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I dare call it murder

By Rev. Ivan Foster

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Being a speech made in the Northern Ireland Assembly on Wednesday February 29th 1984.

I propose : "That this Assembly opposes the extension of the Abortion Act 1967, or any like legislation, to Northern Ireland.

"The issue at stake when we are discussing abortion is of course the termination of the life of an unborn child. There are those who raise their hands in opposition when the word "kill" or "murder" is used of abortion. I find it difficult to consider this matter in any other way or to use terms other than the killing of children, and indeed going further, the unlawful killing of children which, of course, is murder.

I believe that the family is the very hub of humanity; it is the central unit of all properly ordered societies. The fall of any great nation or any great empire had, as its root cause, the breaking down of family morality. There is no greater attack upon the family than that which is launched upon it under the guise of abortion. One might consider these the sociological implications and consequences of abortion, but more directly, and indeed more importantly, abortion is the destruction of human life in its most vulnerable and most innocent state.

KILL CHILDREN — YES! HANG MURDERERS — NO!

To me, one of the great mysteries is how, generally speaking, society can raise its hands in horror at the prospect of a murderer or a rapist being put to death for his crimes, or likewise how many in society can raise their hands in horror at the prospect of what they call blood sports or experimentation on live animals when, at the same time, that society can condone and produce from within its ranks a strong lobby for the killing of unborn children by the million. Since the 1967 legislation, some two million children have been killed in the United Kingdom, all in the name of humanity, all in the name of kindness and care, all in the name of advance and liberty. A verse of scripture prophesies a time when men will put light for darkness and darkness for light and nothing demonstrates more clearly that that terrible age is indeed dawning upon us than the extermination of two million unborn children in the name of humanity and in the name of medical advancement and in the name of enhancing the lives of our citizens. We are talking about humans, we are talking about an unborn child. Sometimes an uneducated, unenlightened view is taken of the unborn child, as if that child were something less than human, as if that child were indeed sub-human, and yet a child is anything but what is described in those terms.

The medical record of the development of a child makes very interesting reading. Twenty-three days after conception, which in many cases is even before the mother is aware that she is carrying a child, the baby's heart is already beating. As early as one month after conception that little embryo has developed and the discernible characteristics of the human being can be seen: the baby has a head with eyes, nose, mouth and brain. As early as two months after conception, the baby will grab an instrument in its palm, and after nine weeks it can suck its thumb. After three months, the baby can kick its legs and feet; it has its own fingerprints, which distinguish us one from another; and it starts to breathe through the umbilical cord. It has already reached a stage where it is perfectly formed, where it has its own personality, and yet at 28 weeks, under the 1967 Act, that little human being can be destroyed. We cannot call this anything other than murder, irrespective of what justification is put forward for it.

That is the medical record of the child. I looked up the Bible just to see what is the spiritual record of a child. In the Psalms, David, inspired of the Spirit of God, had this to say of his own origins. "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My



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substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them," Psa 139 : 14-16

That is the mystery of the development of the unborn child. God plainly indicates that He does not consider the unborn child as anything other than an individual. When Jeremiah the Prophet was ordained of God a prophet to Israel and a prophet to the nations round about, God informed him in these words: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations," Jeremiah 1: 5.

Before he was born he was known to God, set aside by God, and ordained of God. Let me read to you from the Word of God concerning the story of John the Baptist. We read that his father Zacharias was spoken to by an angel. The Bible says: "But the angel said unto him. Fear not, Zacharias; for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shall call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb," Luke 1:13-15.

I must say I am much more at ease with the Bible in my hand than perhaps I am with an Order Paper. I would be nearly inclined to go on and prove my case from the Bible, but I think I have indicated that in the Book of Life - and it is the Book that I, as a Free Presbyterian, look upon as the only infallible rule of faith and practice - it is plainly taught that the unborn child is viewed by God as an individual, a human being with a soul, and with all the properties that we attribute to an adult, except that of full physical development.

