

## Half all pregnancies outside marriage now

A report from the Office for National Statistics shows that around half of all the 800,000 pregnancies in England and Wales in 1997 occurred outside marriage, compared with one third ten years ago. It is further predicted that in ten years married people will be a minority for the first time in Britain, and the number of singles and cohabiting couples is expected to double within 25 years. (Source: *The Evening Standard*, 16 March 1999)

## Under-16 abortions rise 10%

Another ONS report shows that the number of girls under 16 who had abortions in 1998 was the highest recorded ever, at 3,748. This is a rate of 6 per 1,000 under-16s. The rise in abortions for all teenagers was 11%. 'Inequalities in life, low life expectations, a lack of sex education and the inability of young girls to say no are all to blame' said a Family Planning Association spokesperson. (Source: *The Independent*, 28 May 1999)

## More contraception for under-age girls

The government's Social Exclusion Unit has been looking at ways of reducing Britain's teenage pregnancy rate and amongst 'wide-ranging plans' hinted at is a commitment to making contraceptives more freely available. However, the government denies that school nurses will be empowered to prescribe the Pill in schools - 'That is not what school is for' a senior Whitehall source said. (Source: *The Independent*, 10 May 1999)

## Abandoned baby cases treble

This catalogue of social disintegration continues with the news that more than one baby a week is now abandoned in England and Wales, a figure that has trebled in the last decade. Poverty, teenage pregnancy, family break-up and the pressures of trying to be the perfect parent are blamed. Mother and child are reunited in 85% of these cases, though amongst the remainder some babies are found dead. (Source: *The Independent*, 20 May 1999)

## AIDS now fourth biggest killer worldwide

A WHO report reveals AIDS has now overtaken TB and moved up from seventh to fourth place among all causes of death worldwide. It is beaten only by heart disease, stroke and acute respiratory infections. This was brought home to Eutychus recently when he heard in church of two Zambian schoolgirls who died of AIDS just after completing their GCSEs. (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 22 May 1999; 318: 1370)

## The heritage of humanity?

Article 1 of the UNESCO 'Universal declaration on the human genome and human rights' states: 'The human genome underlies the fundamental unity of all members of the human family, as well as recognition of their inherent dignity and diversity. In a symbolic sense, it is the heritage of humanity.' Are they perhaps talking about the image of God? (Source: *Bulletin of Medical Ethics*, March 1999; p8-11)

## Dolly ageing fast

One of the two pieces of biological evidence published in May constituting consequentialist arguments against human cloning was in a report in *Nature* that telomeres on Dolly's chromosomes are shorter than they should be for a three year old animal and are more consistent with a sheep aged six. As commentators have put it, maybe at birth she was 'mutton dressed as lamb'. (Source: *The Independent*, 27 May 1999)

## Doctors last in safe driving league

When insurance company Zurich Municipal conducted its annual survey of claimants, doctors ranked last out of 11 groups of public sector workers. Zurich said doctors tend to drive under great strain after working long days and at all hours. Perhaps Jehu was medically qualified? (Source: *BMA News Review*, April 1999, p11)

## 'Gay gene'- jury still out

A team of scientists from Canada and the US has failed to connect male homosexu-

ality with Xq28, the chromosomal segment controversially suggested six years ago. They studied 52 sibling pairs and found that gay brothers were no more likely to share Xq28 markers than would have occurred by chance. They are now looking elsewhere in the genome for a genetic basis for sexual orientation. Even if they find one, what will it mean? (Source: *Science*, 1999; 284: 665-666)

## Children have rights to 'spiritual comfort'

The World Medical Association's Declaration of Ottawa on 'The right of the child to health care' includes at section 30: 'Religious assistance. Every effort should be made to ensure that a child patient has access to appropriate spiritual and moral comfort, including access to a minister of the religion of her/his own choice.' (Source: *Bulletin of Medical Ethics*, February 1999; p9-11)

## Love not science puts meaning in our lives

Reflecting the explosion of discussion on genetics and ethics, the *Journal of Medical Ethics* recently devoted almost an entire edition to the subject. Eutychus was particularly touched by an article from Australia by a mother who described the impact on the family of discovering that two of their three sons had adrenoleukodystrophy. She concludes 'If you came to our house and made the medicine milkshakes you would see little boys not disorders. My sons are special people, beyond their genetic flaw and it is love not science that puts meaning in our lives.' (Source: *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 1999; 25: 195-199)

*Eutychus*