



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

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Parish Resource Pack to raise awareness about the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill, including possible changes to the law on abortion.

Prepared by St Mary's University College
on behalf of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales

Who this document is for:

- Parish Priests
- Parishioners who may wish to organise meetings and parish action on these issues
- All those interested in an in-depth briefing from a Catholic perspective

What this document contains:

- An Introduction to the Issues and Suggestions for Parish Action
- Detailed briefings on 4 key issues:
 - Hybrid embryos
 - The Welfare of the Child
 - How Future Decisions are Made
 - Abortion

In addition to this document you will receive:

- A DVD produced by Michigan Catholic Bishops' Conference on the science of stem cell research
- A single sheet outline briefing suitable for photocopying and wide distribution within the parish community

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1. An Introduction to the Issues and Suggestions for Parish Action

1.1 What is the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill?

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill is a proposal for a new law on infertility treatment and experimentation on human embryos. This includes embryonic stem cell research.

1.2 What are the key concerns about this Bill?

- **Hybrids:** The Bill will allow scientists to create embryos that are half human, half animal. For example, an embryo could be made from the egg of a woman and sperm from an animal. To do this would be a radical violation of human dignity.
- **The Welfare of the Child:** At present, infertility clinics have to consider the 'need of a child for a father'. The Bill will remove the reference to a father. The Bill will also make it easier to use women as 'surrogate mothers'. The Bill does not recognise the natural right of the child to a mother and a father.
- **How Future Decisions are Made:** At present, decisions are made by an unelected and unrepresentative body. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority appears to exclude people who cherish human life from conception. The government should be urged to create a statutory National Bioethics Commission with a clear mandate bringing together a broad spectrum of experts including people from faith communities.

1.3 Why should the Church become involved?

Christians ought to be involved in the debate because the Bill touches fundamental issues that concern us all - what it means to be human, our identity, and in the longer term, our freedoms and rights. We see with many kinds of technology, from nuclear power through to genetic manipulation, that to truly harness the benefits of science we need to set developments within a social and a moral framework. Science should serve humanity; humanity does not exist to provide raw material for research.

1.4 Does the Church Support Scientific Research?

The Church welcomes and supports ethical and effective scientific research. This is essential to the progress of medicine. Jesus our Lord came as one who serves and to heal the sick. The Church is committed to the care of the sick and the ministry of healing. Healthcare, medicine and medical research are Christian vocations.

1.5 Is Stem Cell Research Ethical?

Adult stem cell research is both ethical and effective. Currently it is used in more than seventy therapies and new therapies are being tested in more than eight hundred clinical trials. In contrast embryonic stem cell research is not ethical. It involves destroying human embryos. It is also important to note that embryonic stem cell research has not yet generated any therapies. At least so far, it is the ethical stem cells (adult stem cells) that have also been the effective stem cells. Whenever you see any news report of success in stem cell therapy you

should always ask: are these adult (ethical) stem cells? or are they embryonic (unethical) stem cells?

1.6 Does the Bill affect the law on abortion?

Currently the Bill does not refer to abortion and, as it stands, it would not affect the abortion law. However, some Members of Parliament have already said that they want to amend the law to make abortion more easily available. There are also moves to set up a Parliamentary committee to look at abortion law reform. If the law on abortion is re-examined then those who recognise the humanity of the unborn child must speak out. Any change in the law must aim to make abortion rarer.

1.7 How can we respond to any change in the Bill?

As the Bill progresses, there will be new amendments. These may introduce the question of abortion or they may touch on other important issues. There may also be breaking news that will need to be taken into account. For these reasons the Bishops' Conference is setting up a webpage to provide up to date information and links and to respond to frequently asked questions about the Bill. The web address for these resources is www.catholicchurch.org.uk

1.8 Is the new Bill likely to become law?

Yes, this Bill is very likely to become law. The Bill was included in the Queen's Speech. This means that the government is committed to bring it into law. The government has the power to push it through because it has a large majority in Parliament.