PRESENT LAW

The law at present in Northern Ireland is quite an aged law in that it dates back to 1929. Under that law, called the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929, there are four grounds upon which abortion can be granted: first of all, serious medical or psychological problems jeopardising the woman's life; secondly, mental sub-normality of the woman; thirdly, proven contact with rubella - I think, German measles is the common terminology - in early pregnancy; or fourthly, substantial genetic risk of having a mentally handicapped child. I am not here today to argue against the 1929 Act, although I would argue against the 1929 Act; I am here today to argue against the extension to Northern Ireland of the 1967 Abortion Act. I am glad to say that the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland are against the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act. But we have come to learn that the majority's opinion oftentimes counts for little. I trust that in this instance the majority will count. I think there is something of significance in the fact that the majority in this case is not one of any particular religious or political flavour. In support of the opposition to the 1967 Act, there is a broad representation of the two sections of our society.

EXTENDING THE ACT

The pro-abortionists argue that there is a need for an extension of the 1967 Act; first and foremost, to prevent unwanted and illegitimate children being born; secondly, to eliminate back street abortions taking place; thirdly, to remove the burden of a handicapped child; and fourthly to preserve the health of a mother who may find herself with child — a child she does not wish to have.

ILLEGITIMACY

When we examine the 1967 Act in the light of those four objectives we discover that the Act does not provide those safeguards. It does not, as it were, produce the goods in the preventing of unwanted and illegitimate children. Let me just give you some figures. These figures relate only to England and Wales, because it is sometimes very difficult to get the figures that cover the whole of the United Kingdom, but these serve our purpose. The figure for illegitimacy among women of all ages in the year prior to the Act coming into force was 67,041 - 8.4% of live births in 1969. The figures in 1980 - and remember the Abortion Act 1967 was supposed to do away with unwanted and illegitimate births - were 77,372 or 11.7% of total live births, and it is important to note that that is the highest number of illegitimate births since records were first kept. So, far from actually improving the situation, it would appear that the situation has deteriorated despite the presence of the 1967 Act on the statute book.



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UNWANTED CHILDREN

Regarding unwanted children, the pro-abortionists argue that abortion is more caring than bringing into the world an unwanted child who may have to be taken into care. To me it is a rather strange argument that it would be more humane to kill the child before he is born that to allow him to live and be brought up under the care of someone other than his mother. The pro-abortionists say that if there is abortion then that will do away with unwanted children. There is no basis at all for this claim because in the years 1951 to 1968 - the year in which the abortion law came into effect - there was an increase of less than 7,000 in the number of children taken into care each year in England and Wales. Between 1969 and 1977 there was an unprecedented increase in the number of children taken into care. The number rose by over 31,000, from 70,700 to 101,000. So, before the Abortion Act of 1967 there was a rise in the number of unwanted children having to be taken into care of some 7,000 children, but after the Abortion Act became law in 1968, far from this figure declining, as was argued and was anticipated by the pro-abortionists, it actually rose, and rose alarmingly by over 31,000. I think we can dismiss the claim that the presence on the statute book of an abortion law - a law that permits children to be destroyed before they are born — will do away with unwanted children.

It has been claimed that the extension of the Act will eliminate back-street abortion but the figures oppose this claim.

A LAWYER'S VIEW

One report, written by a member of the British legal fraternity, Paul Cavadino, which was printed in the British Journal of Criminology, has a close look at the figures that were available. The report, called 'Illegal Abortions and the Abortion Act of 1967', states that: "A rigorously argued survey by John and Hackman (1972) concerned the experience of their teaching hospital in Bristol in which, following the Abortion Act, the total number of legal abortions had risen from 61 in 1967 to 414 in 1970 and 373 in 1971. The number of patients admitted for emergency evacuations of the uterus remained fairly constant from 1964 to 1970 with an unexpected rise of about 30% in 1971. Our unit, in fact, covers 17 days out of every 56 on emergency duty for the city. Hence, our figures for emergency evacuations form a representative sample of the spontaneous and criminal abortions occurring within the area served by the Bristol hospitals. It is reasonable to assume that the ratio of spontaneous abortions to live births is constant in any given community over a short period of time. . . Since the number of emergency evacuations in this department has remained constant (ignoring the unexplained rise in 1971) it seems likely that there has been a rise in the number of criminal abortions in Bristol since the Abortion Act. The numbers varied between 231 and 278 from 1964 to 1970, and in 1971 the figure rose to 361. This most rigorously argued local survey therefore reaches a conclusion in line with that which emerges from the national Hospital In-Patient Enquiry figures — that there is no evidence of a significant decline in illegal abortions since the Abortion Act." Under the heading "Conclusions" the report says: "This is particularly thought-provoking in view of the reference of the Lane Committee (1974) to 'an increased skill and the use of antibiotics on the part of illegal abortionists.'. If it is true that the 'average' illegal abortion is performed more skilfully today than a few years ago, even an unchanged number of illegal abortions should have resulted in fewer botched-up cases requiring subsequent hospital attention. Why, then, is there no clear evidence that this has occurred? There are at least two possible explanations:

