

## Close down the HSE, not vital A&E wards

LAST week, we were told that 24-hour A&E services are to be phased out at seven hospitals – allegedly because they are too small to be viable. By no stretch of the imagination, however, could such a trumped up charge be laid at the door of Limerick Regional.

The second busiest A&E in the country, it provides a life-and-death emergency service not just to Limerick city and its hinterland but, ever since A&E hours were curtailed at Ennis and Nenagh hospitals several years ago, to the entire mid-west.

Indeed, it is claimed that patients from remote parts of Co. Clare died en route to Limerick but would quite possibly still be alive today if they had been able to secure treatment in Ennis.

How much slimmer will the chances of survival now be if, for example, heart attack victims from west Clare must travel in the middle of the night – as is being suggested – to Cork or Galway for emergency care and treatment?

But what is equally scandalous is the excuse being proffered for this latest, nonsensical plan – a shortage of doctors. Every year, hundreds of young doctors qualify from our universities – where they have been trained at the taxpayers' expense.

Only last week, this newspaper revealed that some hospital consultants are receiving €300,000 a year from the VHI alone. If such eye-watering amounts of money are available for top medics, surely we can pay junior doctors enough to make them stay in Ireland?

What this latest bombshell demonstrates once again is not so much a shortage of money to run the public health service as the utter failure of a hopelessly discredited and terminally sclerotic organisation, the HSE, to manage its vast budget efficiently.

The sooner Health Minister James Reilly honours his pre-election promise and shuts down the HSE – for good – the better. Provision of A&E services, be it in Limerick or in Loughlinstown, should be dictated by public demand – not by bureaucratic inefficiency.

## Taxpayers' champion

MICHAEL RING always shoots from the hip – a manoeuvre that normally makes it more difficult to hit one's target. Not for the first time, however, the outspoken Mayo TD and junior minister has scored an impressive bullseye.

He has, of course, also brought into focus the growing strains within his constituency colleague Enda Kenny's coalition – as they struggle on the one hand to balance the books and on the other to maintain essential public services.

But the harsh reality is that – for all Mr Kenny's promises both before the election and again last week that there will be no further tax increases – middle Ireland has been hit with five new charges since the last budget alone.

Those ordinary, hard-working and decent people who never got sucked into the lunacy of the Celtic Tiger are now being asked to pay for the follies of others. Those on social welfare have no shortage of political champions. It was high time a politician stood up for middle Ireland. Well done, Mr Ring.

## We salute you, Rory

IF A certain well-known lager manufacturer did comebacks, they would find it well nigh impossible to better Rory McIlroy's U.S. Open performance.

Just two months after the most humiliating public collapse imaginable, McIlroy has not merely shown extraordinary personal mettle, he has reminded a nation, as down in the dumps as he himself was after the Masters, that hope springs eternal and there is always another day.

For that, Rory, Ireland salutes you this morning.

# The Magdalene scandal is being skewed just to attack the Church

**W**E have to thank David Quinn, head of the Iona Institute, for pointing out three significant facts that have been missing from the discussions on the Magdalene laundries.

First, the Magdalene homes were not an invention of the Catholic Church.

Second, the Magdalene homes did not exist only in Catholic Ireland. For example, the Magdalene Society of Philadelphia was established in 1800 by, among others, the Quakers. In the north of Ireland, the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterians ran Magdalene homes.

Third, the laundries – or if you want to use the name I prefer because it is more accurate, the industrial workhouses – were not established in Ireland to punish unmarried mothers. The first Magdalene asylum was established in Ireland in 1767 by a Protestant benefactor as a home for 'penitent prostitutes'. In fact, we still don't have figures as to just what percentage of the inmates at the workhouses were unmarried mothers.

All of which surprises you, no? Because the tenor of the attacks on the history of the Magdalene institutions – and God knows the history of these nun-run versions of hell deserves to be attacked – is that these workhouses were yet another example of the way a uniquely powerful Irish Catholic Church controlled and suppressed sexual activity until the 'liberal' new times came and freed us from all that.

But you would have to cut out an awful lot of the history of the modern Western world to believe that one.

Yet Ireland does. Ireland looks at the Magdalene horrors and is wilfully blind to the way they fit in with equal horrors going on in other countries at the same time. Somehow the Magdalene politicians – by whom I mean the journalists and politicians who are using the suffering in these workhouses to attack the Catholic Church, I do not mean the women who were once inmates – want us to believe that Ireland and the Church were uniquely grotesque in their attitudes to sex and women.

The truth is far different. Ireland has in fact more or less in step with attitudes across much of the rest of the West. In the 1960s and 1970s, at the same time that Irish women of low intelligence or criminal bent were being confined to the Magdalene laundries to prevent them from becoming pregnant, up in free-love, historically Lutheran Sweden, women of low intelligence or criminal bent were being sterilised as part of Sweden's official policy of eugenics.

