

The Price of Life

Andy. Thanks for agreeing to see us, Pastor, but I'm afraid we have some very tough questions for you this time.

Pastor. That sounds serious! What's the first one about?

Andy. Embryo research. I have just read an article in *Nature* magazine which suggests that *in-vitro* fertilization, where the baby is conceived outside the womb in a laboratory, is actually better than natural conception because in this way we can choose only the best genes.

Jane. Then the abortion issue keeps cropping up, not only with horror stories about live aborted babies being thrown into incinerator sacks, but with suggestions that abortion leaves women with emotional scars and that those who have had abortions are more likely to develop breast cancer.

Andy. That's pretty gruesome, but some people claim that it would be better for a baby to be aborted if doctors consider that its terrible deformities would mean it would have only a very poor quality of life if it was born. Anyway, many argue that as a foetus is not an actual human being no real harm is done.

Jane. And what about eggs taken from an aborted female, fertilized in a laboratory, then inserted into another woman? If an aborted baby is not considered to be a human being, it means that a child can be born from a mother who never existed and conceived after this non-existent mother died. That's wierd.

Andy. It certainly sounds wierd to me! But I have another question, this time about the end of life. It's hard not to sympathise with the patient who can't cope with suffering any more and wants out. And surely there comes a time when it is right to switch off the life support machine or refuse life-prolonging surgery. Does this mean that we should accept euthanasia?

Jane. Hold on! I think we've given the Pastor quite enough to handle already. How do we find the answers to this bewildering assortment of issues in the value-of-life debate?

Pastor. Well, I wouldn't start with any of the issues you have raised.

Jane. What do you mean?

Pastor. I'm not saying those are not important issues, and we have to find answers to them, but we must resist the temptation to start there.

Andy. But that's where the people I talk to always start; and they want to know what the Christian response is.

Pastor. I know. But we have to tell people that if they really want to know the Christian answer they must start their thinking where the Christian starts. We must

neve *begin* this value-of-life debate by offering lurid stories of the horrors of surgeons vacuum-sucking babies piecemeal from the womb, nor by quoting statistics of the increasing number of babies aborted every year, nor by discussing the latest research into the harmful affects of abortion on the woman. We should not even start by discussing whether there can be *any* situations when euthanasia or abortions are justified, nor with the complex problems of genetic engineering, embryo experiments and so on.

Andy. So, where *do* we start?

Pastor. We must begin by being crystal clear on our Christian view of human life: how it starts, when it starts, its value and its end. Let me tell you what I mean. There is no doubt in the mind of the Christian that God is the author of all human life. We read in Genesis 1:26 and 2:7 that God made Adam in his own image and likeness and 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life', so that man 'became a living being'; at that moment something very profound happened. At one and the same time God distinguished mankind from the animal world and declared himself to be the author of life. This theme was picked up throughout the Old Testament. Job 10:8-9 confirms it: 'Your hands shaped me and made me . . . you moulded me like clay.' And David in Psalm 139:13-14 says: 'You created my inmost being; you knot me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful.' In verse 16 David also reveals a high view of God's intimate care from the earliest moment of life: 'Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.'

Andy. You seem to be saying that according to the Bible, life in the womb has God as its author. It's not merely to be thought of as a natural biological process; it is that of course, but it's very much more than that.

Pastor. That's right. And immediately when you establish that God is the author and creator of human life, you must ask who has the right to terminate life.

Jane. But when does life actually begin? I have read various opinions even among Christians. Some say life starts at the formation of a viable zygote, the one-celled embryo, even before it is possible to detect a pregnancy. Others put the beginning of life at the implantation of the fertilized ovum, the blastocyst, in the wall of the uterus. I believe that begins between five to eight days after fertilization.

Andy. You really have been doing your homework!

Jane. Of course I have; this is an important subject. Other people say there can be no human life until the recognition of facial features and the ability to feel pain - at about six weeks. I suppose the only view that can claim some kind of biblical support is that human life begins at around eight weeks with the first heart-beat and the consequent circulation of the blood.

Andy. What's the Scriptural support for that?

Jane. Deuteronomy 12:23 tells the Israelites they are not to eat blood 'because the blood is the life'. We all know that when the blood stops circulating life comes to an

end, so this seems to suggest that there can be no real life *before* the blood starts circulating.