1.9 Is there any point in taking action?

Yes, because the details of the Bill will be debated by Parliament and MPs will be able to propose amendments. The final outcome will depend on how MPs vote and on how the public expresses its views. A key aim of the government is to 'promote public confidence' in reproductive technologies and to 'maintain public trust' in embryo research. In other words, the government wants to build a consensus on these issues. If lots of people speak out and speak out very strongly on one or other of these issues then there is a real chance that the government will think again. If he wishes the Prime Minister can give Labours MPs a free vote of conscience on the Bill.

1.10 Who should get involved?

Everybody. The Church is a body in which some feel especially called to commit themselves to particular kinds of social action, whether local, national, or international, whether concerned with alleviating physical or spiritual distress, promoting peace, or working for a better future. Within the Church many men and women have committed themselves especially to justice for unborn children and to support for women who are pregnant and may feel pressure to have an abortion.

It is good that there are people who bear witness and remind the larger community of the importance of these issues. However, the fact that some people are more involved does not mean that everyone else can forget about it. Social justice issues are relevant to everyone and should inform the decisions we make about how we live, how we spend or give our money, and how we vote. What is more, there will be times when it is necessary for the whole community to get involved in one particular issue, when one issue becomes the issue of the day.

Now is a moment for the whole community and for all men and women of good will to think about and speak out about the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. The proposed changes in the law raise profound issues. It will be passed in the name of all citizens and if you do not speak out about it, then your silence will be taken as consent.

1.11 What action can I take?

Is there someone in the parish, perhaps a healthcare worker or someone concerned with life issues, who can act as an organiser for action on the Bill? People in the parish are more likely to get involved if someone can take on the role of organiser.

Along with this pack is a one-side Briefing Paper that is designed to be photocopied. Please fill in the name of the local MP and the name of the contact person. The contact person could make an announcement after Mass and distribute photocopies of the Briefing Paper. He or she should encourage as many people as possible to write to the local MP and also, if they are able, to come to a parish meeting on the Bill.

1.12 Writing to your local MP

There are few things more effective in persuading government and Parliament to act, or not to act, than writing a letter or an email to your local MP. Letters from constituents in their own words are taken very seriously by MPs, especially if very many people write on the same issue. Sympathetic MPs are more likely to turn up and vote. Uncommitted MPs are more likely to look at the issues afresh. Some MPs will already be clear how they will vote and will not change their mind as a result of letters, but even for them it is good to remind them of the strength of opinion. A key aim of for the parish ought to be to get as many people as possible to write to the local MP.

1.13 Who is my MP and what Address should I use?

You can find out the name of your MP online: www.parliament.uk/people/index.cfm
Or by phone at the House of Commons Information Office: 020 7219 4272
You can always write to your MP at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA.
Or email your MP at www.writetothem.com

1.14 What should I write?

Letters are most effective when they are written in your own words and express what you are most concerned about. The parish should not provide people with sample letters, tempting as that may be. An effective letter will not cover too many points. Even though there are many points of concern in this Bill, you do not have to cover all of them. If lots of people write, then all the points will be covered by someone. The most important thing is to write in your own words about what concerns you, and to get as many people as possible to write. Please remember to be polite and courteous. We will make no friends or allies by being rude or aggressive.

1.15 Organising a meeting

Whoever takes on the role of organiser could put on a meeting and show the DVD on stem cell research that is included with this pack. You could also invite someone to speak on the Bill. If it is not possible to find someone to speak, it would still be worth having an open meeting and talking about what you could do as a community.

In addition to a one-off meeting, this pack could also be used by an existing group, for example, a parish based pro-life group, a house group, study group, prayer group, justice and peace group, or by a lay organisation that meets regularly, depending on what is present in the parish.

1.16 Making links with other groups (local, ecumenical, environmental)

The Church does not exist in isolation from the world but is in the world and in dialogue with others. If you are arranging a meeting, you should consider inviting members of other Christian traditions and members of other faiths. If the meeting is public, it could be advertised locally. The issues that the Bill covers are not only of concern to Catholics. On the issue of hybrids you could make links with environmental groups. If people are unhappy about genetically modified tomatoes, they should be made aware of the proposals in the Bill to allow the creation of genetically modified human embryos!

