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## **FAITH PERSPECTIVE - Cherish every life**

**by Bishop Donal McKeown**

### **Bishop Donal's address to a public meeting in Buncrana - Sunday April 8th 2018**

It is good to see so many people here this evening. Thank you for coming. The numbers involved in our conversations demonstrate just how close this issue is to many people's hearts.

As the local bishop, I have been asked to give both guidance and encouragement to those who live in the Co Donegal part of the diocese. And that led to a shortish pastoral letter that has been publicized this weekend, with the title *Human Life is precious, beautiful, sacred*. I hope it may help to clarify both some ideas and the attitudes that we – as people of faith – bring to the discussions.

The first thing I would like to say this evening is that we need to keep foremost in our minds, not the radical campaigners for change who shout the loudest but the women – and sometimes the men – for whom this is an intensely personal and painful area. As a single man with no children I have to be sensitive to anyone who could be hurt by harsh or condemnatory words.



Jesus would never be strident with people who are hurting. And I am sure that there are people with us tonight for whom this is a very painful issue.

Secondly, the Dublin government has given the electorate a very stark choice. We did not decide what question to put to the electorate. But this is the stark choice that they have put before you.

EITHER to keep the constitution as it is - where the 8<sup>th</sup> is the only legal recognition of the unborn child and which believes that the Irish people are big-hearted enough to love both mother and unborn baby in a crisis situation.

OR, to abolish 8<sup>th</sup> amendment AND implicitly approve Government plan to

oAllow unlimited, no-questions-asked access to abortion up to 12 weeks; AND

oAbortion at any stage to protect the health (physical or mental) of the mother

We did not frame the question. But this is the choice that we have to make.

When it comes to referendum day, we know from UK that the '*mental and physical health of the mother*' essentially means 'on demand'. The UK now has 1 abortion for every 4 live births. That is 1 million abortions in the UK since 2013. That is not the mark of a civilised country. There is no country that has limited abortion to only hard cases. Once it becomes acceptable, it becomes widespread. If we go down the British route, we would lose about 13,500 unborn babies each year. That is a town the size of Tullamore or Cobh each year – or two thirds the population of Letterkenny. That is the choice that the electorate faces. The question is not of our making – but the answer is.

We know that the current legal framework does not remove really difficult situations for expectant mothers. But the solution to painful situations comes from compassion and support – and not from a vacuum pump, a curette or a saline solution. Killing people – before or after birth – is never a solution to a problem. Yet, down through history, powerful people have kept telling us that lie. When will they ever learn? When will we have courage to tell them that they are wrong?

Thirdly, the leader of one political party tried to sound profound when she said that the law does not exist to enact Catholic values. That is true - but it was a very silly comment in the context of abortion. There are people from other faiths and none who believe that, when you remove the right to life, all other human rights are in danger.

-The belief that a baby at 12 weeks has all its organs formed is a scientific fact, not a narrow Catholic dogma.

-The statement that repealing the 8<sup>th</sup> would leave the unborn child with no legal status is a legal fact, not a papal teaching.

We are arguing for how our faith helps us to serve the Common Good, not how to impose Catholic teaching on anybody.

Furthermore, one of the modern buzzwords is 'equality', loudly demanded in other areas by the same party leader. Currently, the constitution provides for equal right to life of the unborn baby and its

mother.

Elsewhere, legislation also tries to secure equality of access and opportunity for people with disabilities. What is being proposed is a situation which will radically discriminate against those with



disabilities before they can even be born. You don't have to be Catholic to argue for the protection of those who will suffer most by the repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> – the poor, the disabled and women.

Fourthly, public figures ask the question as to whether we do not trust women to make good decisions. My simple response is always to ask whether they trust men to always make good decisions. Since the Garden of Eden, human beings – male and female – have shown that they are capable of great courage and of poor decisions. If we trusted everybody to make good decisions all the time, there would be no need for laws or for the courts system.

Fifthly, the Irish tradition, revealed in our language, shows great compassion for the unborn child and the person with disabilities. We have phrases such as

-Beo gan breith to describe an unborn child. 'Alive without birth'

-Duine le Dia to describe a person with learning difficulties. 'A person with God'

This is a warm-hearted tradition. Do we need to abandon it just because large neighbours disagree?

Just yesterday I came back from Lourdes. I was there as part of an international group of 5,000 disabled children and helpers from UK, Ireland and other countries. It was a great opportunity to experience of individuality of each person with disabilities and the goodness that they bring out of others. And I particularly remember on angry

father with a Down's syndrome son. 'You can get rid of a disease with medicines', he said. 'The only way you can get rid of Downs is by killing children like my son'. And that is precisely what is being boasted about by a number of western countries.

The compassionate Jesus of the Gospel loves people as they are and where they are - and despises no-one. Legislating for the publicly funded killing of unborn children can never masquerade as an act of compassion.

I have said enough. And we have parents to speak this evening – and they can offer a wisdom and leadership that I cannot. Suffice to say that the electorate face a stark choice on May 25<sup>th</sup>. Very many people from all backgrounds want to create an Ireland that promotes equality and compassion. Removing the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment will never serve that purpose

Thank you.

*+Donal McKeown*  
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Buncrana April 8<sup>th</sup> 2018