Swedish state sterilisations were carried out between 1936 and 1976, with 36,000 women falling victim to the policy. Some were forced to sign a consent form for sterilisation in order to be released from prison or to avoid losing custody of their children.

Similar programmes of modern day eugenics came to light across Europe after the Swedish programmes were disclosed: the 'liberal' cultures of France, Finland, Norway, Switzerland and Austria all carried out similar sterilisation programmes. Meanwhile the Irish were running industrial



## The Mary Ellen Synon COLUMN

workhouses for women to stop them breeding. Alas for those who want to make us think that Ireland's attitude towards uncontrolled female fertility was uniquely oppressive, it wasn't.

It should be viewed as all part of the Western fashion for eugenics, the control of breeding for the betterment of morals and society. This pursuit of eugenics had its source in the studies published in 19th century England by Charles Darwin's cousin, Frances Galton. Eugenics was billed as 'social Darwinism'. It was aimed at the feeble-minded and poor as much as at promiscuous women. The policies jumped the Atlantic and were legalised in America in 1931.

### Absurd

Yes, while I was at Trinity and the Magdalene laundries were operating here, back at home in Virginia right through the 1970s unmarried mothers and others were being sterilised by the state – and not just in Virginia. A majority of the United States practised eugenic sterilisation through most of the 20th century.

If you think being locked up in something called a Magdalene Laundry was bad, imagine being confined to something called the Virginia Colony for the Epileptic and Feeble-minded. There it was, and I passed it every time my parents drove me back to college in Roanoke.

Such state institutions were sterilising those who had the misfortune to be listed as 'mentally deficient'. Two-thirds of the 7,325 sterilised in solid-Baptist Virginia were female.

Small footnote: almost the only opposition to this policy came from the Catholic Church, alas a weak force against the Protestant 'science' of eugenics.

The point I am making is that modern State brutality to stop females breeding at will was in no way unique to Ireland and certainly not unique to the Catholic Church.

I don't have space here to go into details of the present-day State-enforced anti-female eugenics in Asia, but keep in mind that the one-child policy in China has resulted in the

slaughter of millions of unborn female children and in the infanticide of new-born girls: if a Chinese couple are only allowed to have one child, they want a boy.

In India right now, the cultural preference for male children has resulted in the abortion of millions of unwanted female children. Consider this from a Unicef report on statistics from just one city, Bombay, in 1984: the report stated '7,999 out of 8,000 aborted fetuses were females. Sex determination has become a lucrative business.'

Whatever the Irish have ever done to control or punish females, they have never done that. Whatever money the Irish Catholic Church ever made out of industrial schools and the industrial workhouses – and I suspect they made plenty, especially out of the boy-labour of the industrial schools – they never turned abortion of unborn females 'into a lucrative business'.

Yet note the difference between what is being done in response to all the brutality inflicted from Sweden to China and what is being done here about the Magdalene workhouses. The difference is that here the left-wing Irish Human Rights Commission has invited the UN Committee Against Torture to call on the Government to hold an inquiry into the Magdalene institutions. As if we were so uniquely vile we couldn't be trusted to get justice for these women without a UN committee getting involved.

But have you had a look at that UN committee? One of the committee vice-chairmen is from Morocco. You know, Morocco: the country which has offered torture facilities to the CIA for suspected terrorists who have been subject to 'extraordinary rendition'.

Other members of the UN committee include human rights 'experts' from China and Senegal. The idea of a Chinese government appointee condemning the Irish for torture is absurd. As for Senegal: it is a West African state that is 95 per cent Muslim. If you are a female and you want your sexual liberties protected, is it likely you would turn to a man representing a West African Muslim state? Stand by for female genital mutilation.

If the Irish Human Rights Commission thinks such people ought to be invited to comment in any way on events in Ireland, the Government needs to shut it down today.

Now, back to Sweden: in 1999, after the facts came out about what had been done to those tens of thousands of women, the Swedes agreed to pay compensation to those who had undergone the state-sponsored sexual mutilation.

Similarly, one hopes the Irish state will pay compensation to those women still alive who were confined in the Magdalene laundries. Forget who was actually running the things and lawyerly debates over just how 'voluntary' confinement in the institutions was: where was the protection by the State of the women's right of *habeas corpus*? That is the ancient right of every person – we inherited this protection from English law – to challenge detention before a judge.

More, where was the constitutional protection of due process for these women? Bunreacht na hÉireann, Article 40, section 4: 'No citizen shall be deprived of his personal liberty save in accordance with law.'

So you can ask if you like: where was God in the Magdalene laundries? I prefer to ask: where was the law?

m.synon@dailymail.ie