1.17 Responding to articles in newspapers and other media

As well as writing to your MP, it can be very helpful to respond to the reporting of stories in the media. People can be encouraged to respond to stories that appear in the papers, on television, or on the internet. The media have a powerful role in shaping public opinion but the media also reflects public opinion. One science journalist told Parliament that 'the public' do not really care about half human, half animal 'hybrids'. He believed this because he did not get many letters on the subject. If you do not respond to the media, then people in the media will assume that you are indifferent. Also, if you do have a letter published in a newspaper or if you put a comment on the internet, then it may encourage someone who reads it to act and may make someone think about the issues in a new way.

1.18 Finding resources

This pack contains information on each of the three major areas of concern in the Bill and a DVD from Michigan Catholic Bishops' Conference about stem cell research. The pack is designed so that, as well as the general briefing paper, each section on a key issue could be photocopied separately if needed. If the local MP responds to the letters that are sent, then people may need more resources so they can respond constructively to the MP's letter. The Bishops' Conference is setting up a webpage to provide up to date information and links and to respond to frequently asked questions about the Bill.

The web address for these resources is **www.catholicchurch.org.uk**

2. Hybrid embryos

2.1 What is the law at present?

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 allows human embryos to be used in experimentation. It allows humans to be conceived purely for the sake of research, if they are destroyed before 14 days. It even permits scientists to produce embryos who are clones, genetic copies of an existing person.

2.2 What is proposed in the Bill?

The Bill goes even further. It allows scientists to create genetically modified human embryos. It also allows scientists to create embryos that would be part human, part non human. This can be done using an egg from a cow (or some other animal), taking the nucleus out, and replacing it with the nucleus of a human cell. Embryos made by replacing the nucleus in this way are sometimes called 'cybrids'.

The Bill also allows scientists to create 'true hybrids'. These are produced from the sperm / egg of a human being and the egg / sperm of an animal.

2.3 Why do Scientists want to create hybrids?

Two teams of scientists have asked to make 'cybrids'. This is because cloning is still very difficult and unreliable. Instead of going back to animal models, the scientists want to try human cloning using animal eggs. No scientists in the United Kingdom currently want to create 'true hybrids'.

2.4 What does the Church teach?

In the past the Church did not consider the prospect of scientists deliberately producing creatures who are a mixture of human and non human. Nevertheless, there is Catholic teaching that can help us. The Church teaches that God is the Creator of everything there is, and that this creation is good, reflecting God's own goodness. At the same time human beings are distinct from other animals. We are made in the image of God and God became a human being in Jesus Christ. To seek to produce a creature who is a mixture of human and non human is not compatible with respect for the human nature that God creates and redeems. Also it fails to respect the harmony of creation as a whole or to recognise that human beings 'are part of creation, formed out of the earth, and dependent on the rest of creation for our continued existence' (Care of Creation). Bishop Elio Sgreccia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life has described the proposal to create hybrids as 'a monstrous act against human dignity'.

2.5 What can natural reason tell us about the ethics of making hybrids?

Politicians and people in the media will not be impressed by arguments framed in religious terms. What does natural reason have to tell us about making hybrids? It is not easy to say precisely what is wrong with mixing human and animal. Many people feel an instinctive reaction against it, but they find it hard to put into words. There is something wrong here, and we should try to help people find the words to express it.

We are human beings. This is what we have in common. This is the basis of human rights. We oppose discrimination on the basis of race or sex or age or disability between people who are equally human. We treat other animals differently. We should treat them well and not cruelly, but we do not treat them as human. The idea of sex with an animal is repugnant because human sexuality is adapted to express love between human persons. Mixing a human and a non human animal fails to respect our common humanity, which is the basis of our community.

