

all choices have consequences

David Jones reports on the national launch of the Alliance of Pro-Life Students

It was another busy week in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Croydon University Hospital. I'd already seen three C-sections, two vaginal deliveries, a major obstetric haemorrhage, and attended a number of antenatal, gynaecology and fertility clinics. As a mere male I had been struck, once again, by the amazing feat women go through to go through in order to bring new life into the world.

It was in this context that I received an invitation from CMF to attend the launch of the Alliance of Pro-Life Students (APS). My initial concern was with the branding of the organisation. 'Pro-Life' for me, is a phrase that conjures up images of law-driven religious fundamentalists, people who traumatise women outside abortion clinics by shouting slogans, waving banners of dismembered fetuses, and generally communicating a message of condemnation rather than grace. On the other hand, at the heart of my thinking was the thought that being 'pro-life' should mean being 'pro-woman'. After all, in every pregnancy there are (at least) two lives. So I attended, but with some trepidation.

Upon my arrival I soon met with three student peers who would be co-representing CMF. I was quick to articulate my concerns, to see if they shared them. They did, but we all agreed to keep our minds as open as possible.

The evening began with a drinks reception followed by a speech by Lord David Alton (Baron Alton of Liverpool) who reminded us of the importance of tact when discussing these issues. We need to understand that all choices have consequences, he declared: 'To have the right to do a thing is not the same as being



right to do it.' He punctuated his speech with quotes from GK Chesterton, Nelson Mandela, Phyllis Bowman, and Aristotle, to name just a few. He stated the obvious irony that all those in favour of abortion have, of course, been born!

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He then shared some staggering statistics surrounding abortion in the UK:

- There are 600 abortions per day in the UK.
- 1 in 5 pregnancies in the UK ends in abortion.
- 1 in 3 women in the UK has had an abortion.
- Since the introduction of the 1968 Abortion Act, 7 million abortions have been performed.

He reminded his audience that the Abortion Act 1968 had been introduced under the premise that it would prevent backstreet



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abortions (and thus decrease maternal deaths) and would not result in 'abortion on demand'. This latter premise had clearly been violated. It had been confirmed by a recent *Daily Telegraph* investigation which uncovered that some abortion providers were terminating pregnancies based on gender alone (sex-selective abortion).¹ He said the sheer number of abortions being performed suggested that a large number were being carried out on demand.

This increasingly blasé attitude towards abortion had led us to a point in history where some ethicists were willing to argue in favour of so-called 'after-birth abortion'.² We have come a long way from the original Act in which abortion could only take place where pregnancy posed 'a serious risk to the mother'.

Moving on to issues raised by embryological research, Lord Alton stated that creating and destroying 1.7 million embryos, had not yielded a single scientific breakthrough in 37 years of research. Genetic testing had resulted in the abortion of 90% of Down's syndrome babies. It appeared that the general feeling was that the only option was to abort a disabled child or else confine oneself to a life of misery. Alternative options were not well voiced. This cultural pressure for perfection in pregnancy is what eugenics is all about, and it had pushed a culture of abortion.

Likening abortion to euthanasia Lord Alton said that rare and difficult ethical cases were being used by lobby groups to pressure the government into liberalising the law on euthanasia. Yet rare and tricky cases were a poor foundation upon which to base legislation, he insisted, and would have far-reaching

effects. He quoted Baroness Jane Campbell, Commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), who herself has spinal muscular atrophy, 'I and many other severely disabled people will not perceive your support for euthanasia as an act of compassion but one founded in fear and prejudice.'

Lord Alton said students today had inherited a culture of death. It was down to us to bequeath a culture of life; to realise the intrinsic worth of every human being regardless of race, religion, gender, or ability, from womb to tomb.

The APS is a student-led organisation that aims to unite pro-life students of faith, with atheists, feminists, and anyone else willing to champion the pro-life cause. Recently a group emerged calling itself Pagans for Life! APS aims to have 15 pro-life student groups across UK universities by the end of the year. They are offering support which includes starter packs, advice, and university visits to any student(s) willing to set up a group.

APS was founded ten months ago by Eve Farren, a charismatic and courageous Bristol University student. Judging by the protest outside the launch they are already being taken very seriously by their pro-abortion opponents. Its student leaders (predominantly female) came across as intelligent and compassionate. In the words of Eve Farren 'we do not intend to force our views on anyone, but rather to offer them'. ■

REFERENCES

1. www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/9099925/Abortion-investigation-Available-on-demand-an-abortion-if-its-a-boy-you-wanted.html
2. <http://jme.bmj.com/content/early/2012/03/01/medethics-2011-100411.full>