Andy. But that seems to be a major conclusion based on one phrase. It might tell us when life ends, but surely we can't conclude from that when life starts? After all, we also know that the brain dies when the blood stops circulating, but the brain waves of a child in the womb can be detected at six weeks, before the first heart beat; and the brain is developing long before that even. Anyway, surely the statement in Deuteronomy is preparing the Israelites for the importance of the blood of the sacrifice - it therefore has nothing to do with the question of when life begins in the womb.

Pastor. I'm sure you're right Andy. However, Jane has given us a good overview of some of the ideas about when life starts. But let's see what the Bible has to say on the subject. You may be interested to learn that in the Old Testament there are no fewer than eight Hebrew words for 'child'. Hebrew is the language in which most of the Old Testament was written. Those eight words cover the various stages of development from the newborn baby, through to the suckling child; the child asking for food; the weaned child; the infant clinging to its mother; the youngster being independent; the boy who is shaking himself free and finally to the 'ripened one'. But there is no special word for foetus or embryo or even for the child in the womb.

Andy. Does that mean the Old Testament does not recognize the existence of the child until it is born?

Pastor. On the contrary, the word for a newborn baby - which is *yeleth* in Hebrew - is used of the infant in the womb. Sometimes this word is used for a youth, but mostly it refers to a very young child. You may remember the verse in Isaiah 9:6 which refers to Christ: 'To us a *child* is born'. That is the word *yeleth*. But it is exactly the same word used in the context of a pregnant woman in Exodus 21:22, where the phrase 'gives birth prematurely' is literally 'if her children come out'. In other words, if a woman is pregnant she has a child in her womb. In the New Testament the Greek word *brephos* is used in Luke 2:12 of the infant Christ lying in a manger, while in Luke 18:15 the same word is used of the children who were brought by their mothers to Christ. However, in Luke 1:41 exactly the same word is used when we read: 'When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the *baby* leaped in her womb.' Then there is an interesting expression in Matthew 1:18 which says that Mary was 'found to be with child'; this phrase is literally 'in womb' and it is equivalent to our word 'pregnant'; it does not refer to the child but to the condition of the mother.

Jane. So there is no word in the Bible for 'embryo' or 'foetus'?

Pastor. None at all, and any translation that uses those words is misleading. At every stage in the womb it is called a child. The Christian would be wise never to think of an embryo or foetus but always of a baby in the womb. But let me take you a little further. In Psalm 51:5 David speaks of himself as being 'a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me'. This kind of statement is not popular today, but it clearly teaches that a child in the womb already has the rebellious nature of a born sinner. On the other hand, as the New King James version puts it in Luke 1:15, John the Baptist was declared to be 'filled with the Holy Spirit even from

his mother's womb' and there is a strong case for taking those words to mean, 'while he is still in his mother's womb.'

Jane. I was looking at that passage in Luke 1 as you were talking, and in verse 44 Elizabeth says 'the baby in my womb leaped for joy'. As she was speaking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, those words give us more than a hint that her unborn baby had some capacity for awareness.

Andy. All this means that we must never work backwards from modern theories about when life starts. Since the Bible only refers to the 'fruit of the womb' as a child, and since it has no separate word for embryo or foetus, we ought not to use those words in everyday life.

Jane. I can see that, but does the bible tell us exactly when the child becomes a real person; I mean, when does it have a soul? Genesis 2:7 implies that God created Adam and *then* 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.' Perhaps, therefore, the soul comes into the child at some time after conception.

Pastor. That is a subject that has been discussed since the time of the philosopher Aristotle, some three hundred years before Christ. I don't think the verse in Genesis you refer to really helps us, Jane, because its purpose is not to tell us *when* Adam became a human being distinct from the animals, but *how*. Among Christians there have been two views about the origin of the soul. The first is known as *traducianism*, from a Latin word meaning 'to propagate'; this view maintains that the soul is produced from the parents rather like the body itself. The other view is known as *creationism*, which believes that the soul is created at a given moment by God.

Jane. If you believe the creationist view, you could say that God does not create the soul until some time after conception.

