

Theologian: Rape doesn't OK abortion

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — A French moral theologian, commenting on the case of a 14-year-old Irish rape victim seeking an abortion, said the drama faced by the girl does not justify the taking of another human life.

"Looking at it from the point of view of the child, the church confirms its condemnation of abortion, even in cases like this," said Jesuit Father Olivier de Dinechin, an expert on human life issues for the French bishops' conference. He was interviewed by Vatican Radio Feb. 27.

In introducing the interview, Vatican Radio said the Irish case was being exploited by some who wish to legalize abortion in Ireland.

"But abortion, with the elimination of a defenseless being that has the right to life, and with its undeniable and dramatic psychological consequences for the mother, must first of all be the subject of serious moral reflection," the radio said.

Irish opposition politicians said Feb. 27 the country might have to lift its blanket ban on abortion, following the decision by the Supreme Court to allow the teenager to travel to Britain for an abortion.

Opposition Deputy Nuala Fennell said, "While the judgment happily resolves an immediate problem, it leaves some unfinished business for politicians."

Labor Party leader Dick Spring said, "It may well be that this issue is far from resolved."

Father de Dinechin said his own



AP/Wide World Photos
Police hold up metal barriers as protesters attempt to break through during a demonstration in Dublin Feb. 25. Around 300 people, mainly students, blocked streets outside the Irish Parliament to protest the Supreme Court of Ireland's decision banning a 14-year-old rape victim from having an abortion in England.

pastoral experience had left him with no doubt that rape "is one of the worst experiences that a woman can experience." The girl's age in this case makes her situation especially moving, he said.

"I think that for a woman who has suffered violence and becomes pregnant, it is very problematic to add to the terrible experience of rape the experience of participating in a homicidal gesture, which would aggravate her drama," he said.

Moreover, he said, the church has traditionally spoken out in defense of the innocent life in cases such as this. It teaches that a conceived child cannot be condemned to death on the basis of violence suffered by the woman, he said.

Father de Dinechin noted that the Vatican's doctrinal congregation in

1974 emphasized that no one, not even the father or the mother, can decide to choose death for a child — even in the embryonic state.

"Clearly, this case presents a very dramatic situation, and only God can judge the consciences of those who have made a particular decision," the priest added.

The Irish case sparked widespread debate in and outside the country on abortion for rape victims.

In late February, the Supreme Court of Ireland overturned a lower court order and said it would allow the girl to fly to Britain for an abortion. The girl had allegedly been raped by her best friend's father.

The rape victim, who was almost 12 weeks pregnant, threatened to commit suicide when the Irish attorney general first issued an injunction stopping her

from having the abortion. A constitutional amendment bans all abortion in Ireland, but an estimated 4,000 Irish women travel to Britain every year for abortions.

It was not immediately clear whether or when the girl's parents would arrange to have the abortion.

The Irish bishops' Catholic Press and Information Office noted that the Supreme Court did not explain how it reached its ruling, but said it could only "be a matter of satisfaction to all concerned that the legal issues in this case have been resolved with the minimum of delay."

However, the office added, "It remains the concern of the Catholic Church that, as always, whatever the circumstances, innocent new life should not be made to pay the penalty of death for the crime of another."

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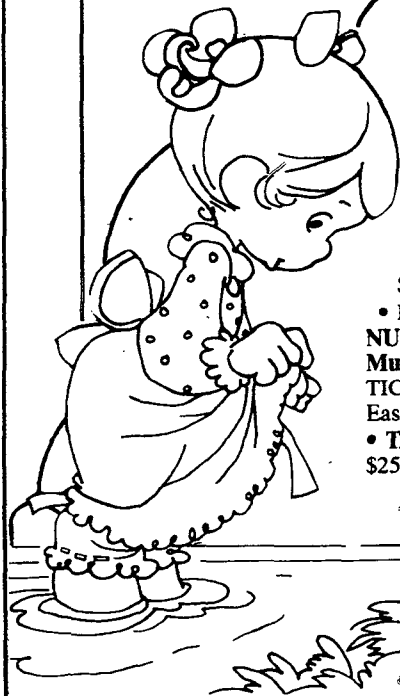
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