(i) There has been no significant reduction in illegal abortions, and the Lane Committee is incorrect in its view that the standards of care on the part of illegal abortionists have improved since the Abortion Act.

(ii) The Lane Committee is correct on the latter point, but there has been an increase in the number of illegal abortions; hence, although the proportion of botched-up cases has fallen, the actual numbers have not. Whatever explanation is correct, it seems that the Abortion Act has so far failed in one of its cardinal objectives - to reduce the incidence of incomplete abortions by reducing the number of abortion operations carried out in contravention of the law."

ABORTIONIST'S CASE DAMAGED

I believe that those figures, those arguments and those conclusions are very damaging to the pro-abortionists' case which rests primarily on the attempt to remove illegal abortions from society. It appears that the



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1967 Abortion Act, far from removing from our midst illegal abortions and those involved in that heinous trade, has done, if anything, the opposite. In 1966 the proposer of this 1967 Act in the House of Commons, Mr. David Steel, M.P., stated that one of the objectives of his Bill was to stamp out back-street abortionists. I think that that can be put down as another of Mr. Steel's failures.

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Another argument that has been put forward for extending the Act to Northern Ireland is that it will remove the burden of a handicapped child. I have met a number of parents of children who are physically and mentally handicapped but I have yet to meet any parents of such children who wish they had never had these children. I am sure other Hon. Members of this House have heard the parents of such children tell of the difficulties that raising them can bring, but they also say that they love the children all the more because of this. I do not think that a parent of a handicapped child would favour, for one moment, abortion as a solution. It was Adolf Hitler, of infamous fame, who believed that he had the answer to genetic and mental defects in human beings. He wanted to put them to death to purge the human race of defects. Adolf Hitler is looked upon as a monster and rightly so. But Adolf Hitler had more charity in him than the abortionists because the abortionists would seek to put to death a child with no defects, a child who is perfectly formed.

ABORTION - A HEALTH RISK

The fourth reason put forward in support of abortion is that it will preserve the health of the mother. That is a very questionable argument. In fact there are those who have argued that it will do anything but preserve the health of the mother. Figures can be produced to show that abortion brings about a deterioration in the health of women. Women who have had an abortion tend to be more suicidal than most. In evidence to the Select Committee on abortion, on the 28 July 1976, it was stated that a study of suicide attempts admitted to the Westminster Hospital in 1975 showed that almost 30% of the women had had an abortion as opposed to only 13% of women in a control group of similar age and marital status. So, far from relieving a woman from burdens, it seems that an abortion actually increases these and produces a higher level of, and a greater propensity to suicide attempts amongst women who have actually had one. Physically, there is a risk to a woman who has an abortion. After a legal abortion, laceration of the cervix can make subsequent pregnancies difficult to carry through. An article in the British Medical Journal in May 1976 by Richardson and Dickson showed that a woman with this condition had only a 50:50 chance of successfully completing her next pregnancy without miscarriage. I wonder if the pro-abortionists tell their supporters that when they have a child aborted they have a 50:50 chance of never having a family at all. They may not just be aborting a child but aborting a potential family, and destroying the ability ever to have a child again. When comparing women who had had legal abortions with women who had had natural miscarriages, these two men found that, during subsequent pregnancies, 17.5% of those who had undergone legal abortions lost their next child compared with only 7.5% of those who had suffered a miscarriage. A survey of British gynaecologists showed that 83% agreed wholly or partly with the statement that termination of pregnancy, even in the early weeks, is neither simple nor safe. So abortion available to women does not in any way enhance their physical health. Abortion also increases the risks of a woman giving birth to a handicapped child after subsequent pregnancies, owing to damage to the womb. Since the 1967 Act was introduced the number of congenital malformations among live and still-born babies in England and Wales has risen. In 1968, 13,954 children were born malformed. That was 16% of the children born. In 1969 the number had risen to 13,959 and it continued to rise until 1972, and these are the latest figures that I have, when it was 14,412.

