



EUTYCHUS

Patient-Assisted Dying Bill

A new bill aiming at the legalisation of euthanasia had its first reading in the House of Lords on 20 February. It is due to be debated in May 2003.

Designer Baby Decision

Triple Helix readers may have missed the fact that just before Christmas *Comment on Reproductive Ethics* (CORE) won a High Court judicial review against the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA), by successfully contesting the right of the HFEA to permit pre-implantation genetic diagnosis for the creation of human embryos as specific tissue matches for sick siblings. CORE had argued that the HFEA was overstepping its remit and taking decisions that were Parliament's alone. The prestigious Science and Technology Committee had already criticised the HFEA on this very issue of tissue-typing in its 2002 report on Developments in Human Genetics and Embryology: 'Parliament does not need protecting and democracy is not served by unelected quangos taking decisions on behalf of Parliament'. (*Evening Standard* 2002; 20 December:5)

30th anniversary of Roe vs Wade

Over 40 million abortions have been performed in the US since the Supreme Court's historic Roe vs Wade ruling of 22 January 1973 authorised the legal killing of unborn children nationwide. Former abortionist Bernard Nathanson, in his 'Confession of an ex-abortionist' in which he admitted to being personally responsible for 75,000 abortions, described the tactics he (and others) used to change the law as a founding director of NARAL (National Abortion Rights Action League): 'We persuaded the media that the cause of permissive abortion was a liberal enlightened sophisticated one. Knowing that if a true poll were taken we would be defeated, we simply fabricated the results of fictional polls. We announced to the media that we had taken polls and that 60% of Americans were in favour of permissive abortion laws. This is the tactic of the self-fulfilling lie. Few people care to be in the minority. The number of women dying from illegal abortions was around 200-250 annually. The figure we constantly fed to the media was 10,000. These false figures took root in the consciousness of Americans.' 1.3 million American women still have abortions every year and despite recent gains the Pro-Life movement's goal of overturning Roe vs Wade has remained elusive.

Demographic shifts

Britain's high abortion rate (almost 6 million since 1968) and falling birth rate will mean that over 65s will outnumber under 16s for the first time by 2014. The findings are reported in the social trends survey published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for England and Wales. Penny Babb, one of the authors of the report, said: 'We are in the midst of one of the most striking demographic shifts for generations as the ageing population has become a reality'. (*Daily Mail* 2003; 30 January) The former President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Jacques Attali, has stated in an essay in *L'Avenir de la vie*: 'As soon as he goes beyond 60-65 years of age man lives beyond his capacity to produce, and he costs society a lot of money...euthanasia will be one of the essential instruments of our future societies.'

Unsupervised sex

Most teenage sex takes place at home, and a significant number of 'encounters' happen before 6pm according to a survey reported in *Pediatrics*. The association between lack of supervision and risky sexual behaviour was borne out by the observation that boys who were unsupervised for more than five hours per week were twice as likely to have gonorrhoea or chlamydial infections.

(www.pediatrics.org/cgi/content/full/110/6/e66)

Spirituality and clinical care

Spiritual values and skills are increasingly recognised as necessary aspects of clinical care according to a leading article in the *British Medical Journal*. Larry Culliford, Consultant Psychiatrist in Brighton, reviewed the literature and cited a signal publication by Koenig et al, covering 1200 studies and 400 reviews. The article also quotes a World Health Organisation report which asserts that 'Patients and Physicians have begun to realise the value of elements such as faith, hope and compassion in the healing process', and concludes that 'spirituality and clinical care belong together' and that 'the time is ripening for doctors to recall, reinterpret, and reclaim our profession's sacred dimension'.

(*British Medical Journal* 2002; 325:1434-1435, 21 December)

Oregon apologises

Oregon's governor, John Kitzhaber, has officially apologised to thousands of state residents who were sterilised under a eugenics bill which was passed in 1913 and stood until 1983. A total of 2,648 people who were mentally ill, had epilepsy, were criminals or were homosexuals were sterilised by castration, tubal ligation, hysterectomy or vasectomy. Oregon was only one of 33 US States to enact eugenics laws between 1900 and 1925.

(*British Medical Journal* 2002; 325:1380, 14 December)

Discrimination against Muslims

An article in *The Times* has reported that British medical schools have started to restrict the number of Muslim students because they refuse to learn about abortion. The proportion of medical students from ethnic minorities in Britain has risen from 10% to 33% over the last 20 years, and the Council of Heads of Medical Schools has expressed concern that tutors are now unable to teach the full syllabus on account of the refusal of Muslim students to participate in certain courses that run counter to their faith. Many Muslims (and Christians) still seek to abide by the principles of the *Hippocratic Oath* and *Declaration of Geneva* (1948) which forbid abortion and it appears that this may work against them in 'enlightened' 21st century Britain.

(*The Times* 2003; 17 February:4)

Dolly dead!

Dolly, the first cloned mammal, has been put down after developing a lung infection at the Roslin Institute in Scotland. At the time of *Triple Helix* going to press it remained unclear as to whether her early death was linked to flaws in the cloning process. Meanwhile the claim of members of the Raelian cult, to have successfully cloned a human born over the Christmas period, remains unsubstantiated.

(*Observer* 2003; 16 February)