

## **Introduction**

*(This talk was given at the SPUC National Conference in Newcastle in Sept. 1993, the year that Tony Bland was sedated and starved to death in March.)*

It's over ten years now, since I became pro-life, and during that time I've given countless talks on the right to life of people with severe disabilities, drawing on my own experience of being so labelled because I was born with spina bifida.

The response of pro-life people has always been a determination to publicise the plight of the unborn and new-born disabled, and, of course, I recognise that a lot has been done and is being done on that score.

## **Who has a severe disability**

In the past I've often started my talks by asking the question, "Who thinks s/he has a severe disability?"

After defining 'severe disability' as any physical, emotional or spiritual impairment to our being wholly perfect human beings, it has always transpired that in fact there is no one who doesn't have a 'severe disability'.

I have been very encouraged recently to see that people are beginning to be sensitive to this, and are recognising the importance of using accurate terminology and the necessity of avoiding offensive words such as 'defective', 'deformed' and 'abnormal', which should never be used to describe people with obvious disabilities.

Now, however, I want to move on from this and explain that sometimes the language we use to describe apparently able-bodied people can have negative implications for those who have obvious disabilities. In order to do this, I'm going to ask three questions which I'd like you to answer as honestly as possible.

The first question, then is, "Who thinks s/he is 'perfect'?"

The second question is, "Who thinks that the person sitting in the next seat is 'perfect'?"

'Perfect' actually means 'faultless, absolute, not deficient in any way, complete'; so, I'd hazard a guess that you were appropriately humble in suggesting that neither you nor your neighbour is 'perfect'.

Nevertheless, I've lost count of the number of times I've been told by well-meaning people, "Mrs X was told that her baby would be severely disabled, but, in fact, he's perfect!"

Using the word 'perfect' to mean 'free from obvious disability' is not only an inevitably inaccurate description of the baby in question, but also, by implication, suggests that babies labelled 'severely disabled' are, uniquely, 'imperfect' which is a misleading distortion of the truth which is that we are all less than perfect in some (maybe many!) ways.

Since, we have now established that it is inaccurate to describe any currently living human being as 'perfect', since none qualifies for the description 'absolutely faultless', I want to ask you the third question, which is, "Who thinks s/he has 'perfect health'?"

Before you answer it, bear in mind that 'health' means 'soundness of mind, body and spirit' so 'perfect health' would mean absolutely faultless perfection of body, mind and spirit; such a person would never be ill, never depressed, or upset, never irritable or impatient or intolerant and would relate with perfect love and understanding at all times to all other humans.... So, (and you can answer it now)

"Who thinks s/he has perfect health?"

## **The importance of using positive images and terminology**

This question is important because very often pro-lifers say, almost without thinking of it, things like: “There are 180,000 abortions each year, 98% of them on perfectly healthy babies.”

Although such statements are made with good intentions never meaning to imply anything negative about people with obvious disabilities, they do, in fact, clearly suggest that apparently able bodied babies are ‘perfect’ and aborting them is worse than aborting those with obvious disabilities.

By categorising people in this way, we are, actually, overlooking the individuality and uniqueness of each human being and thus failing really to do justice to the pro-life message that human beings have infinite value regardless of their apparent abilities and that aborting any baby is infinitely wrong.

It is, perhaps, easiest to explain this by reference to the fact that doctors often refer to me as ‘a spina bifida’ as if spina bifida was what I am not what I have. Even well-meaning people sometimes refer to ‘the disabled’ as if we were a homogenous group and as if being disabled were the only relevant characteristic we have. Yet, I bet that, for instance, people who wear glasses would be less than happy to be spoken of, collectively, as ‘the bespectacled’ as if that were the only interesting feature about them. It’s important to remember the power of negative labelling, especially when we come to consider the fatal pre- and post natal discrimination being extended to older vulnerable people by the legalisation of euthanasia.

