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Letters ...

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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LETTERS...

To the Editor:

Zelie and Louis Martin, the Little Flower's parents, are being placed before the Catholic world as possible and probable candidates for canonization.

1983 marks the 25th anniversary of the opening of their "cause," in addition to their 125th wedding anniversary (July 13). This "Decade of the Family" seems the ideal time to pray to obtain graces and even miracles through their intercession.

For further information and pictures of each parent, please send a long, self-addressed and stamped envelope to:

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Letter from Ireland, 1983

Up to about 20 years ago, all doctors in Ireland were represented by the Irish Medical Association. A division occurred about that time because some of the members felt that the system of negotiation of conditions of service, salaries and such was inadequate. They formed a Medical Union which has been active since then. For some years now, efforts have been made to unite these two bodies, and in January of this year, the Medical Association voted in favor. I have delayed this letter a little while to await the result of the voting of the Irish Medical Union which, in fact, was also in favor of reintegration. So once again the doctors of Ireland have a single representative body and the evidence of discord has been removed, the new

group going into action in January, 1984. In a country so divided politically and in other ways, this must be a good omen.

* * *

As you know, it is illegal to perform abortions in the Irish Republic. This prohibition stems from an Enactment of 1861 called The Offences Against the Persons Act which, among other things, prohibits abortion. We were then part of the British Isles. A new Constitution for the Republic was promulgated in 1937 and the relevant section states as follows (Article 40): — "All citizens shall as human persons be held equal before the law. This shall not be held to mean that the State shall not in its enactments have due regard to differences of capacity physical and moral and of social function." This Article was considered to give sufficient protection to the fetus and to be less liable to challenge than the original 1861 Article. As we all know, the British Abortion Law of 1967 was considered to give permission for abortion only in certain serious and well-stated situations, but the fact was that abortion on demand became widespread almost immediately.

In recent times, there has been a considerable voice in this country for abortion, not only because of the many Irish women who go to England for this reason, but also to present a legal challenge to the validity of the relevant Irish Article. If this latter succeeded in the Courts, we would find ourselves permitting abortion, with the same consequence as in England. A group of concerned people, fearing that this might happen, set up an

organization to lobby for the revision of this Article by a referendum. Initially agreement to support this was secured from the main political parties. We then had a general election, and the campaign began in earnest with a different Government. It was waged with considerable vigor and rancor, both by those in favor and against, even before the actual text of the proposed Amendment to the Constitution was published. Eventually, when this was published, the Government party withdrew its support. We then had many sub-divisions, e.g., pro-abortion anti-referendum, pro-referendum pro-abortion in certain cases, etc., etc. Voting took place in September of this year, and by a majority of 3 to 1, but with less than two-thirds of the population voting, the Amendment was passed. It reads as follows: "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and with due regard to the equal rights of life of the mother guarantees in its laws to respect and as far as is practicable by its laws to defend and vindicate that right." Thus we are now one of the few remaining countries in the world where the right to life of the fetus is equal to that of the mother. Of course we recognize that a proportion of Irish women, mostly those who are unmarried, go abroad to

have abortions performed each year, but in fact, these numbers are declining, principally because the attitude of the public to illegitimacy is improving and becoming more understanding. It is certain that those who favor abortion have not given up, but at least they have had a firm set-back. We can anticipate a similar series of actions on the subject of divorce, which is also outlawed by our Constitution, but we may well find that the law here may be changed to no longer agree with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

* * *

Finally I regret to say that there has been a very great increase in the use of hard drugs in this country, particularly in the capital city, Dublin, and to a lesser extent outside it, in the past five years. We are now quite used to reading that large quantities of heroin and other drugs have been discovered either in ships in port or at the main airports. Recent statistics show that a high proportion of the heroin addicts are very young teenagers. Following a recent outcry in all the media, a campaign is now being mounted to counteract this abuse before it is too late. More in my next letter.

— Robert F. O'Donoghue, F.R.C.O.
Cork

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