letters to the Editor

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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## LETTERS...

To the Editor:

The reprint of the article by John R. Connery, S.J., ("The Quinlan Case," Feb. 1976) very clearly states the background for many of our individual decisions in the practice of medicine.

As a Catholic physician I felt reassured.

As an American Catholic physician I felt a very large void.

The freedom of choice of physician has traditionally been one of this country's strongest forces in providing the highest quality of medical care.

At a time when the choice of physician as well as informed consent as to form of medical treatment to be undertaken (or to be continued) is now dawning bright on the American patient and his family, it would have seemed to be the easiest course for the Quinlan parents to find a physician who would be in concert with their wishes and transfer the care of their daughter to that physician.

The only justification I have for the situation in which this simple exercise in freedom was not carried out rests on the fact that Karen Ann was over 18 years of age, medically indigent and therefore under the Medicaid Program of New Jersey — her hospital and medical bills being paid for in part or in full by public funds and as stated by the Solicitor General of the United States in a case regarding patient care before the U.S. Supreme Court "a patient whose medical care is provided by public funds has no constitutional right whatever to choice of physician or to choice of treatment (using the highest standards of medical practice)."

We must never allow the courts to dictate the norms of the practice of medicine nor interfere with the legitimate entity of clinical impression for

"medicine" of, by and for the State is not medicine at all, but biological control.

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To the Editor:

I write to thank Mr. Robert Slesinski, and the *Linacre Quarterly*, for the excellent essay on abortion (Feb. 1976).

Mr. Slesinski's exposition of person in Biblical terms as the *image* and *likeness* of God is good news. This paper is truly a beautiful and unifying answer to the questions of animal-human fetus, person-personality, non-human-human entity in abortion.

Congratulations.

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### Letter from New Zealand

One of the dramatic events of the past year was the overwhelming defeat of the Labour (socialist) Government after only one term in office during which they enjoyed the largest majority in our history. The National (conservative) Government now has reversed the position and has an equally huge majority in the House.

A month later an identical upset occurred in the Australian Parliament. These two events along with the disillusionment with the Labour Government in Britain suggest that the tide is turning against socialism. People now see that it always pursues a soft line on abortion, its extravagance is bad news for the economy and it usually

lets defence run down. The aggressive expansion of the Russian Navy into the Indian Ocean and of Indonesia into New Guinea and Timor has demonstrated the now historic fact that we need the help and co-operation of the U.S.A.

The Labour White Paper on Health had threatened to bury private practice of medicine. Happily the new government has buried the White Paper and will support both public and private sectors.

The abortion situation has gone from bad to worse, and the first and only abortion clinic is thriving. It survived two trials of its chief abortionist when he was eventually acquitted. And a Supreme Court Judge ruled that the Hospitals Amendment Act, which aimed to restrict abortion to public hospitals, was incorrectly drafted. On the other hand the new Prime Minister has warned any medical entrepreneurs contemplating new abortion clinics that they may lose their investments. New legislation to give effect to the will of Parliament is pending.

A Royal Commission on Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion has been flooded with submissions and all sorts of Catholic organisations have taken the initiative in expressing their views.

The birth rate has fallen to 18.90 per 1,000 and the absolute number of births is declining steadily. For this young country the demographic implications are serious. The economy is in a mess (whose isn't?) but the proverbial corner is stated to have been turned.

During the year we had visits from Dr. Herb Ratner of Chicago who did a great service for natural family planning, family life, breastfeeding and laughter; Fr. Paul Marx of Collegeville, who has done more than any other man for the unborn child; and Prof. Jerome Lejeune of Paris.

With these men, Prof. Sir William Lily, and other distinguished speak-

ers from Australia and the Pacific, the Guild of St. Luke meeting was a unique success.

As the Pope says, we look to the future with a mood of Christian optimism in spite of the sorrows that afflict society and almost every family. As parents and as physicians we cannot expect to be anything other than like Christ, who was "a man of sorrow," but fortunately he permitted us to have short memories and to enjoy the gift of laughter.

