

Say an Ave there for me

The vote in Ireland in the spring to take away constitutional protection for the unborn came as an unhappy surprise to Irish Catholics in the United States. It was a piece of news we didn't want to hear or believe.

Far more Americans identify as Irish than the mere 5 million people who inhabit the Republic of Ireland today. Most have no idea how quickly the once Catholic nation they think of so fondly is losing its faith, thanks in no small part to clerical scandals there.

What many Americans may still not realize is that Ireland is embracing the culture of death with a zeal and gusto that few other countries — even traditionally secularized ones — would be so foolish as to imitate.

During the campaign to repeal Ireland's Eighth Amendment (its constitutional protection of the unborn) campaigners promised that it would be followed up with a moderate abortion law. That promise is not quite panning out.

The current Irish government is not content just to legalize abortion. It worries that abortions won't become widely enough available if providers aren't compelled to perform them.

As in the United States, most medical professionals don't go through years of training so they can do something so sordid. A poll of Irish general practitioners this year showed that 68 percent of them either could not or would not perform abortions. Regardless of their politics, doctors tend to view themselves as lifesavers, not life-takers. . That's why Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and his cabinet are pushing a bill that would rope into the practice of abortion both taxpayers (who would fund it) and as many medical professionals as possible.

His original plan would have forced general practice physicians — the doctors the government is counting on to become the nation's new abortion corps — to specifically opt out of the program or else perform abortions. This roused the ire of the National Association of General Practitioners, which voted in June that no one should have to perform an abortion without specifically opting in. The government

finally yielded on that point this week — a small bit of good news.

But the government still wants all hospitals that receive public funding to perform abortions starting in the new year, including those traditionally tied to the church and run according to the principles of Catholic medical ethics.

And all doctors will have to refer patients for abortion, no exceptions. So must Catholic crisis pregnancy centers, which are publicly funded in Ireland, but which were established specifically to give mothers better options than going abroad for an abortion. The bill also contains no exceptions for pharmacists who don't want to sell abortion drugs.

Abortion has long been illegal in Ireland, but the pendulum has swung back hard — so hard as to knock the common sense out of its leaders' heads.

This would be a good time to spare a prayer or two for Ireland. It's no longer the place you thought it was. It could use a new St. Patrick to drive out the snakes and scorpions again.

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