Pastor. Perhaps, except that, as we have seen, the Bible gives us no hint that the child in the womb is ever anything less than human. Actually the Bible does not specifically settle this matter of the origin of the soul in a baby, and we are wiser not to pretend that we know what God has not told us. Since his revelation in the Bible always speaks of the child in the womb as fully human, we would be wise to take conception as the starting point of true life and humanity.

Jane. Does the Bible tell us about the value of life in the womb?

Pastor. Well, it's clear that human life is different from the rest of creation and very special to God. We have already seen that much from Genesis chapters 1 and 2. This is why murder, including self-murder or suicide, is a serious offence against God himself; it harms his own image in mankind. But another way to look at the value God places upon life is his care for the weak in society. Here is just one example from many in the Old Testament: in Leviticus 19 God gave instructions for his people to look after the poor, the deaf and the blind and to ensure justice for everyone. In the New Testament James 1:27 defines part of the practice of true religion as looking after orphans and widows in distress. These were all non-

contributory members of society, and God tells us to value them equally with anyone else.

Jane. I can see that by inference, but is there anything that specifically refers to the child in the womb?

Pastor. Yes there is. I referred to Exodus 21 earlier, where God speaks about harm done to an unborn child and its mother. Unfortunately some versions of the Bible translate it like this: 'If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage, yet there is no further injury, he shall surely be fined... But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, etc . . .' In other words, they make it appear that if the only harm is a miscarriage then there would be a fine, but if there is serious injury or death to the mother then the punishment will be in proportion to the harm done; that makes it look as though the child in the womb has very little value. But that is a bad translation. The New International Version has a more accurate translation so perhaps you would read Exodus 21:22-25 for us Jane.

Jane. 'If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she give birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.'

Andy. I can see the difference. This passage refers not to a miscarriage but to a premature birth. If the child survives then there is a fine, but if the child dies the punishment is a life for a life.

Pastor. Exactly. The Hebrew word used in verse 22 is not the word for miscarriage. The word for miscarriage is found in Genesis 31:38 when Jacob tells his uncle Laban that in his care none of Laban's sheep miscarried. The word used here in Exodus 21 literally means 'to go out' and in this context refers to a premature birth; the same word is used in Genesis 25:25-26 when Esau and Jacob 'came out' of their mother's womb.

Jane. That sounds pretty conclusive. It refers to a premature birth not a miscarriage.

Pastor. Exactly - and if you look at the whole context of Exodus 21 you will see that it is about the penalty for murder. Now, if the focus in verse 22 is on the woman, why do we need to be told she is pregnant? Surely the same penalty will be true if harm came to any woman whether or not she is pregnant. The focus of attention must be the child in her womb. If as a result of violence to her the baby 'comes out' but there is no serious injury to it then a fine will be levied, but if the child is dead then the punishment is life for life. In other words, a deliberate act that causes an abortion is treated as a murder.

Jane. You have talked about the origin of life from God the creator, the beginning of life at conception, and the value of the unborn child as a real human being, but I think you said earlier that we need to understand also the end of life. What did you mean by that?

Pastor. God did not create humanity to follow the animals into the dust with that as the end of existence. Human life is both continuing and accountable. Ecclesiastes 12:7 tells us that 'the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.' God's plan and care for life is well expressed in Psalm 139:16 which we referred to earlier: 'Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.' God has plans for the developing child in the womb and every life has to give an account to God. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us that we are destined to die once, 'and after that to face judgement' - something never said of the animal kingdom.

Jane. So what you are saying is that from the womb to the tomb human life is of such value and concern to God that to destroy it maliciously or prematurely is a serious offence against God himself because it defaces his own image in mankind?

Pastor. Yes, but don't forget the added point that caring for the weak and defenceless in society is how God describes the practice of pure religion.

Andy. Alright, I can see the value of all human life, but can we tackle some of the hard questions this raises in the value-of-life debate?

Pastor. Not yet Andy, because I would like to take you down a different path. You see, if everyone started from the Christian and biblical description of the value of life most of our problems would be resolved. But very few people actually start there. In fact if you leave God and his Word out of your reckoning there is really only one alternative.

Andy. What's that?

Pastor. In the middle of the last century Charles Darwin published his book *On the Origin of the Species* in which his theory of evolution effectively reduced humanity to being the smartest animals in existence, and the purpose of humanity to maintaining its lead in the fight for survival. This put ethics, economics, politics and morality all at the service of this evolutionary process of survival.