## **False estimations of the worth of disabled people**

As you will know, experiments on human embryos, abortion up to the moment of birth and the killing of the new-born are all currently justified on the grounds that they supposedly ‘prevent disability’, and ensure that only babies labelled ‘perfectly healthy’ are born.

In defence of this philosophy we have the ‘experts’ (all of whom consider themselves ‘perfectly healthy’, of course) prognosticating on the value of the lives of the obviously disabled. We have Prof. Peter Dunn of Bristol and Dr. Martin Chiswick of Manchester admitting that they ‘allow to die’ (meaning sedate and starve to death) on average one disabled baby per month. There is Prof. Nicholas Wald of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in London saying that screening for spina bifida is clearly cost effective because it’s cheaper to kill people with spina bifida than to care for them. There is the Royal College of Physicians stating that screening costs only £5 per patient, as opposed to the care of a disabled person, which costs £ 10,000 per year. And in January 1993, the Office of Health Economics issued a report saying that money spent on saving the lives of premature babies was a waste, because so many grew up to be disabled.

The extent to which such estimations of worth are based on false notions of relative value is made abundantly clear by an American study which showed that, if every child with Down’s syndrome in the U.S.A. were to be institutionalised (which would, actually, be the least appropriate and most expensive way of caring for them) their keep would cost approximately 1/10 of what Americans spend every year on dog-food.

What the supposedly ‘preventive measures’ of screening followed by abortion really do of course, is prevent people who already have obvious disabilities from continuing to live. With the growing pressure for legalising euthanasia, more and more deaths are liable to be labelled as ‘preventing suffering’ (even though most of the suffering of disability is caused by obstacles put in the path of obviously disabled people by an uncaring and discriminatory society than by the disabling conditions themselves), and more and more people are liable to be designated too expensive, too ‘imperfect’, too inconvenient or too distressing to others to be allowed to live.

### **Three vulnerable people- the key to the pro-life message**

In view of the vast consequences of the currently prevalent philosophy that some people are 'better off dead' and the huge number of lives already affected, as well as the even greater number potentially affected, it's easy, sometimes, to lose sight of the real simplicity of the pro-life message in the realisation of the enormity of its implications. For this reason, I would like to introduce you to three people during the course of my talk, who represent the weakest and most vulnerable of human beings, and who together provide the key to the real meaning of the pro-life message; three people whom I would like you to keep in mind as I speak.

The first is Tony Bland, the young man injured in the Hillsborough Football Stadium disaster; he was crushed in the panic to escape the stadium and his brain was damaged by lack of oxygen to the extent that he was regarded as being in the inappropriately named 'Persistent Vegetative State' or PVS.

The second is a little girl born in Stoke on Trent with a condition called anencephaly, which means that most of the higher brain is missing. The brain stem (which controls the so-called 'automatic' functions like breathing and heart beat) is intact but the 'higher brain' which controls conscious thought is absent. Babies with anencephaly typically have a very short post-natal life of less than a week. This little girl lived for only one day.

The third is a baby boy born in Calcutta to parents so desperately poor that the bit of the pavement where they live is likely to be the only home he will ever know.

The message of these three people is simultaneously profound and simple, and, I hope, by the end of this talk you will understand clearly what that message is.

### **Tony Bland and the human value of the worth of people in PVS**

Everybody must be aware of the case of Tony Bland, the first of our three people. The NHS Trust which runs Airedale General Hospital in Keighley, where he was a patient, backed by his parents, applied to the High Court for permission to stop feeding him so that he would starve to death. The High Court ruled that this could be done and the Appeal Court concurred. The Law Lords, the last possible point of appeal also ruled the same way and Tony Bland died on 3/3/93 after nine days without food and water.