2.6 But if the embryos are not implanted what is the problem?

In every country people treat human embryos and animal embryos differently. In the UK a special license is needed to work with human embryos. An embryo is always an embryo of something. We can only understand what an embryo is if we think what it will be like when it grows up. An interspecies embryo is an embryo of a mixed human-non human creature. We will already have crossed a human with an animal. And if scientists do create such a hybrid, who knows if someone somewhere will implant it in an animal?

2.7 What are the arguments in favour of permitting hybrids?

Politicians and scientists who wish to permit the creation of hybrids will say that this is necessary for the progress of scientific knowledge. They will say that 'cybrids' will help us make embryonic stem cells and cure diseases like Parkinson's.

2.8 What are the counter arguments?

If something is unethical, it should not be done. There must be some limits on what we allow scientists to do in the name of research. There is an ethical alternative. We know that adult stem cells have produced seventy therapies where embryonic stem cells have produced none. There are also other promising alternatives (the Japanese have succeeded in a new way to get stem cells). The proposal to create 'cybrids' is a kind of shortcut to try to bypass the problems of human cloning. Even from a purely scientific perspective, it is of dubious value. If human cloning is the goal (and this itself is a dubious goal) what is needed is more understanding of cloning in animals. In 2007, Ian Wilmut, who helped clone Dolly the Sheep, announced that he is giving up on cloning embryos for their stem cells because other sources of stem cells are scientifically more promising. The scientific case for 'cybrids' (which are mostly human, in terms of their DNA) is in fact very weak. There are better alternatives.

There is no case whatsoever for allowing the creation of half-human half-animal 'true hybrids'. The government is proposing to permit this even though no one can think of a good reason to do it. There is no proposed medical benefit.

2.9 What changes should we push for in the Bill?

To amend the Bill so that it prohibits the creation of all part human, part animal hybrids (what the Bill calls 'interspecies embryos'). To prohibit any use of human embryos in research.

3. The Welfare of the Child

3.1 What is the law at present?

The present law states that, when a clinic gives infertility treatment, it must consider the welfare of the child who would be born, including the need of the child for a father. In practice, clinics allow single women and lesbian couples to have infertility treatment. Surrogate mother contracts are not recognised by law and businesses are forbidden from profiting for arranging surrogacy.

The law allows parents to screen out unwanted embryos (pre-implantation genetic diagnosis or PGD) to have a child without a disability. If a family has a seriously ill child, the law allows them to use PGD to select another child who could help the first: a 'saviour sibling'. This is allowed where what is used is blood from the umbilical cord.

3.2 What does the Bill say about the child's need for a father?

The Bill drops any reference to the 'need for a father'. It also gives the legal status of parent to the partner of the mother. If the couple were women in a civil partnership then the birth certificate would record the other woman as the 'father'. The child would be deprived of knowledge of his or her biological father.

3.3 What does the Bill say about Surrogate mothers?

The Bill also allows 'surrogacy' agencies to run on a not-for-profit basis and to advertise their services. They would arrange for a woman to conceive, carry and then to give up her child. This raises obvious dangers of exploitation for the 'birth mother' in addition to concerns for the child. The agency would enable a child to be conceived who would then be estranged from his or her birth mother.

3.4 What does the Bill say about Saviour Siblings?

The Bill also allows parents to select a child to donate tissues and organs. There is a danger that such a child could be thought of as a donor from birth. This also erodes the principle of consent. The child might face years of donating tissues.

3.5 What does the Church teach?

The Church teaches that the union of man and woman in marriage is ordained by God. Not everyone is called to marriage, and not all who marry are blessed with children, but every child ought to be the fruit of the union of a man and a woman who are committed to one another and to the care of their child. 'The child has the right to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up within marriage: it is through the secure and recognized relationship to his own parents that the child can discover his own identity and achieve his own proper human development.' (Instruction on Respect for Human Life II A.1) Thus a child should only be given into the care of others if the parents are not able to raise the child. Adoption is a response to a situation that no one planned. It is utterly wrong to plan to bring a child into the world who will be alienated from one or both parents.

