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SPAIN – NICE COUNTRY, PITY ABOUT ITS BIOETHICS

We spent time in Spain this summer, along with some of the other 16 million annual tourists from the UK. It has an excellent climate, art galleries, transport system and food, but its stance on key bioethical issues is as dismal as ours.

For many years, the Spanish socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero has sought to destroy Judeo-Christian values. In 2003, it legalised human embryo experimentation, in 2005 it legislated for homosexual 'marriage'; in 2006 the terms 'father' and 'mother' were replaced on Spanish birth certificates by 'parent A' and 'parent B' in order to remove any association with traditional heterosexual family life.

And there may be worse to come. In September of this year, the country's health minister, Dr Bernat Soria, announced that end-of-life care in Spain was due for a major overhaul. And he confirmed that Spain may soon legalise assisted suicide if proposed reforms of the law are implemented. He declared that: 'The change will ensure that the patient's right to a dignified death becomes a real right.'

Furthermore, this predominately (apparently 76%) Roman Catholic country is becoming almost as dreadful as the UK when it comes to abortion. Abortion was legalised there as recently as 1985 and is apparently restricted to urgent medical cases only – up to 12 weeks in the case of rape and 22 weeks in the case of suspected handicap. However, there is no time limit if the mother's physical or mental health is considered to be at risk. So, many women obtain a psychiatrist's letter confirming the latter.

In 2006, there were approximately 100,000 abortions performed in Spain. OK, that total is only half of the UK's 201,173 but its population is only 40 million compared with our 60 million. Indeed, over the last ten years, the number of Spanish abortions has almost doubled. Furthermore, abortions among teenage girls are rife – in 2006, the figure was 13,894. According to the Institute

for Family Policy in Spain, 'Every half hour in Spain a girl under the age of 20 receives an abortion, and each day there is at least one abortion performed on girls under the age of 15 (496 abortions in 2006).' As is the case in the UK, 50% of pregnancies among adolescent girls end in abortion. And similarly there are those, including the Institute's president, Eduardo Hertfelder, who are calling the Spanish government's policy of the 'indiscriminate promotion of the morning-after pill among adolescents and of abortion as a solution, erroneous and out-dated.' Abortion is now the single largest cause of death in Spain.

On 16 October 2008, the bad ship *Aurora* attempted to dock for a few days at the Spanish port of Valencia (home of that delicious dish, paella). The *Aurora* is an 'abortion ship' run by a Dutch group known as Women on Waves. It offers free abortions by picking up clients and then steaming out into international waters, thus evading any country's laws on abortion. This Valencian event was one of a series seeking to provoke a liberalisation of Spain's abortion law – already a commission has been set up to study ways of achieving this. The Spanish government is said to admire the UK's legislation and favours our free supply of abortion up to 24 weeks.

IVF in Spain is commonplace too. In the UK during 2005 there were 41,911 treatment cycles, whereas in Spain in the same year there were almost as many – 41,680 cycles to be precise. Indeed, Spain has become a popular destination for 'IVF tourism,' especially among British couples. It has high standards of medical care, better success rates than in the UK, treatments that are about half the price of those in the UK, and it is just over two hours away by budget airline. And egg donation is widespread, something that has dwindled in the UK since our law changed in April 2005 giving children born as a result of ova or sperm donation the right to trace their biological parents.

Now, if you consider IVF to be abnormal, then you will still probably not believe this. Last December, Elena Beloki was jailed for 13 years for being a spokeswoman for the international arm of the banned Basque group, ETA. Six months later, in June 2008, she was released from prison, on conditional bail, so she can begin IVF treatment at a clinic in San Sebastian. What? Yes, she is 47 years old. Yes, the Spanish state is paying for her IVF treatment. Yes, the victims of ETA terrorism are especially outraged.

And as if to prove that Spain is up there with the rest of the bioethically-substandard world, in early October 2008, Javier Marischal was born. He is Spain's first saviour sibling, selected and screened from a number of IVF embryos (the unused ones were, of course, destroyed) and born in the hope that his umbilical cord blood stem cells will be a match and a cure for his six-year old brother, Andrés, who suffers from a congenital form of anaemia known as beta-thalassaemia. The Spanish media dubbed him a 'miracle baby.' Other Spaniards stated: 'You cannot kill one human being to save another' and 'The method of this birth is degrading for human beings to have been selected like a prize.'

With all these attempts to obliterate Christian values, as well as human life, perhaps it should have come as little surprise that in June 2008, the Spanish parliament's environmental committee

decided to extend human rights to four classes of great apes. If we are merely smart monkeys, non-special and soulless, then such a move makes perfect sense. España, estás en el camino equivocado. [Spain, you are on the wrong road.]

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