Before this case, most of the arguments put forward in support of the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia centred around three main requirements:

The person making the request to be killed must be:-

1. terminally and/or incurably ill or disabled
2. in "un-relievable, unbearable pain" (ignoring the fact that virtually all pain can be controlled in the right environment)
3. have a "sustained wish to die" (i.e. they must have signed what is known as a Living Will or Advance Directive requesting death in the event of particular conditions arising)

The Tony Bland case put these supposedly "strict criteria" of the pro-euthanasia lobby into perspective, because enthusiasm for killing him was undimmed despite the fact that he was NOT terminally ill (he could have lived another 30 years with ordinary case), he was NOT in pain (his doctors said he was incapable of feeling pain), and he had never expressed a wish to die (and, of course, once in PVS, he was incapable of formulating such a wish). So the pro-euthanasia lobby wanted Tony Bland killed even though he didn't satisfy ANY of their own "strict criteria".

The reasons why this was so are simple to understand. The general consensus is that a life like Tony Bland's is worthless, and that death is in the best interests of anyone so profoundly disabled. There is

also an economic motive, since it is estimated to cost around £40,000 a year to keep someone in a PVS alive.

In order to really “get to know” Tony Bland, and to understand that the Court judgement that he was “better off dead” demonstrated essentially the same philosophy as that which justifies killing disabled babies before or after birth, we need to know something of the reality of his condition.

PVS is often referred to as being virtually synonymous with “coma” and most people think of that as meaning that the person is, to all intents and purposes permanently asleep. This isn't actually so, people in a PVS, like Tony Bland, sleep and wake in the same way as anyone else. They could be left lying in bed all the time, but equally well they can be put into a wheelchair so that they can see what is going on. Since they cannot speak, no one knows exactly how much they take in, but they are responsive to some extent. They can breathe unaided and are NOT on “life support machines.” Most could be fed with a spoon but, because it would take up a lot of time to do so, and because it could be dangerous for them because their swallowing reflex is damaged, it is quicker and safer to feed them by tube. In short they are profoundly disabled people, NOT vegetables, despite what the term PVS would suggest.

As with disabled unborn babies, people in PVS are constantly dehumanised by those who would prefer to see them killed.

This is amply demonstrated by quoting Sir Stephen Brown, President of the Family Division of the High Court, who said his ruling on the case:

"The doctors can lawfully discontinue all treatment (to Tony Bland) including ventilation, (he wasn't actually ON a ventilator), nutrition, hydration and other medical treatment because there is no possibility of him ever emerging from his existing PVS. He has no feeling, no awareness, nor can he experience anything relating to his surroundings. To his parents and family he is "dead." His spirit has left him and all that remains is the shell of his body."

This is, to say the very least, presumptuous. Does Sir Stephen claim to have a ‘spiritometer’ that he can so confidently pronounce on the presence or absence of a human being's spirit ?

On the other hand, those who know and, most important of all, love and accept such profoundly disabled people see in them something radically different. Alan Tombs has been in a PVS for five years since an anaesthetic error during a routine operation left him permanently brain damaged. His wife, Dena, used the compensation money received for his injuries to build an extension to their home, where she is now caring for him herself. This is how she describes her husband:

"Alan is not a cabbage. He's a man; simple as that. Even though he can't run or walk or talk, I've discovered other qualities in him that make me love him more. There is a childlike innocence that touches my heart every time I look at him. Few adults possess that capacity for giving joy. When he is sulking or angry he sticks out his bottom lip. When I talk lovingly to him, he stares at me with a gooey look just like he did before the accident."

"But best of all, Alan laughs, a great, big, happy laugh that makes your heart leap for joy. Nobody, not even the doctors, ever thought they would hear that laugh again."

He laughs a lot now. He roars at Tom and Jerry on the telly. They were always his favourite cartoon characters. He sniggers when my team, Tottenham, lose at football, he was daft about Derby County. Every time his face lights up I think 'That's my Alan'. Sometimes he even giggles in his sleep. Another exciting thing has happened recently. When I called his name, he moved his head towards the sound of my voice. It has taken five years for things like that to happen. It may never have happened, but does that mean Alan deserves to live any less than you or I? Does it mean that he should be disposed of because he is an inconvenience, because it hurts, because it's sometimes frustrating or painful to be with him? I don't think so."