I feel that, on all counts, people who say that the 1967 Act is of benefit to women who wish to safeguard their health, who wish to avoid the possibility of a handicapped child, who wish to find a method other than that of back-street abortion and who wish to remove from society an unwanted or illegitimate' child, are wrong. The 1967 Act fails on all these counts. It is a failed Act, but, despite its uselessness, there are those who lobby that it be extended. I think that every woman who considers having an abortion should bear in mind what was said in 1976 by Sir John Peel when giving evidence to a Select Committee on abortion. He said that a 5 to 10% infertility rate following abortion was not unreasonable. Think of that. Women who have abortions in order to relieve themselves of social pressures, or for some other reason, may in actual fact be sacrificing their future motherhood.



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THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

It has been stated by those who lobby on behalf of the extending of this Act that women have a right to choose; that women should have the right to carry a child through until birth, or to have an abortion and have the child destroyed. I do not think it is proper, logical, human or reasonable to give to any person the right to kill another human being, even when it is the mother who is seeking that right to kill her child. That right cannot be given to any person. It cannot be given to a mother. No mother can claim the right to kill her offspring, either born or unborn. There is a sizeable pro-abortionist lobby appearing in Northern Ireland and recently our newspapers have been filled with various articles, most of which are from the pro-abortionist's viewpoint, and I find that sad. Incredible is a more correct description of my feeling. Our society is plagued by terrorism and we in this House have had, on innumerable occasions, to get up and lament a murder. We had to erect a memorial to a Member of this Assembly who was cut down by terrorism. We join together in our opposition of terrorism. Our newspapers report the deeds of terrorists and they use the harshest terms to describe those who gun down innocent people. Yet, within the same columns, we have the words of those who advocate the killing of children. Is that not an incredible situation?

MINORITY SOUNDING LIKE A MAJORITY

We have had the mustering of the pro-abortionist lobby here in Northern Ireland aided by an influx of abortionists from Southern Ireland who, finding themselves unable to take their campaign any further because of their constitution, are coming up here to turn Northern Ireland into an abortionists' haven. Well I, as a Protestant, resent the view that has been often put forward by ecumenical and liberal Protestants that Protestantism is synonymous with a pro-abortionist stance. That is not so. I, as a Protestant, am totally opposed to abortion and I would like the killing of children in Northern Ireland to be made illegal. But I have mentioned that there is a growing lobby, not growing in numbers, I am glad to say, for I think I am right in saying that some 83% - and this is taken from a poll of Northern Ireland people - object to abortion for social reasons. The pro-abortionist lobby is not growing in strength, but it is growing in print and publicity and I am very frightened of that because a minority cause can often be made to look like a majority cause simply because of the amount of noise that it makes.

EUROPEAN FRONT

But what is even more alarming is that the pro-abortionists are attacking Northern Ireland on the European front as well as on the local front. I understand that a draft report for the European Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee has just come out in favour of harmonisation of abortion laws within the E.E.C. Despite the fact that the vast majority of people of Northern Ireland were opposed to the legalising of sodomy, that law was foisted upon us. That law was forced upon us because of the power that has been foolishly given to the European Parliament and I believe that the pro-abortionists are now mounting a similar campaign and that they are going to force upon the majority in Northern Ireland, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, an extension of the 1967 abortion law. I hope that the decision taken by this House today will do something to stop that campaign and will do something to register the strongly held, sincerely held and rightly held views of the majority. Abortion cannot be justified medically; it cannot be justified ethically; it cannot be justified morally, and I call on this House to support my motion today."

The motion was passed with 20 votes for and one vote against, that of Alliance Party member for East Belfast, Mr Addie Morrow.