November 1970

Letter from Ireland, 1970

Robert F. O'Donoghue

Follow this and additional works at: http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol37/iss4/27
Letter From Ireland, 1970

Ireland has made the international headlines this year again, but not for the usual reason. Instead of the green island of peace, we have a land torn at one end by the tension of a politically-religious nature, and disturbed by strikes and industrial unrest at the other. The troubles between Catholics and Protestants in the North of Ireland are in a state of solution, and an uneasy peace is maintained by what is virtually an army of occupation at the trouble spots of Belfast and Derry. No one denies that the problems to be faced are a great, but most people believe that the solutions would more easily be found if there was a little more Christianity among the Irish. In the South, we have again made the top of the European class for time lost by industrial strikes. As I write the banks are closed because of strikes, and the building industry has been idle for nearly three months because of a strike of cement workers. Even junior hospital doctors are threatening to resign their posts in search of better conditions of service and pay. All these obviously have an effect on the economy, but less obvious is a considerable fall in the tourist trade, which is very important to us.

Perhaps we all fail to communicate— an explanation for most problems that we face. We fail to communicate with youth, church fails with the laity. This idea of the church has always been a strong one in Ireland. Our parents seemed to go along with this being dictatorship, but not so the post-war generation. The second Vatican Council showed that we are all one body, the people of God, but this has not been very much shown in practice as yet. However, last month we made a big leap forward into the seventies, with a National Centre of Communication, promoted by the hierarchy but headed by a layman. The object of this Centre is education and promotion of understanding between the clergy and laity. This new organization stems from the Catholic Truth Society, which had come to the end of the road with the changing times of the post-war world. Originally publishing pamphlets on religious and moral questions for a population which was rapidly becoming literate, it had become outmoded by more modern methods of communication. Today's youth are tomorrow's new people skilled in the use of the new media were recruited for this purpose we progress.

Medically, we also progress, with those sparring partners of old, the Irish Medical Association, and the Irish Medical Union, much in accord. Negotiations proceed with the Ministry concerning State-sired fee per service system of medicine. We have nearly solved one problem involved in implementing the legislation on breath analysis and blood tests for suspected driving under the influence of alcohol. The Irish level of alcohol accepted at 0.30%, is a pretty high by European standards but it is a start. The merger of the Universities which seemed so likely two years ago now seems to have become a subject for debate, with both sides hanging on grimly to see what will happen. Even now, the city of Limerick waits for a new University: this in a country of three million people, which already has five Universities and five Medical Schools. The Catholic Doctors Guild may need the same treatment as the Catholic Truth Society. Its' activities are minimal at the moment, but they do not reflect the great work being done by Irish doctors individually in the Lay Apostolate, especially in marriage guidance. We wish the new Master General of the Guild, Dr. McKeogh, every success in his efforts to upgrade this Society of Doctors.

Robert F. O'Donoghue, M.B., M.A.O., F.R.C.O.G.
Deputy Master
Irish Guild St. Luke, Sts. Cosmas and Damian
Cork.

November, 1970

Letters To The Editor...

CRITICAL OF HARRINGTON'S ARTICLE

To the Editor:

In his treatise on abortion the Rt Rev Harrington seems to reason in a circle, first depending on his position and then subjugating person to things. We are shown in detail how the fetus from its beginnings is more than an aggregate of cells but is indeed a human being, therefore distinct and too precious to destroy. But later, we are told that while a child has the right to be born, it has in the light of law, no right to not be born. (Rev Harrington's reference to many laws and their definitions on the subject appear to us irrelevant, anyhow, as the whole point at issue in this day of examination is whether laws are fair, scientific, logical or if they should be changed.)

Now we hold that if a child has no right to not be born (even when it would be a hideous, limbless jelly or perhaps with enough mind to know itself an horror to itself and to its world) that, then, as a person, that child has no rights at all; neither have its parents, neither have science, common sense, or judgments of reason and love. The only right has returned to that biological activity which must have its way, being divine, no matter how weird its developments. Person is now adjugated to those very cells and energies to which it was supposed to be superior and because of which superiority its birth as a whole person is desired. We were advised, must (morally) be assured!

Now this identification of nature with divine activities would appear strongly pantheistic in the very ecclesiastics who ideally oppose Pantheism as a doctrine. The over caring for the very child; lightning strikes an adolescent; immediately we hear; "It was the will of God." But was it now? More than when a kidnapper carries someone away? We prefer to say that God's will is in warning child or adolescent about the rivers, storms, kidnappers.

Yes, and the will of God is to heal disease, correct nightmare situations of nature, society, or individual; not in every wanton, freakish, or egregious act of nature. We see God in health, in peace of mind and contentment, in administering of medicine, in happiness; i.e., in quality of life, for which the Rt. Rev. Harrington tells us the law makes no provision.

Dr. Lees, formerly of Mercy Hospital, in a TV discussion, explored a hypothetical situation in which a patient (without there being hope of return to consciousness or to communication with society) could be kept alive indefinitely by artificial means and which continuance this doctor considered foolish and wrong, a fruitless trial to friends and big expense for nothing. Clearly, there is a choice here between person and thing, as in abortion in some cases. An evaluation must be made. Are person, thought, conscious communication the essentials? Or are the workings of nature, however hideous and chaotic, the sacred and final answer? Are ink, are not health and financial status and mental states of the living friends of more worth, than unconscious existence of cells and energies?

In like manner we must give precedence to a mother's life, as personality, to the unborn, especially if it be born in danger to both parent and offspring.

Not that we condone the dispatching of prenatal life on any pretense: embarrassment, selfishness; only when it concerns the whole person, mother or child, laid on both. In viewing that classic movie, the Cardinal, and the decision there in to let the mother die, we couldn't help but wonder that had that woman been married in the Church (rather than participating in what the Church considered great sin) would the choice have been different; would mother rather than infant been spared? At any rate, we are reminded of Jesus' words when certain persons objected to his healing on the Sabbath; "It is lawful... to save life, or to kill!" (Mk 3:4). Whether he did right or wrong, the Cardinal didn't just allow a human being to die; he killed her. Which ever way he decided, he would take a life; and the mother, being the suffering, cognizant one, and comparatively young, would seem the tragedy in the case. If forgiven and encouraged by the Church she might have put in many years of worthwhile living.