The difference between these two quotes about people in PVS is easy to spot, of course; Dena Tombs sees her husband as a human being with the same value as she has herself. Sir Stephen Brown saw Tony Bland as a "shell" with no spirit or personality, who had NO value.

### **Euthanasia -a particular threat to disabled people**

Disabled people are inevitably going to be in the front line of vulnerability from euthanasia, of courses because society has already decided (by sanctioning embryo selection and abortion on grounds of foetal disability) that obvious disability is a "fate worse than death." and that being so, there is no good reason not to kill obviously disabled adults. In fact, many would see it as "loving' and "merciful, to "release the severely disabled from a life of pain and suffering." (Although those who say such things hardly ever have any real experience of such disabilities.)

Some pro-life people when discussing euthanasia tend to concentrate their arguments on the threat of involuntary euthanasia because they believe this argument will appeal more to those who are uncommitted than to tackle the more controversial issue of voluntary euthanasia. Its relatively easy to do this too since we can talk about the involuntary euthanasia already going on here (the sedation and starvation to death of new-born disabled babies, the killing of Tony Bland) or about the fact that, in Holland, a substantial number of euthanasia deaths have been found to be involuntary or non-voluntary even, in spite of supposedly "strict criteria" to ensure that only the those who request euthanasia are killed.

However (the WHOLE pro-life truth is that **ALL** euthanasia is wrong whether or not the patient consents) because killing people is wrong.

We can't just say, "Legalising voluntary euthanasia is wrong because it will tend to involuntary euthanasia" because that implies euthanasia is OK so long as the patients have consented.

We need to be saying, as we do for abortion, that non-violent solutions can be found (and are found) in Hospices and that killing vulnerable people is NEVER the right response to human suffering

Of course although euthanasia's proponents talk about a "right to die" they don't actually mean that there should be a universal right to be killed since rights must have corresponding duties to be meaningful.

If there were a right to be killed we would find ourselves obliged to kill ANYONE who expressed a wish to die however fleeting that wish was.

- ◆ Depressed people would HAVE to be given an overdose;
- ◆ Those threatening to jump from a high building or under trains would HAVE to be pushed ;
- ◆ Anorexics would HAVE to be allowed to starve themselves to death.

Those in favour of legalising .euthanasia don't really want that, of course; they only want SOME people, those with terminal illnesses or obvious disabilities, to have their request for euthanasia taken seriously. And this is because of an underlying presumption that sick and disabled people are right to want to die whereas apparently able bodied people are not.

This naturally says a lot more about the prejudices of pro- euthanasia advocates than it does about the lives of sick and disabled people.

In fact the truth is that such people are usually depressed For much the same reasons as those regarded as not disabled (like, for instance, broken relationships, bereavement, unemployment, housing problems) or for reasons which could easily be remedied by positive care and support and by the reassurance that human value and worth are not measured by physical or mental ability.

**The "help" that euthanasia advocates say they offer is simply killing masquerading as "love and compassion."**

It is interesting to note that both hospice doctors, who work every day with sick and dying people and are totally opposed to euthanasia, and doctors in Holland who actually practise euthanasia say that it is depression rather than physical pain in (which can virtually always be controlled) which is behind the vast majority of requests for euthanasia.

A good example of this is the case of Larry McAfee, an American paralysed from the neck down (a condition called Quadriplegia) due to a car accident. He cannot breathe without a respirator and for a long time he was resident in a hospital Intensive Care Unit. He applied to the Courts for the right to have his ventilator turned off because he felt his life wasn't worth living and the Judge, acceding to his request said:-

"Mr. McAfee will NOT be committing suicide in having his ventilator turned off. The ventilator is not prolonging his life, but prolonging his death" (i.e. his existence is a kind of death, and not real life at all.)

Thankfully before Mr. McAfee could take his own life he was offered a place in a group home. He took that option and is now working towards getting his own home and a job.

Euthanasia would have killed him because of the label "severely disabled" when it was his living conditions, not his disability, which were the cause of his suicidal feelings.

