February 1970

Letter from New Zealand

H. P. Dunn
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The past year has seen the continuation of the dramatic recovery in the economic situation, following on devaluation. Exports increased by 59%, the Stock Exchange index is at a record peak, and overseas funds are at a comfortable level. Drillers have for the first time struck oil and natural gas.

The fall in the birth rate has been arrested at 22.60 per 1,000. Illegitimate newcomers have reached a record incidence of 13% of all births. This shameful figure has at least one bright aspect: there are no adoption racketeers because the supply exceeds the demand. Besides their hair, gate-crashing, and generally parents' hell.

The recent recession temporarily increased the "brain drain" to Australia, Canada and the U.S.A., even leading for a while to a small loss of population for the first time in 150 years. As an underpopulated country we could not afford this trend.

Maternity fees for general practitioners have increased from $30 to $60 for complete services. Specialists may charge the patient an additional $50.

Your correspondent has helped to arouse the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child to combat the threat of legalized abortion legislation, which during the year has been passed in Singapore and South Australia. The President is P. J. Liley, who introduced to the world the intrauterine transfusion of the Rh monoclonal baby. Most church leaders, Christian and Jewish, have agreed to being Foused Members. We expect an interesting ecumenic struggle ahead.

We have also organized a national family planning service based on ovulation techniques. There is a growing demand for this information from people who have become disillusioned with current hormonal and IUCD treatments.

To help the doctors, whose proper role should be solely educative, we have recruited nurses and interested laymen to follow up patients and convince the of beneficial fruits of this way of life.

In the year following the enactment of the new medical law, the Catholic community has cooled down in the ancient virtues. There was an official protest march on the Archbishop who during the hospital bills of patients and having more say in hospital construction and operation, the Roman Catholic Orders running hospitals feel they must, as community hospitals in a pluralistic society, no longer insist on the Code being enforced. Therefore, in some Roman Catholic hospitals, direct sterilizations are now being permitted, as long as the legal and medical requirements of the staff have been met.

I would like to remove myself from any implied pressure of the law, to carry out procedures which I feel are morally wrong and not medically indicated. I feel no conflict of patient interest by never carrying out practices which I feel are morally wrong and not medically indicated.

Perhaps it is difficult to enforce and perhaps, as administrators only, there is no longer the power to control and enforce. If this is so; why Catholic hospitals?

This new law in Canada empowers Hospital Boards of Administration to set up sterilization and abortion committees, who will review submissions and pass judgement on them, according to standards set by the law. There is no requirement that hospitals set up such boards, although an amendment to specify this not allowed by the government.

Current practice reveals that there is a tremendous variation in the frequency of sterilization and abortion in various hospitals and various localities. When further studied, it reveals that one or two individuals become largely responsible for this variation. But in all hospitals, where it is current practice to allow liberal sterilization and abortion, the number of such procedures doubles every six months.

For some reason, administrators of some Catholic hospitals have no longer secure in enforcing this Moral Code, even though it remains in their constitution. It would be a breach of my beliefs to me that because governments are breaking the hospital bills of patients and having more say in hospital construction and operation, the Roman Catholic Orders running hospitals feel they must, as community hospitals in a pluralistic society, no longer insist on the Code being enforced.

I wish to discuss only the consequences of this change in law, relating to abortion and sterilization and its effect on Catholic hospitals in Canada.

The current constitutions of Canadian Catholic hospitals have incorporated into their statements to the effect that the Code of Ethics of the C.M.A., Canadian Medical Association and the moral code of the Catholic Hospital Association shall govern professional conduct of its staff and that where there is conflict, the Moral Code shall take preference. This Moral Code was written in booklet form around 1943 and adopted by The Canadian Catholic Hospital Association. Currently, it is supposed to be in the process of revision. No changes have yet been published.

I would like to remove myself from any implied pressure of the law, to carry out procedures which I feel are morally wrong and not medically indicated. I feel no conflict of patient interest by never carrying out these procedures and I practice Obstetrics and Gynecology. I also feel that Catholics have no monopoly on good ethics. Most Christian doctors do not follow the non-Christian doctors do in fact respect life from conception to death. They therefore would agree to the moral code which I follow.

The following is a simplified code which I think should be acceptable to any hospital staff. It is neither Catholic nor Christian, but follows from a belief in a Supreme Creator, the dignity of man and the belief in a hereafter. This belief, I feel, is shared by most doctors.

THE MORAL CODE

The moral code of this hospital is based on the following beliefs:

1. That human life, from conception to death, has a dignity as a creature of God, with an eternal soul and life hereafter.

Bill C-150 is an omnibus bill relaxing requirements for divorce, permitting homosexual acts between consenting adults and laying down criteria and procedure for performing legalized abortion and sexual sterilization in certified hospitals as well as other changes in the Canadian Criminal Code. This bill was introduced by the Minister of Justice John Turner (a Catholic) under the Liberal Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau (a Catholic). A free vote was not permitted — all members of the party being obliged to vote for the government bill. No amendments were successful. Now awaiting passage by the Senate, it is about to become law in Canada.

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