



The Abortion Act (as amended) A Ruby Anniversary 1967 - 2007

Over the last 40 years, since the passing of the Abortion Act in 1967, we have become accustomed - indeed anaesthetised - to an aggressive and fatal cancer, subverting principles of morality in society throughout our world. We live in a society in which it is more fashionable to defend the welfare of animals than to defend the rights of the unborn child. In the United Kingdom alone, we kill over 500 unborn babies every day. Yet our society successfully disguises the enormity of what in earlier times we would have called 'a crime against humanity' with a carefully orchestrated use of linguistic deviousness. This language of concealment, callously describes the unborn child as "fetal tissue" and NHS Trusts are given advice from the Department of Health on burning "all fetuses and fetal remains" which prior to disposal are to be stored "in containers made from opaque materials".

Fortunately we have, in England and Scotland, two Cardinals who have recently spoken out to support the rights of the unborn child. Cardinal Murphy O'Connor, of Westminster, reminds us that "all life is sacred, with value and meaning at every stage and in every condition, from the moment of conception to the point of natural death". Cardinal O'Brien, of St Andrews and Edinburgh, reminds us that the increasing rate of abortion in Scotland is equivalent to "two Dunblane massacres a day". In another publication he graphically and effectively contrasts our society's

compassion for the newborn and starving child in Darfur or Eritrea with the way in which we deal with unborn babies who face the end of their short lives just as certainly as those babies in the Sudan.

Our Cardinals are not alone in their concerns; The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists records the large rise in the number of doctors who are "conscientious objectors". Furthermore, the journal of the Royal College informs us that live births after abortions occurred in 18 out of 20 maternity units in the West Midlands. A government agency, in 'The Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child Health' reveals that in one year alone as many as 66 babies were born alive after abortions carried out on their mothers, before dying as a result of the procedure. Increasing concern about late term abortions is voiced in the doctors' newspaper 'Pulse', which records that almost a quarter of Britain's GPs are refusing to sign abortion referral forms. That same publication also revealed that 55% of the doctors surveyed wanted the current 24 week limit for abortions to be reduced immediately and that a significant minority of Britain's GPs believe that abortion should not be legal at all.

Increasing public concern is also reflected in the sadly unsuccessful Parliamentary 'Ten Minute Rule' Bill recently introduced by Ann Winterton MP; one of three attempts to modify current abortion law in the last eight months. In this context, individuals who share our concerns about saving unborn lives and safeguarding women's health frequently

ask "How can I make my concerns heard? How can I help to change the law's current approach to human life in its earliest stages?"

A compelling opportunity to challenge current abortion law arises in the Government's recently published proposal for a new law, the 'Draft Human Tissue and Embryos Bill'. Proposals in the draft bill have many frightening consequences which will be addressed in future articles from the PAC. These consequences include allowing scientists to create a variety of animal-human hybrids and chimera embryos for research purposes; repealing the Reproductive Cloning Act 2001, which banned reproductive cloning; permitting amendments on many aspects of our current abortion law, including allowing abortions to be performed by nurses and midwives without input from a doctor. However the draft bill will also permit Parliament to undertake the most wide ranging review of the current abortion law, providing a rare and exciting opportunity to challenge the current legal framework which allows the killing of so many unborn children. In such a situation it is unthinkable that, as men of faith, we can remain silent. Each one of us has a personal, individual responsibility to inform and then to act on the dictates of our consciences. The PAC section on the Association's new website offers further information and guidance. In a very real sense, brothers, the shaping of an important element of our future is in our own hands. So.....Over to you.

JPK

The People's Quiz - By Bart Smith, Highgate Circle

The possibility of winning money is always an allure and when a colleague alerted me to an opportunity to enter The People's Quiz, a spin-off from the National Lottery, with a prize of £200,700 (ie ten times 2007) I could not resist the temptation. With the intention of giving the winnings to my local church, of course.

Although heats had been running for some weeks, there was still an opportunity to apply. Which I did and several weeks later received a phone call from a member of the production team, indicating that on the strength of my success in University Challenge in 2004 (see various editions of Catena for that year) I had been selected to appear on The People's Quiz - Wildcard, an opportunity to aim for the jackpot.

Recording took place at BBC headquarters in May. Any TV appearance invariably means waiting around and this - involving viewing the programmes being recorded - allowed me to grasp the complicated formula which, combining bits from other TV quizzes, such as The Weakest Link, defies easy description.

The idea is to win sufficient 'rounds' (each 90 seconds) head to head, in which the person who answers the final question correctly wins, in order to join the Leader's Row, membership of which offers an improved chance of entering the final. The Questionmaster was Jamie Theakston, frontman of Car Wars.

We were exhorted by the production team to be lively.

Selection to the game takes the form of the 'fastest finger' principle, in my case "What was the colour of Noddy's hat?" - answer, blue. Surprisingly, of the nine potential entrants, I was the only one to get that right, just shows how things remain in the memory from a young age.

Then I was off - against the previous winner. By judicious 'switching' I won that game - and then on to the next programme. The pace quickened as I won a second, a third and a fourth game - ending the last with a rendition of the Sound of Music favourite Edelweiss. I seemed on the brink of evicting one of the Leader's Row. All went swimmingly - until a question about the best British pop album of 2006. My mind went blank. But my opponent knew the answer ("Arctic Monkeys"). Bang went my chance of winning, along with a cash injection to the finances of my local church.

Appearing on TV is great fun, especially when 'recognised' by the public. The first of my appearances was shown on the evening of the Mid Herts Circle's 900th and one of the ladies approached me with the greeting "Have I just seen you on television ... ?" I have since been approached by strangers when out and about, a great boost to the ego.