The problem again stems from labelling people as if the apparently able-bodied were "perfect" and those with obvious disabilities nothing more than the disabling conditions they have. When a person labelled "severely disabled" wants to end their life, or when parents are presented with a positive pre-natal screening test and offered abortion, or when parents are told their child is in a "PVS", those who will decide whether the disabled person lives or dies are told nothing more than the, name of the obvious condition.

The baby is "a spina bifida" or "a Down's Syndrome", the terminally ill woman is "a cancer", the depressed young man is "a quadriplegic", the injured son or daughter is "a PVS."

By wrongly designating some people as 'perfect' one inevitably invites such negative terminology about those whose imperfections are rather more obvious than most. Yet as we saw at the start, none of us is really "perfect" and emotional and spiritual imperfections are no less grievous than physical or mental ones.

Nevertheless, it is because obviously disabled people are seen as nothing more than a collection of malfunctioning body parts that, they are dehumanised to such an extent that the vast majority of people condone their deliberate destruction.

### **The wrongness of attempts to establish a "sliding scale" of human value**

This "them and us" philosophy, designed to separate out those who will be accorded full human status (the ones labelled "perfect") from those who will be regarded as dispensable (the ones labelled "severely disabled") is done in the abortion debate generally by those who want to ignore the rights of the unborn and who therefore justify killing them by saying that they are so different and inferior (so small! unseen, un-communicating, unproductive! unable to claim their rights) that they may be done away with for the benefit of a "real human being" -the mother .

Likewise those labelled perfectly healthy" are separated out from those labelled "severely disabled" by classifying the latter as "miserable, burdensome, a drain on the economy etc." as if no one else ever was.

The time has gone for false distinctions between the "perfectly healthy" and the "severely disabled" and the pro-life movement must be in the forefront of those who are saying that human worth and value is NOT measured by physical or mental ability, but by the dignity and worth inherent in the very fact of humanity.

### **The importance of promoting the whole truth of the pro-life message**

In the past many pro-lifers have understandably concentrated their efforts in talking about the 98% of abortion done on "social" grounds, simply because these constitute the greater number of deaths. As I mentioned before, I'm sure that many of you, in trying to persuade people about the injustice of abortion, have said things like:

"There are 180,000 abortions done each year, 98% of them on perfectly healthy babies" or "2% of abortions are done on grounds of the 'hard cases' like disability."

I'm sure these things were said with good intentions, maybe thinking that most people will think social abortions are far worse than 'hard case' ones, and if they could only be got to agree with us on those, it would be a good start.

I believe, however, that such statements overlook the equal tragedy of the deaths of 'hard case' babies and I'll try to explain why by saying things like:

"98% of aborted babies are perfectly healthy" or "2% are 'hard case' abortions", you unwittingly imply something quite subtle about those 2% of hard case abortions.

You imply, in fact, that the feeling that social abortions are worse is right; that the 'hard case' babies are not as important as those regarded as "perfectly healthy" and that killing is wrong in direct proportion to the status society assigns to a particular victim.

### **The value of a baby girl who lived for only one day**

At this point I'd like to "introduce" you to the second of the three people. I mentioned at the start of the talk, the little girl born with anencephaly.

Such babies are usually regarded as being totally unimportant and expendable, since they represent the most extreme of disabilities; and arguments in defence of their short lives are very rarely heard. Maybe having heard me say that this baby had very little brain, you are wondering what she looked like, perhaps even imagining something horrific, even grotesque. Let me assure you that this was not the case, nor is it ever the case. I have a photo of her on the wall of my study at home, dressed in baby clothes, wearing a little bonnet to cover the top of her head, which is flat rather than rounded like yours or mine (her only obvious difference from any other baby). Her mother is cuddling her in the photo, and it is a picture of motherly love for a baby which is both beautiful and entirely natural.

However, we don't have to look far for justifications for killing babies such as her. People will say their lives are short, valueless, that their early death will cause the parents grief (as if the abortion could be easy and cause no grief); that the parents should forget the baby and "try again" (implying that children are interchangeable, and that one is much the same as another.)

