

## Actions with tragic consequences

*When altruism is wrongly used as a shield*

Review by **Steve Fouch**

CMF Head of Allied Professions Ministries

**K**atherine Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty*<sup>1</sup> is riding high in the aftermath of its Oscar nomination, it is interesting to reflect that the film got at least one thing wrong in its telling of the hunt for Osama bin Laden. In 2011, Dr Shakil Afridi entered the alleged compound of bin Laden, ostensibly to take blood samples and administer a hepatitis B vaccination (not a polio vaccination as the film and indeed the Taliban both seem to think). The vaccination was a fake – the operation was a ruse to try to get genetic samples to prove this was bin Laden's household before a CIA strike force was sent in.<sup>2</sup>

The consequence has been all too tragic – murders of polio vaccination workers in Pakistan last year by the Taliban,<sup>3</sup> and in February this year, in Kano Nigeria. up to nine workers (all women) were gunned down, allegedly by the Islamic militant group Boko Haram.<sup>4</sup> In a context of the

long-held suspicion of some Nigerian, Pakistani and Afghan mullahs who claimed that global vaccination programmes were cover for a plot by the CIA to sterilise Muslims. This was reinforced with lethal effect by the hunt for bin Laden.

The horror is that these three nations are the only ones in the world where poliomyelitis has not yet been eradicated by vaccination. From over 350,000 cases worldwide a year in 1988 to barely 250 in 2012, the global eradication of polio has been a massive near success. Sadly, the final push may just have been delayed or even reversed by this ignominious episode, as polio rates in all three countries are now going up again.<sup>5</sup>

*Zero Dark Thirty* may be a Hollywood take on these events but it misses the wider consequences of the operation.

Christians are working in all three countries to tackle the awful health problems afflicting their populations, and

have faced harassment, persecution and even death in doing so. Christians are even more readily identified with the foreign policies of Western governments than most, because of the mistaken assumption that the West is Christian.

There are CMF members and their families and colleagues very much in the way of harm as they seek to serve Christ in serving the poor.<sup>6</sup> We need to remember them in our prayers as global events like these affect their lives and ministries.

### references

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4. Smith D, *Polio workers in Nigeria shot dead* *The Guardian*, 8 February 2013. <http://gu.com/p/3dkfqtw>
5. <http://bit.ly/2fEyUP>
6. Matthew 25:31-46

## Flesh and Blood

*giving more than money*

Review by **Philippa Taylor**

CMF Head of Public Policy

**‘**What if the Church saw organ donation as part of its giving?’ reads the strapline to a new campaign which wants to mobilise UK churches to promote blood and organ donation. The aim of *FleshandBlood* is to build on the Christian culture of giving and make blood and organ donation a part of this.

There were 7,800 people on the UK waiting list for a transplant in 2011. There were 511 deaths of people on the waiting list although this figure may be higher, according to the BMA, perhaps up to 1,000 people.<sup>1</sup>

*FleshandBlood* encourages church denominations, organisations and individuals to be advocates for donation. They are working in partnership with NHS Blood and Transplant to raise the profile of donation within the Christian community.

‘Being willing to give our time, money and gifts is a significant aspect of our stewardship of what we have received. But

this applies just as much to the blood that flows in our veins; and the organs that are such an intrinsic part of our bodies.’<sup>2</sup>

A CMF paper<sup>3</sup> by consultant transplant surgeon, Keith Rigg, encourages us all to consider what we would like to happen to our organs and tissues after death. Organ and tissue donation fits within the Christian stewardship responsibility and call for sacrificial giving and love.

Nevertheless, organ donation is not without controversies. There is currently a draft bill in Wales that is likely to introduce presumed consent for organ donation. CMF has submitted several briefings to the Welsh Assembly outlining some ethical and practical concerns with presuming consent to donation when it has not been given.<sup>4</sup>

We should also be aware of other agendas, such as conflicts of interest, debates over the definitions of death,<sup>3</sup> use of elective ventilation and ‘mandated’ consent.<sup>5</sup>

Our support for organ donation is based upon it being a free gift in a context of fully informed consent, not undermined through

any hint of financial incentives or felt duty. The altruistic gift aspect of donation, which arises from fully informed consent, fulfills our Christian obligation to love our neighbour as oneself and fits the mandate to heal, motivated by compassion and mercy for others.