Andy. Isn't that a bit strong?

Pastor. I don't think so. Let me quote to you from a book Darwin published in 1871 and which was even more influential than his *On the Origin of Species*. It is called *The Descent of Man* - a significant title. Here is what Darwin wrote: 'With savages, the weak in body or mind are soon eliminated . . . We civilized men, on the other hand, do our utmost to check the process of elimination; we build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed and the sick; we institute the poor-laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment. There is reason to believe that vaccination has preserved thousands, who from a weak constitution would formerly have succumbed to smallpox. Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind.' Now listen to what he added: 'Hardly anyone is so ignorant as to allow his worst animals to breed.'

Andy. That's incredible. You mean Darwin actually suggested we are wrong to care for the feeble and sick, the poor and ignorant because they only produce more feeble, sick, poor and ignorant?

Pastor. That is exactly what he was saying. But it was the logical outcome of his evolutionary biology of the survival of the fittest.

Jane. But surely no one supported that?

Pastor. I'm afraid the very opposite was the case. It led directly to the formation of what became known as 'The Eugenics Society'.

Andy. The what?

Pastor. Eugenics comes from a Greek word that means 'well-born' and it is the science of ensuring the purity and high quality of the human race by producing only good stock. To this end eugenics strives to make sure all babies are born well and that only well-born babies are allowed to be born at all. The Eugenics Society was formed in 1907 by the anthropologist Sir Francis Galton under the original name of The Eugenics Education Society. Incidentally Galton was a cousin of Charles Darwin. He endowed a professorship of Eugenics at London University and was knighted two years after forming the Society.

Jane. Who joined the Society?

Pastor. some of the most influential people of the day. Dr. Harry Campbell, physician to the West End Hospital for Nervous Diseases in London wrote in the *British Medical Journal* in 1913 that medicine contradicted nature's method of wiping out the frail and unfit. He held back from advocating killing the unfit, but suggested instead that such people should be sterilized so that they could not procreate.

Andy. Did he define who is unfit to procreate?

Pastor. Yes. It included not only the mentally disabled, but those who had undergone operations for hernia, appendicitis and ovarian cysts!

Andy. Surely that was a joke.

Pastor. Far from it. These men were deadly serious. A popular author by the name of W.R. Greg wrote a book in 1872 called *Enigmas of Life*. In it he observed that whereas 'among wild animals the sick and maimed were slain; among savages they succumb and die or are suppressed; among us they are cared for, kept alive, enabled to marry and multiply.' That book went through eighteen editions in nineteen years.

Andy. Were there other influential people who joined this eugenics crusade?

Pastor. Yes. Dr. Robert Rentoul had published two books by 1906 in which he saw charity as a curse and urged the unfit either to commit suicide or at least to promise

not to have children.. H.G. Wells wrote *A Modern Utopia* in 1905 and claimed, 'There is only one sane and logical thing to be done with a really inferior race, and that is to exterminate it.'

Jane. Did H.G. Wells really write that?

Pastor. Yes he did, and the atheistic philosopher George Bernard Shaw wrote the same kind of thing: 'There is now no reasonable excuse for refusing to face the fact that nothing but a eugenic religion can save our civilization from the fate that has overtaken all previous civilizations.' Sidney Webb, founder of the London School of Economics and a significant man in political thinking at the beginning of this century, declared that it was a primary duty of governments 'to determine which kind of fitness shall survive', and 'deliberately to manipulate society so that survivors may be the type which we regard as the highest.' Sir James Barr, President of the British Medical Association, Dean Inge of St. Paul's in London, the Archbishop of York, James Kerr, the education medical officer for the London County Council, as it was then, and even Winston Churchill, all supported eugenic ideas. By 1931 a Sterilization Bill came before Parliament and although it never became law, it was admitted that it would have been only a first step towards the elimination of the unfit.

Jane. But you don't hear too much about eugenics today. So what happened to it?