Ronald Cranford, Chair of the Ethics and Humanities Committee of the American Academy of Neurology says:- "Anencephalics are not alive and they're not dead, but they have many of the characteristics of being dead."

Have YOU ever heard of a dead person who could breathe, suck and swallow, who had a beating heart and moving arms and legs, who was warm to the touch who cried?

Sir Raymond Hoffenburg justified killing such babies by saying "Death is absolutely inevitable among babies born with anencephaly." Unlike the rest of us I suppose.

On the other hand Paul Johnson whose son Jamie was born with anencephaly says "I know that he could feel... He developed a clear personality showing pleasure by smiling, displeasure by becoming agitated; he could even follow you around the room with his eyes."

Again, it's a question of the value we put on human life. Paul Johnson thinks his son Jamie was a human being with a real and individual personality. Sir Raymond Hoffenburg thinks such babies are for all practical purposes already dead.

### The infinite value of every human being

The question of human value is at the centre of all pro-life thinking, and it's probably easiest to clarify my views on it by reference to a subject, (the complete ignorance of which is one of the many disabilities I have besides spina bifida), Maths.

I was in the bottom stream for Maths at school and was the despair of my teacher. In fact I got to know her so well because I had to retake Maths O level so many times that she became a great friend of mine and we still keep in touch.

Probably the ONLY concept she really managed to instil into me in all those years was the concept of infinity but I'm very grateful to her for achieving that. I'm sure everyone is acquainted with the concept of infinity (if only because no one could be worse at Maths than I was!).

Infinity is always implicit in itself and it cannot be added to or subtracted from neither can it be multiplied or divided. Infinity cannot be split up so that each infinitely valuable thing has "a bit of infinity." If something or someone has infinite value then two things with infinite value cannot therefore be worth twice as much. There is no such thing as twice infinity. Infinity remains always the same and the most that any individual or group of individuals can be equal to is infinity.

**I believe that each human being has this infinite value and, since infinity cannot be multiplied or divided each individual human being is as valuable as all other human beings put together. Thus one deliberate killing (say of Tony Bland) or of the little girl with anencephaly) is as tragic, as unjust, as much to be mourned, as much to be condemned by pro-lifers as the total number of "perfectly healthy" babies killed by social abortion.**

There are two different ways of explaining the compelling reasons for accepting this argument of the infinite value of all human beings. I'm in a position to explain them both since where I have come from represents one standpoint, and where I am now represents the other.

It is now almost exactly twelve years since I changed my mind about abortion. Just over twelve years ago I was a pro abortion atheist. Twelve years ago I became a pro-life atheist. Two years ago I became a pro-life Catholic. It is possible for me to say, therefore, that from the point of view of both a Christian and from a secular perspective, the whole truth about the pro-life message is that it is infinitely wrong to kill ANY (infinitely valuable) person deliberately or to condone (even tacitly) the killing of any such person.

From a secular perspective we can say that abortion is an issue of basic human rights and that human rights have no meaning at all unless they are universally applicable. In other words, I can't claim a right for myself which I would not explicitly hold to be a right for all (e.g. I can't say I have a right to life while simultaneously denying that other human beings -the unborn -have a similar right.) Likewise we can't argue in favour of protecting apparently healthy babies from death by abortion while compromising our stance on the fatal discrimination being practised against the disabled unborn. If we DO attempt to do that, we establish the principle not that abortion is wrong in itself, but a principle that aborting some

kinds of babies is wrong -a position none of us actually holds.

The Christian argument is rather more beautiful and it is this one that I hold now and that I would suggest is the more complete and compelling.

Since every human being is made in the image of God, each is of infinite value and Jesus would have paid the same price for one as for all, the same price for the same -infinite -value. Because of this infinite human value, one minute of life is as precious as a hundred years (how could a hundred years be precious but not the individual minutes and hours and days which comprised it?) A short life is as valuable as a long one and a "severely disabled" life as precious as one labelled "perfectly healthy."

