

Proposed Abortion Law 'Dead' and 'Buried'

Albany — (RNS) — Under heavy fire from several of his legislative colleagues, a legislator who sponsored the bill to broaden the New York State abortion law said his proposal poses a "crisis in conscience."

Assemblyman Albert H. Blumenthal (D-Manhattan), who introduced the controversial bill on abortion, spoke for 30 minutes on the Assembly floor.

He said that opposition to his proposed abortion reform bill "came almost entirely from the Catholic Church."

Mr. Blumenthal said his statement was an answer to a pastoral letter signed by the bishops of the eight New York dioceses and read at Sunday Masses in the state's 1,700 Catholic churches.

In their letter the eight bishops had urged the state's 6.5 million Catholics to fight with "all their power" the bill to liberalize New York's 84-year-old abortion law.

(Bishop Sheen wrote his own letter to be read in parish churches of the Rochester Diocese. It was published in last week's Courier.)

Current New York law permits abortion only when the mother's life is in danger.

Mr. Blumenthal's bill would permit abortion in cases where the mother's physical or mental health could be impaired, in cases of incest or rape and unmarried young girls.

In his speech to the Assembly, he said he respected the rights of the bishops in their actions.

"But this is a crisis of conscience," he said. "One that we don't face too often. And those who in good conscience wish to make the decision for themselves should have the right to do so."

Upon completion of his speech, Mr. Blumenthal came under immediate fire from two Roman Catholic Assemblymen.

"This is not an issue where the only people who oppose abortion are eight Catholic bishops and their 6 million constituents," said Assemblyman Lawrence P. Murphy (D-Brooklyn). "But I have to believe my eight Catholic bishops who tell me how to believe. Who is going to tell us when a foetus is a person? I won't take that man's (Blumenthal) word for it. He's not equipped."

Mr. Murphy said the minds of every Catholic in New York State were open to proposals, but "it's going to take more than we've heard here to change it."

Assemblyman Dominick L. DiCarlo (R-Queens) then charged that Mr. Blumenthal's proposals were "abortion on demand." He accused him of having a "personal crusade."

"You want to conform to the wants of the Americans for

Democratic Action and the Civil Liberties Union," stormed Mr. DiCarlo, "and what they want is abortion by demand."

Mr. DiCarlo, a former Queens district attorney, said the position of the Catholic Church is that life begins at the instant of conception and thus would naturally include a foetus of any age.

"Atheists are willing to destroy life," he said, "but I don't think that most people want any part of this."

Mr. Blumenthal said that while "those of the Roman Catholic Church presented their point of view," members of other Churches, while taking similar views, acknowledged a need for reform.

Three public hearings were jointly conducted by the Committee of Health, chaired by Mr. Blumenthal, and the Committee of Codes, chaired by Assemblyman Thomas V. LaFauci (D-Queens).

Little effort was made by the bill's backers to enlist full testimony of the medical profession, thus the hearings evolved into a debate on theological issues.

Strong support for the Blumenthal bill came from the New York State Council of Churches, representing 33 Protestant denominations and the Episcopal Church of New York State.

At a hearing in Albany, the

State Council of Churches stated, "We support the bill not because we do not believe in the sanctity of human life but because we believe that there can be situations in which considerations of charity, profound charity, dictate that termination of pregnancy be permitted for the sake of the mother, or of the child that may be born, or both."

John V. P. Lasso, Jr., director of Christian Social Relations for the Episcopal Diocese of New York, testified that "we do not advocate reform of these laws for reasons of birth control, which we deem an entirely separate issue, or for eugenics or genocide, both of which we condemn."

"We are concerned solely with those cases in which continuation of the pregnancy could have tragic and damaging effects. We ask only that a legal and safe abortion be granted to those whose religious beliefs do not prevent it," he said.

However, churchmen of various denominations in New York City, said revision of the law would mean "a serious deterioration in American family life."

Those who voiced opposition to the abortion reform bill included Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, president of the Protestant Council of the City of New York, Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese

of North and South America, Rabbi Julius G. Neumann, a member of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, and Rabbi Jehuda Melber, of the Briarwood Jewish Center in Queens.

In their letter, which Mr. Blumenthal answered in his floor speech, the Catholic bishops called upon their parishioners to "do all in your power to prevent direct attacks upon the lives of unborn children."

"We invite serious reflection on our position as Catholics," the bishops stated, "regarding the right to life of every human being and our consequent opposition to abortion. The right of innocent human beings to life is sacred and inviolable and comes from God Himself."

It was hoped, for a time, by backers of the abortion reform bill that the Catholic Church might relax its position on the measure, as it did last year on the broadening of the state's divorce laws.

However, it was pointed out here by seasoned observers that the Church's relaxation came only after two years of closely watching highly-publicized surveys, and state public hearings which are considered the lawmakers' traditional way of "aging" controversial measures.

Even during the hearings emotionalism hit a peak on several occasions.

At one point at a hearing here, Albany District Attorney John T. Garry II, hurled sharp questions at Mr. Blumenthal, as to whether he favored euthanasia, was committed to atheism, and whether he believed in the Ten Commandments.

"We are being asked to take the life of the most innocent creature of God, the life of the unborn child," shouted Mr. Gary.

John T. Noonan Jr., a consultant to the Papal Commission on Problems of the Family, Population and Natality — and a Notre Dame law professor, told the committee, "You are facing one of the great moral issues of our time."

Other speakers who favored the bill argued that a foetus does not become a human being until it is born. They held that abortion to protect the mother's life and physical and mental health is good medical practice, not "murder."

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Charm Course for Young Nuns

Dubuque — (RNS) — Thirty-nine postulants of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary took a five-day charm course, similar to that given to airline hostesses. Some of the "charm students" confer with one of the instructors, Miss Myla A. Hoffman, supervising hostess of O'Hare International Airport in Chicago (left). Mother Mary Consolatrice, superior general, who arranged the course, said, "We have always been impressed with the graciousness of airline hostesses and decided to learn about their training."

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