Pastor. Actually you do hear about it, but now it goes under the names of euthanasia and abortion. And there is a tragic historical reason for that. What happened was the the eugenics crusade in Britain actually wrote the eugenics agenda for Hitler's Nazi party in Germany during the 1930s and 40s, but what he did was so horrific that even eugenics supporters were appalled. Hitler merely took up the eugenics and applied it. He called his terrible Final Solution 'applied biology'. It ended in the murder of six million Jews and millions more Poles, homosexuals, communists, Gypsies, Slavs, prisoners of war, and mentally and physically crippled. What Hitler did so shocked the world that the eugenics crusade lost its momentum; but what he did was merely the logical conclusion of evolutionary biology - the survival of the fittest by eliminating weak and inferior stock. And it is the fittest who determine who are the weak and inferior stock.

Jane. I'm not sure what all this has to do with our value-of-life problems today.

Pastor. Let me just continue our history lesson a bit longer and I think you will see. In his political manifesto *Mein Kampf* - which means 'My Struggle' - Hitler wrote: 'Whoever is not bodily and spiritually healthy and worthy, shall not have the right to pass on his suffering in the body of his children.'

Jane. That was a re-write of the eugenics agenda.

Pastor. Yes it was - but ten years later, in 1933, Hitler introduced a sterilization law into Germany.

Andy. Two years after a similar bill had failed in the British Parliament?

Pastor. Correct. And as a matter of fact, about the same time similar laws were being introduced into Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and many other countries including some states in the USA. Hitler and the Third Reich were motivated by two ideas: first they believed the Nordic race, of which they considered Germany to be a prime example, must be kept pure from intermarriage and defective blood, and second that the mentally and physically sick were too costly to look after. Their price of life was too high.

Jane. Another development of the eugenics agenda in Britain!

Pastor. Yes, but remember eugenics is the logical result of evolution and it must always lead to something more sinister. By the outbreak of the Second World War 50,000 people had been sterilized across Germany, but within two more years, in one hundred hospitals, 70,000 patients had been killed - mainly the mentally feeble - and already the gas chambers were being built and the terrible medical experiments in Dachau, Austwitz, Buchenwald and other concentration camps had begun. The rest of the story, of which the Jewish 'Holocaust' is tragically only one part, is well known.

Andy. What happened to the eugenics crusade after the War?

Pastor. For fairly obvious reasons it went quiet! For sometime in Britain the crusaders concerned themselves with immigration and racial issues. In October 1974, a speech by Sir Keith Joseph in Birmingham cost him his bid for the Conservative Party leadership because he dared to suggest that something must be done to stop the lower classes from breeding too many children. As recently as 1987, the House of Lords debated sterilization, but felt obliged to declare that it had 'nothing to do with eugenics' - which of course it had. The relevance of all this for the euthanasia and abortion debate and the issues of embryo transplants and so on is that we are still trying to ensure that children are born healthy - that is an excellent goal, but that only healthy children will be allowed to be born at all - and that is a very different issue.

Andy. The article in *Nature* that I referred to at the beginning of our discussion actually referred to the harmful effects of the mutations in male genes as a reason why laboratory fertilization is possibly more advantageous to the human race than natural means. That was pure eugenics wasn't it?

Pastor. Of course. And given the evolutionary starting point of *Nature* it is perfectly reasonable. Anything we can do to keep the human race pure we must do - whatever the cost. Evolution has never bothered about who suffers along the way so long as the fittest survive. What made the Holocaust so vile in the eyes of most of the world was not *what* the Nazis did - the eugenic agenda ultimately allowed that - but the *scale* on which they did it. You see, evolutionary thinking is very muddled when it comes to ethics - after all, biology can't produce good morals can it?

Jane. But I can't really see our doctors and scientists being involved in a eugenics programme today.

Pastor. Can't you Jane? But many of them are. We must never allow people to tell us that we can trust our scientists to know how far to take their experiments. Some of the greatest scientific minds in Germany were fully supportive of the Hitler regime even when they knew what he was doing. Similarly, we must not believe that the medical profession has higher moral and ethical standards than any other group in society. People who believe in evolutionary biology cannot have a consistently high ethic. Forty-five percent of German physicians joined the Nazi party, and it was the medical doctors who were involved in the terrible experiments in the concentration camps. Today many doctors will tell young mothers that abortion is in their best interest, when what they really mean is that it is eugenically necessary. Any doctor involved in abortion or supporting euthanasia is carrying out a eugenic programme - though he may not realise this.

Jane. Does eugenics question whether everyone has an equal right to medical care?