### **The 'poorest of the poor' in Calcutta demonstrate the infinite value of every human life**

To put this same message another way I want to introduce you to the third of the three people I mentioned at the start of the talk and at the same time to share with you an experience which affected me profoundly in ways which have altered my perception of God, my understanding of the beauty and dignity of suffering human beings, and increased my belief that it is in terms of individuals, however weak or vulnerable they may be, rather than of accumulated "numbers", that the truth of the pro-life message is ultimately powerful.

I spent the Christmas of 1991 in Calcutta learning to love the poorest of the poor. I could not begin to tell you all they taught me, but in many ways I left my heart behind there, and its people will always be with me.

I want now to introduce you to the baby I mentioned at the start -just one baby among the seemingly countless numbers of babies in Calcutta. This baby was a new addition to a family of "pavement dwellers" -people who literally live and die on the street with only a bit of the pavement to call home, while the rich step over them and walk by. This baby was the tiniest child I have ever seen. He was probably no longer than my outstretched hand. He moved very little and cried not at all. His parents had two other children and all were dressed literally in rags with nothing warm, despite the fact that, for Calcutta, December is a cold month. The baby was so tiny and weak it seemed incredible that he could have survived at all, and extremely unlikely that he would survive much longer.

Yet the family had covered this tiny child, lying on the hard pavement, with all their "best" things, the thickest, warmest, nicest of the rags they had. They stroked him and whispered to him, in between begging from passers-by for the coins they needed to buy the few grains of rice which would constitute their meal that day.

They loved him genuinely, wholeheartedly, even though he could do nothing and contribute nothing, just appreciating his unique preciousness. At that moment I recalled Mother Teresa speaking about the unborn, paraphrasing a passage from Isaiah (43. 1 -4)

I have called you by your name. You are mine.  
Water will not drown you. Fire will not burn you.  
I will give up nations for you. You are precious to me.  
I love you."

It's the sentence "I will give up nations for you" that is so relevant here. It seems to me that this is God saying He would put aside the interests (for the moment) of vast numbers of other, equally precious people for this one child.

It is God saying, "These vast numbers of other people will not satisfy me if you are lost." It is God saying, "you are as valuable to me as all the others put together".

This is what the pavement family in Calcutta seemed to be saying to their weakest, most vulnerable child. This is what I think we should be saying to those like Tony Bland and the little girl with anencephaly whom our society labels as "imperfect" and "severely disabled" and therefore, by implication, worthless.

### **The importance of protecting every human life**

I hope you are not by now thinking that I care more about protecting those labelled "severely disabled" than those who are apparently "perfectly healthy", because that is not my position at all.

What I AM saying is that if we lose sight of the interests of the weakest and most vulnerable, whose deliberate killing is not only accepted but applauded and encouraged by the majority (those who speak of "exciting breakthroughs in technology" by which they mean new screening tests to detect and destroy disabled babies, or of "allowing death with dignity" by which they mean starving people like Tony Bland to death) we lose an opportunity to demonstrate in practice what we claim in principle -the infinite value of every human life.

I believe that one day our times will be remembered as an era when some people killed babies while most of the others condoned it.

Pro-life people are set apart by our opposition as a matter of principle to ALL abortion, and it's crucial that our actions reflect the whole truth of our commitment to vulnerable lives and the truth that each human being, although inevitably imperfect, has infinite value.

I want us to be remembered as the people who refused to compromise with the truth in any way; the people who put first the needs of those whose destruction society most condoned those like the three people I have focused on.

In the face of all the media hype about "mercy killing"; in the face of the pro- abortion doctors who say aborting those with obvious "severe disabilities" or "allowing them to die" after birth is "the loving thing to do"; in the face of those who say human worth lies in what people can DO, not in what they inherently ARE, we are the ones who have to stand firm (or in my case, perhaps, sit firm) and categorically state that real love and compassion cannot run counter to moral principles, and that each individual human life is a gift of incomparable, infinite value.

Alison Davis 7/93