

# readers' letters:

## Genetic counselling

*Biochemistry graduate Louise Ray plans to move from general counselling and work with special needs children into genetic counselling, and is asking for interested Christians to contact her:*

Over the last 15 months God has very obviously and with many confirmations called me to be a genetic counsellor. Being fully qualified is still several years away but is something I am making progress towards and am certain will happen.

From the beginning I have known how hard it will be to get on the Master's course in Manchester and how difficult it may be ethically. I am only just discovering however that the informed sector of the church views genetic counselling as a force for negative eugenics. Genetic counsellors are meant to be impartial and in practice that isn't always the case. There is bad practice; often reinforced by doctors and social workers. It doesn't have to be this way.

I see genetic counselling as an opportunity to support parents and to empower them with information and the space and time they'd need to talk through how they'd cope with each eventuality. I want to defend the rights of people with disabilities by being as realistic as possible regarding quality of life, and by dispelling the disproportionate fear and panic associated with hearing your child is imperfect.

So many people with disabilities have enriched my life that it is unacceptable to me on finding similar disabilities only to give serious thought to termination. There is very good reason for Christians in this field to be balanced professionals and I hope we will be supported by other Christians.

If you are a genetic counsellor and a Christian please get in touch so that we can support one another:

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## Jubilee 2000 campaign

*Responding to the critique in the Autumn 1998 edition of the proposal for a jubilee-style cancellation of debt owed by the developing world, paediatrician Chris Cooper from Stockport argues 'it is making a start':*

You give considerable space to the reply by Stephen de Garis, outlining his objections to the Jubilee 2000 campaign. I welcome criticism as this helps to keep a balanced view and tempers idealism.

However, I think a reply is warranted. Poverty in the developing world is surely the major injustice of our times and it is becoming clear that our trading and financial systems are helping to keep the poor poor. The huge debts incurred by the developing world began in earnest with irresponsible lending by Western bankers during the oil boom of the 1970s.

The original amount has been paid off many times over, but the debt will never be paid due to mounting interest. The World Bank has admitted that this is true for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries. Debt repayment is having a crippling effect on ordinary people in developing countries. Christians cannot stand by and do nothing.

It is true that many governments in the developing world are dictatorial and corrupt, but let us ask ourselves what government is free from scandal and irresponsible deals? Our own government was exposed in the Pergau Dam affair in misuse of foreign aid, and currently sells arms to Indonesia's regime.

The World Bank and the IMF impose and closely monitor Structural Adjustment Programmes which force cuts in public services in order for debt payments to be made. Could they not monitor the use of money redirected from debt repayment towards health and education services, possibly through the United Nations - a sort of opposite of sanctions? Governments would be accountable to independent arbitrators both for use of released funds and for any future loans. This is one of Jubilee 2000's proposals.

I do not think the Jubilee 2000 movement are so naive as to think that by writing off debt, world poverty will end. It is making a start to address the huge problems faced in the Third World. Other means such as Fair Trade and long term development work are needed, but will never be effective without debt relief.

The poorest people in the world are powerless in the face of huge international financial forces. The amount of money to write off the twenty poorest countries' debts is not great on a world scale, but the political will is lacking. Surely this is the new slavery of our times? Just as the misery of slavery in the last century was eventually ended by the weight of public opinion, the debt crisis can also end. Let Christians lead the way in standing up to this challenge!

The Editor welcomes original letters for consideration for publication. They should have both Christian and health-care content, should not normally exceed 400 words, and if accepted may have to be edited for length.

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