Pastor. Of course it does. Where do we get the idea that all human life is of equal value? Only from the Bible. Evolution, as we have seen, teaches the exact opposite. We have put a price tag upon life and people are judged by their economic contribution or by their value to society. Of course we dress our arguments in different clothes: we pretend the old man with Alzheimer's disease and the Down's syndrome baby have a poor quality of life so we talk of euthanasia and abortion.

Andy. But is there no truth in that argument?

Pastor. None at all. Who are we to judge the quality of another human life just because it is different from ours? Surely it is more human and productive to improve a quality of life rather than to kill it. Let me show you the tyranny of evolutionary logic. If it is justified to kill a mother's baby today because we consider it has a poor quality of life, then it must also be justified to kill the mother herself when she is frail or senile and we judge *her* to have a poor quality of life.

Andy. But you could argue that there is a difference. The mother may have served society well and she deserves care in old age.

Pastor. The evolutionist would have to dismiss that as pure sentiment, something that has no place in biology! Besides, if years of service qualify someone for medical care then every toddler is at risk and you have reduced human morals to the ethics of the racing stud - you retire the ageing Derby winner to honourable grazing rights, but you send the old nag to the knacker's yard. There can be only one logical reason for caring for the sick and the handicapped, the ailing and the dying, and that is the Christian view of the value of life which is created in the image of God.

Jane. What would you say to those who claim that the individual has absolute right over their own body? You know the argument: abortion is the mother's right and euthanasia is the patient's right.

Pastor. In the first place society doesn't consistently believe that. For example, we have laws to make people wear crash helmets and seat belts - so we don't allow people to do what they like with their own bodies. But more particularly a baby is not

just part of the mother's body. We have seen from the Bible that it is a separate and individual human being dependent upon its mother; but if dependency allows it to be disposed of, then the child will be at risk for many years. As far as euthanasia is concerned the Bible treats all self-destruction with horror, from the suicide of King Saul recorded in 1 Chronicles 10 to that of Judas Iscariot recorded in Matthew 27.

Andy. Are you saying that all abortion and euthanasia is wrong? Wouldn't you allow any exceptions? What about the gang-raped girl or the dreadfully deformed spina bifida baby?

Pastor. That is exactly why we have to start with the Christian view of the value of all human life and contrast it with the evolutionary view. If all human life has value then there can be no exceptions. Take the gang-raped girl. The real harm has already been done, so how do you erase that experience by murdering her baby? Christian love, care and support is the only adequate response. Then take the example of a grotesquely malformed child. We have already said that God doesn't give us the right to judge the quality of another person's life in order to decide whether or not they should live. If anyone believes we have that right then they should think again of the tyranny of evolutionary logic: if you abort the spina bifida baby, why not the Down's Syndrome? Andy why not the Cystic Fibrosis baby? And why not the baby with the dislocated hip, or the one with twelve fingers? Or every child after the second in each family? China has a law to limit the number of children allowed to each family and in December 1993 introduced a 'Eugenics Law' to 'put a stop to the prevalence of abnormal births'. Evolutionary logic demands that when they have stamped out all defective births, they will then turn their attention to the ten million disabled people still alive in China - and then the elderly and infirm . . .

Jane. Scary isn't it?

Pastor. Yes, and sinister too, as the logic of evolution always is. Unfortunately people prefer not to think about it.

Jane. But what do you say if the mother's life is at risk? For example in the case of an ectopic pregnancy where the fertilized egg implants outside the womb in the fallopian tube, or when a diagnosis soon after conception indicates cancer of the cervix? In each case the treatment necessary to save the life of the mother will result in the death of the baby.

Pastor. Tragic though such cases are, the decision is not difficult. If the mother is left untreated and consequently dies then the baby will die anyway, so it will be sadly necessary to destroy one life in order to save another. In medical statistics such occasions are not registered as abortions because the purpose is not to take the life of the child.

Andy. Presumably you would not see any case for euthanasia either? Not even when the end is inevitable or the patient has got tired of life.

Pastor. No, not even then. Joni Eareckson Tada has published a book called *When is it Right to Die? - Euthanasia on Trial*. In it she asserts that there is never a case for justified euthanasia. Joni has a right to be heard on the subject because she has

been a quadriplegic for nearly thirty years, and for some time after her accident she would have done anything to be allowed the right to die. A person taking their own life has eternity to regret a decision born in despair. There is a far better way than euthanasia.