This new campaign is based purely on altruistic donation. In addition to advocating blood and organ donation as part of the ‘giving’ culture of the Church, *FleshandBlood* offers information and resources to equip individuals in local churches to consider donation and to promote it to the wider community. It is a great new initiative that we welcome and support: [www.fleshandblood.org](http://www.fleshandblood.org)

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## BBC TV sitcom on assisted suicide

*Is this the 'Way to Go'?*

Review by **Andrew Fergusson**  
Chair, Advisory Group, Care Not Killing Alliance

When the BBC announced<sup>1</sup> it was to air a six-episode 'black comedy' about assisted suicide on BBC3, its channel orientated towards young people, there was outcry. Conservative MP Mark Pritchard slamming it for turning suicide into a joke.<sup>2</sup> Care Not Killing, in which CMF remains active, expressed concern but announced it would reserve judgment until the series had concluded.

CNK would assess *Way to Go* under four criteria:<sup>3</sup> does the programme follow World Health Organisation guidance not to 'glorify and sensationalise suicide' and thus risk suicide contagion; does it follow the BBC's track record on this subject and drive an apparent political agenda; is it respectful towards those who face these sensitive matters in real life; and can assisted suicide ever be a suitable topic for TV comedy, even when only used as an innovative context?

How has *Way to Go* done? It is important to realise it is not a serious treatment of euthanasia and assisted suicide, the BBC has done plenty of that – albeit one-sidedly<sup>4</sup> – but a surreal excuse for a storyline about three lads in financial straits. Superficially seeming to accept that assisted suicide is down to individual choice, the four deaths so far actually demonstrate CNK's concerns.

No-one seeking death appears ill, and presumably these unconvincing portrayals are intentional, to maintain the unreal comedy feel. Three are older men, socially isolated – indeed another older man in a care home abandons his plan when soft-hearted Scott arranges sexual services for him and he discovers a reason for living.

A younger woman said to have terminal cancer and less than six months to live has symptoms which appear to be mainly existential. Each moment of dispatch is glossed over so that no viewer could take it seriously, and its illegality is stressed

throughout with the potential 14-year sentence mentioned frequently. The series ends with a cliff-hanger: will the lads get caught?

Ethical considerations aside, the series makes depressing viewing for its worldview of casual sex, drug-taking, and trivialised criminality. This reviewer cannot recommend it, but to the extent it treats a hot topic, the case against comes out clearly on top. Neither legalising assisted suicide nor making a comedy about it is the way to go.

### references

1. <http://bit.ly/UrcEnw>
2. <http://bit.ly/RzUMcm>
3. <http://bit.ly/XmznzKF>
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## Francis Report shines revealing light on the NHS

*Failure of care shakes belief in the health service*

Review by **Steve Fouch**  
CMF Head of Allied Professions Ministries

The horror stories that emerged from the five enquiries into the failure of care at Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust have shaken the national belief in our health service. Patients left in soiled bedclothes, people being triaged by A&E receptionists, appalling hygiene standards, patients left on gurneys in severe distress... The litany of abuse and neglect goes on. Hundreds of patients (maybe over a thousand) are thought to have died unnecessarily as a result, and many more have suffered needlessly.

What is more, those who raised concerns were ignored, threatened or silenced, and the regulatory mechanisms that should have picked up on these failings simply did not work. There was something rotten in the state of the NHS as whole, not just in Mid-Staffs.

The publication of the second Francis Report<sup>1</sup> has sought to address this wider, systemic failure. It has spared no one's blushes in its criticisms of institutional

blindness and self-interest trumping the needs of patients across professional and regulatory bodies and the Department of Health.

Francis makes 290 recommendations. Central to them is that transparency becomes a legal duty for NHS trusts and professional bodies, and that there needs to be an overall culture change in the NHS, that puts patients and their needs at the centre of the system. This seems so fundamental that the inquiry's need to state it explicitly suggests how far the NHS has drifted away from its original purpose.

Significantly, while good leadership is vital to this, Francis makes it clear that the culture change is the responsibility of every NHS employee, from 'porters and cleaners to the Secretary of State'. It is a bottom up change, not further top down restructuring that is needed.

A change in culture only arises from a shared set of values and beliefs. This presents a challenge and opportunity for us as Christians to express the God-given

value of each and every person made in his image,<sup>2</sup> the centrality of compassion as an expression of God's love and character,<sup>3</sup> and of service and advocacy for those in need as central to an expression of his justice.<sup>4</sup>

Many are calling this a 'watershed moment' for the NHS. It may well be a 'kairos' moment, when 'eternity erupts, transforming the world into a new state of being'.

So let us not just hope that the Francis Report is a spur to action in others, but also a spur for us as Christians to be agents of change and transformation in the NHS.

### references

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2. Genesis 1:26, 27
3. 1 John 4:7-9
4. Isaiah 1:17; Matthew 25:33-46