**H. P. Dunn, M.D.**

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### Letter From Ireland

In May of this year on the feast of St. Brendan, five men will set sail from County Kerry in a 34 foot open boat, made of hides sewn over a wooden frame, and powered only by leather sails and oars. Their plan is to follow the journey of Brendan the Navigator in a boat similar to the one he used when, as tradition has it, he discovered America in the sixth century. Research in recent years has lent credence to this legend, which in spite of much miraculous hagiology has a sound basis. Certainly the Norsemen were there 400 years later. As tradition has it, during this year's celebration of 200 years of American independence his voyage will show how the Irish connection with the new World is of long standing.

It also serves me to note that the Irish have always been great travellers, whether because of emigration or pilgrimage or as missionaries. Even in the sixth century our influence extended right across to Europe as far as North Italy. Again, at home we have native pilgrimages as old as the foundation of our Christianity in the fourth century: Croagh Patrick or St. Patrick's mountain where he fasted the traditional forty days, St. Patrick's Purgatory of Lough Derg, where each year thousands of penitents undergo three days of fasting and sleeplessness,

whilst walking barefoot on stones saying the prescribed prayers, or perhaps the Shrine of the miraculous apparition of Our Lady at Knock, County Mayo; and there are many others. However, the ease of long distance travel in recent years has helped the Irish pilgrim to renew his connection with the shrines of Europe, but especially at Rome and Lourdes. All through Spring to Autumn large groups fly to Lourdes from Ireland, bringing invalids to pray at the Grotto and to hope for a miraculous cure. Each Diocese and religious grouping has their appointed time, and for many pilgrims and invalids this is their annual holiday. All invalids have their case histories fully documented by their doctors. Miraculous cures are few and far between, but the renewal of faith in the presence of such great demonstrations of loyalty to Our Lady is constant. Doctors come from all over the world, are welcomed by the Medical Director, and they examine cases and discuss them in conference each day. Any sudden improvement in a patient's condition which cannot be explained naturally or scientifically will be subject to scrutiny for several years, with many specialist examinations before a "cure" is declared. In these days of lack of faith in God and too much faith in man, a visit to Lourdes will go a long way in correcting perspectives. I would go so far as to say that any thoughtful physician visiting Europe will find in Lourdes his own spiritual miracle.

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Since my last Letter the situation in the North of this country has deteriorated, with violence increasing and attitudes becoming more polarised. One cannot now see a sudden end to this conflict which is not a religious war but rather a trouble stemming from social and political injustice of long standing. The present recession has done little to help here, but rather has made the chronic unemployment situation worse. The South of Ireland

also has the highest unemployment and rate of inflation ever. Our European connection, which is more obvious since the development of the European Economic Community, has brought some financial reliefs and support, but efforts to level off living standards have shown Ireland to be the poor relation in many respects. For example, we are low in such things as cars and telephones and civil servants per head of population, but high on days lost by strikes.

In purely medical matters new problems emerge; for example, doctors of recognised qualification may now move freely from country to country within the European Economic Community to set up practice. The British and Irish requirements for specialist training and qualification are different and of a higher standard from several European countries. Thus, a two-tiered system of specialist grading may result. An older problem is still with us, viz., abortion. This procedure is now virtually available on demand in Great Britain, which is half an hour away by air. An increasing number of Irish women are taking advantage of this service. It is hard to blame them, because attitudes to unmarried mothers in Ireland are still so harsh. Of course not all are unmarrieds. Our Bishops have come out very strongly in this connection recently, and are setting up centres of aid support and care to help these people. One other point, the fee per item of service scheme in general practice, is now working very well. The Hospital services are in the process of being reorganised with a view to free treatment for all, but this may be more complicated and more costly. It is possible that a compromise scheme of Voluntary Health Insurance, rather like the Blue Cross, may yet emerge.

To-day the Irish remember their exiles.

**Robert F. O'Donoghue, F.R.C.O.G.**

St. Patrick's Day, 1976.