Andy. But what about turning off a life-support machine or withholding surgery that would prolong life?

Pastor. Again, most of these decisions are not so difficult as the media often make them out to be. When someone is 'brain dead' and their heart and lungs are dependent entirely upon artificial means, and there is no known way of reversing that, then the Christian view of life does not demand that the body must be kept functioning mechanically for ever. However this is very different from withholding food and water from some one who is in a prolonged coma but whose body is otherwise functioning normally. As far as withholding surgery or other life-prolonging treatment is concerned it has always been consistent with the Christian view of the value of life to allow the process of dying to take its natural course and to concentrate on limiting suffering. We are certainly not obliged to keep a dying patient alive regardless of the discomfort or suffering it costs them.

Jane. Going back to the Christian view of the value of life from conception, doesn't that mean that any research, treatment or therapy involving the deliberate destruction of a fertilized human egg must be wrong because it is the destruction of a human life?

Pastor. Yes, regardless of whether the egg was fertilized in the womb or elsewhere.

Jane. But isn't it true that between fifty and seventy percent of all conceptions abort by natural causes anyway? It could be argued that by destroying a few more we are merely adding to the number of natural losses.

Andy. Surely there is a big difference between death as a result of natural process and death as a result of deliberate action? The logic of your argument would support euthanasia on the basis that since all old people die eventually we are only hurrying things along, and it would support abortion on the basis that since some babies abort naturally we are merely adding to their number.

Pastor. That's a good response Andy, and let me head off a question about all those spontaneous abortions being millions of little human beings who never come to life beyond the womb. We do not have an answer from the Bible for everything we want to know, only for everything we need to know. Moses made a very important statement about this in Deuteronomy 29:29: 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children for ever . . .' But let me ask you a question. You know that the Latin *in vitro* literally means 'in glass', and we talk of babies conceived by this method as 'test-tube' babies. Well, would it ever be right to keep a baby beyond the brief *in vitro* stage and develop it fully outside the womb?

Jane. You mean the possibility of fertilizing an egg and developing a baby entirely outside a mother's body? I think we are a long way off from that, but it sounds close to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* where all reproduction is handled in the laboratory.

Pastor. But in scientific research the unthinkable often happens. What if we could?

Jane. I'm not sure about that - assuming we have learned how not to destroy so many children on the way. Would it be wrong if the purpose was to help a childless couple start a family or to discover the cause of some malformation? And what about surrogate motherhood, where an egg can be fertilized outside the womb and then placed in another woman to carry the child? And artificial insemination by donor where an anonymous donor can give sperm to fertilize an egg if the husband is infertile?

Pastor. You have raised some big issues here, and there are massively complicated legal problems in all the methods you have outlined. However, this is exactly why we need to start where we did by emphasizing the status and dignity of human life from conception. However worthy the aim, we cannot accept anything that involves the deliberate destruction of the child in the womb. Let me put it like this - from conception - no exception! No childlessness or disease is worse than taking a human life. However, the Christian view doesn't stop research into all kinds of fertility or disease, it simply sets moral limits.

Andy. But what about surrogacy and sperm donors? It does all seem a bit unnatural doesn't it?

Pastor. Perhaps it does, although what seems 'unnatural', as you put it, is not necessarily wrong. We must ask some foundational questions again. Isn't it true that surrogacy and sperm donors, as well as in vitro fertilization of course, violate God's created way of bringing children into the world? To sever conception from the act of sexual intercourse in a loving, caring relationship is contrary to God's plan. For the same reason *planned* single parenting is equally wrong. God's purpose for sexual intercourse is not only that a husband and wife should enjoy this physical relationship as a way of expressing their total commitment and love to each other, but that children should be conceived within the intimate, loving and exclusive bond of marriage. We can never act contrary to God's plans without tragic consequences. In the same way, God planned for the child to develop within its mother's womb over a period of nine months; it did not need to be as long as that, but it is part of a wise Creator's plan to give a mother an intense physical and emotional bond with her child. 'Greenhouse' babies and surrogacy by-pass all of that.

Andy. If somebody was listening to our conversation how would you defend yourself against the charge that your Christian view is doctrinaire and uncaring because it doesn't seem to address some heart-rending issues?

