
Access to abortion enshrined in the Constitution. Msgr. Hérouard: “Life is not a problem, we must ensure it is supported and welcomed”

“The value of life is not recognised. This happens when life is seen as a problem in certain situations and by certain people. But life is not a problem. Death and the denial of life is the problem. We must help life to grow, to be embraced and accompanied,” said Msgr. **Antoine Hérouard**, Archbishop of Dijon and COMECE Vice-President. SIR contacted him on the day of a parliamentary vote that will make France the first country in the world to explicitly enshrine access to voluntary abortion in its constitution. The amendment introduces a new paragraph into Article 34 of the Constitution, which reads as follows: “The law determines the conditions under which the freedom guaranteed to women to have recourse to voluntary abortion is exercised.” In a statement issued a few days ago, the French Bishops reiterated their conviction that abortion “remains an act that threatens life from the very beginning”, which “cannot be seen exclusively from the perspective of women's rights.”



Your Excellency, why do the bishops oppose it? Because we are pro-life. The problem is not the Abortion Act per se, but the failure to address the underlying issues. When Simone Veil's law was first passed in 1974, it was said that the law would put an end to a very dangerous situation. What we have instead is an increase in the number of abortions, and today the number of abortions is at an all-time high. France recorded an average of 235,000 abortions annually. This is a huge number. **What are the “underlying issues” you just mentioned?** No one, no political party, is calling the freedom of choice into question today. There is no danger on this point. The real question is why so many have resorted to, and continue to resort to, abortion. This is a serious act which has far-reaching consequences, including psychological implications, for so many women. **The newly approved parliamentary amendment incorporates abortion into a constitutional text. This is a landmark decision for France. What makes you doubtful?** The fact that this freedom is enshrined in the Constitution. The Constitution is the legal framework for the functioning of the democratic state. It does not mean trying to incorporate everything into the Constitution. That is why the bishops are not in favour of it. **The French Bishops have noted that abortion “cannot be seen solely from the viewpoint of a woman's rights”.** Indeed. We said that the issue cannot be discussed solely from the perspective of women's rights, which is obviously a very important aspect, but there is also a new life that begins that is not being mentioned. **You are the French Bishops' delegate to COMECE. What message do you think France is sending to Europe with this decision?** This initiative comes in the context of a Europe-wide attempt to include the freedom of abortion in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. However, situations vary greatly among EU member states. In Malta, for example, abortion is banned. Nor is it a question of European legislation per se, since issues relating to ethical and family problems are the sole responsibility of national legislation. But this effort on the part of the French government and President Macron is also a signpost at the international level. **As Bishops, you speak to European societies that are increasingly secularised and de-Christianised. And what you say is often judged as conservative and traditionalist. How do you respond to these comments?** It is not a question of judging women who want to have an abortion - we are fully aware of the many difficult situations involved. All we want to say is that abortion cannot simply be a means of contraception. Abortion remains a very painful act with consequences for the woman's life. We often see this in women who have had a voluntary abortion 20 or 30 years ago and who, many years later, confide in the priest about the deep scars they still carry from that experience. This is why we say that this dimension of abortion cannot be treated simply as a right. It is an intimate matter that involves the woman as well as the man. **In the face of political projects that affect the most intimate spheres of human life, what worries you most as Church in Europe?** What we see today in European societies is this almost infinite demand for individual rights, aimed at guaranteeing that a person can do whatever they want, when they want

and how they want, without taking into account the social and collective dimension of their actions and how they affect other people. For example, if the demand is for the legal capacity to end someone's life through euthanasia, what consequences will this choice have for the most vulnerable people who are ill? What will they think? Should they think that their lives are no longer of value and that they are, in fact, a burden? It is therefore a question of understanding whether care for the weakest and most defenceless among us, whether at the beginning or at the end of life, still has a role to play in our understanding of human life. **As Bishops, do you feel more alone and isolated after this constitutional amendment?** In practice, very little will change. What is most important for us are the concrete steps taken by society to help women avoid this predicament and to see to what extent abortion is permitted. In France, it was first allowed at 10 weeks' pregnancy, then it was extended to 12 and now it's 14. Meanwhile, the number of physicians willing to carry out abortions is not increasing because they see that it is increasingly difficult and complicated, including from a technical angle. This presents them with a serious problem in terms of understanding their mission, which is to help people, not to destroy human life.

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