Pastor. I'll be glad to answer that, but I thought I had addressed some of the issues. Let me say immediately that for anyone who has already had an abortion or has been in some way involved in either that or euthanasia, and who subsequently realises how wrong it was, the Christian good news offers forgiveness *and* a clean

conscience. Terrible though it is to take life, there is no sin that God will not forgive if we are genuinely sorry and believe that Christ died on the cross for all our sin. There is a tremendous statement in the Bible to encourage someone in this position; it's found in Hebrews 9:14: 'The blood of Christ will cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.' In fact, God not only forgives, but when we become a Christian he gives us his Holy Spirit to create in us a new way of thinking about creation and the value of life. There are many Christian churches and organizations who are ready to help people who are struggling with the memories of wrong things they have done in the past.

But let me show you some of the advantages of believing in the absolute value of human life from conception to the grave. First of all it maintains the full dignity and status of all human life regardless of age or infirmity. The Bible often claims that there is no partiality with God - in Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9 and Acts 10:34-35 for example.

Jane. You mean that we should look at a deformed child or someone with a deranged mind and see human dignity? It would follow that we can also see the same dignity as we watch an old man with Alzheimer's disease or a young woman wasting away with terminal cancer. On the other hand, evolution sees only a price tag on an unproductive life in the fight for survival.

Pastor. Right. Secondly, the biblical view of the value of life encourages a vigorous attitude of care in society. Infertility, which is the main cause of childlessness, is not a disease - however painful it may be - and it is wrong to treat some human life cheaply in order to satisfy the needs of a childless couple. Care and counsel are better than the destruction of life in a laboratory. The National Hemlock Society in America and Exit, which advocate euthanasia, are offering a remedy of despair. The Hospice Movement, on the other hand, is a provision of hope. The Christian view of life forces us to take the seriously disabled seriously and work to find efficient pain relief, a better life quality for those in despair, effective self-help for the disabled, and greater support for those who care for them. In other words the Christian value of life looks for better answers, whereas euthanasia and abortion opt out of a caring responsibility. If assisted suicide or 'humanitarian murder' are not options, then the dying and disabled may be encouraged to look deeper into the meaning of life. The Christian view of life says there is hope; the evolutionary view says there is no hope. The Christian view says, 'We will care all the way'; the evolutionary view says, 'From here on you are too costly'. From the Christian perspective, pastoral counsel and pain killers are needed for the dying; from the evolutionary viewpoint potassium chloride will do.

Jane. Doesn't the Christian view of life also mean that if medical doctors accept it there would be no fear of them working against the best interests of the patient?

Pastor. That's right. To put what you have said another way: the Christian understanding of the value of life confirms the medical profession as guardians of life rather than arbiters of death. I would not wish to be treated by a doctor if I knew that he believed in abortion or euthanasia, because he would have a cheaper view of life than I have. It is vital to retain a relationship of trust between patients and doctors. The more our physicians become custodians of racial purity or national economics, the more I will suspect that they have put a price on my life.

Andy. Since 1967 abortion has been legal in our country and now we have virtually abortion on demand at any stage of pregnancy. Do you think the same will become true for euthanasia?

Pastor. Yes, as long as our society is driven by the tyranny of evolutionary logic. Remember, in the 1930s the Nazi party began on the eugenic road with sterilization laws; ten years later millions were being exterminated in the gas chambers. The same thing happened in the British parliament over abortion. In 1967 very few imagined we would be where we are today with one in five pregnancies ending in abortion resulting in a staggering almost 200,000 babies a year being killed in this way throughout the United Kingdom alone. The same will happen over euthanasia. In May 1990 there was an attempt to get a euthanasia bill through Parliament. It was defeated by 101 votes to 35 but what is more important was the absence of the other 500 members! In her book, Joni Eareckson Tada come to a powerful and frightening conclusion: 'Gradually, though no one remembers exactly how it happened, the unthinkable becomes tolerable. And then acceptable. And then legal. And then applaudable.' That is exactly what happened in Germany in the 1930s with a sterilization law; it happened in Britain in 1967 with an abortion law - I will leave you to draw your own conclusion. The further we move from true Christian values the faster we will drift into the tyranny of evolutionary logic. The Christian talks of the value of life, evolution talks of the price of life.