3.6 What can natural reason tell us about the welfare of the child?

When it comes to adoption the children being adopted rightly have priority over the wishes of couples to adopt. Hence the State takes responsibility for regulating the process of adoption. Assisted reproduction also involves the state and its duty to safeguard the interests of children. As State-regulated clinics are involved in the conception, the State has some responsibility for the child. It also has a responsibility to document accurately the parentage of the child. It is one thing for a parent to mislead a child about his or her origins, it is quite another for officials of the State knowingly to include false information on its official documents.

3.7 What are the arguments in favour of dropping ‘the need for a father’?

The reasons for dropping reference to the need for a father are to do with single women, and women in civil partnerships. The government wishes to make explicit that single women and women in civil partnerships are legally allowed to have fertility treatment, even though they are not usually infertile women. Some people also say that referring to the need for a father fails to reflect the current social reality of this country, in which many children are brought up by single parents. They say it is insulting to women who are single parents to say that a child needs a father.

3.8 What are the counter arguments?

The current law allows single women and women in civil partnerships to have fertility treatment. So, even from the perspective of those who wish to promote this, there is no necessity to change the law. On the other hand the dropping of mention of a father, particularly when the need for a father had previously been mentioned in the law, sends a very harmful message to society. It is not disparaging to the great efforts of single parents to say that a child is missing something of importance when he or she has no father. It is not in the interests of women or children or of society as a whole, to weaken the sense of responsibility that fathers should have for their children.

The experience of children who have been adopted has shown us how much some children desire to know about their origins. Many children conceived by donor sperm experience a similar need, and this is now acknowledged in the law. Children have a right to know about their biological parents. This gives a further reason why the law should not permit or require false statements to be put on birth certificates. A birth certificate should not describe two women as the ‘mother’ and ‘father’ of a child.

3.9 What changes should we push for in the Bill?

To amend the Bill so that it retains the reference in existing law to the need of a child for a father. The Bill should also include a reference to the child’s right to know about his or her origins. To amend the Bill so it prohibits making money out of surrogate mothers. To amend the Bill so it prohibits selection of a child as a tissue or organ donor.

4. How Future Decisions are Made

4.1 What is the situation at present?

At present, many important decisions about embryos and infertility treatment are made by a body called the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). The HFEA is not elected and it does not represent a full range of views. It appears to exclude anyone with a consistent pro-life position.

4.2 What is proposed in the Bill?

The Bill contains nothing that would ensure that future decision-making becomes more inclusive. The Bill continues to give the Secretary of State and the HFEA powers to apply the law in new situations without reference to ethical guidance. The Bill does not even provide a moral framework for these decisions. There is a detailed definition of what is meant by a 'human embryo', but there is nothing on the moral status of the human embryo or the protection due to the embryo.

4.3 What does the Church teach?

The Church teaches that public authorities have the common good as their prime responsibility. 'The common good cannot exclude or exempt any section of the population. If any section of the population is in fact excluded from participation in the life of the community, even at a minimal level, then that is a contradiction to the concept of the common good and calls for rectification.' (**Common Good 70**). The Second Vatican Council states clearly that 'any kind of social and cultural discrimination... must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design' (**The Church in the Modern World, paragraph 29**). Thus the Church speaks not only for the rights and duties of Catholics to be involved in the political process but for those of all citizens.

4.4 Why do we need a National Bioethics Commission?

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor has joined others in urging that the Bill be used to create a statutory National Bioethics Commission. This could bring together a broad spectrum of experts with a clear mandate and an independent advisory role. Only such an authoritative and independent body can ensure that serious ethical scrutiny is no longer an afterthought, but a precondition of such research.

4.5 Would there be dangers in setting up National Bioethics Commission?

The setting up of a national commission would not guarantee that sound ethical judgments were made. There is a danger of disillusionment or even of scandal if and when the commission advocated some view that was incompatible with a Catholic and a fully human view of life. Such a body must be set up so that people can register their dissent in such cases. Nevertheless, a body that was committed to representing a range of views, including a Catholic perspective, would certainly be an improvement on what we have at present.

4.6 What can natural reason tell us about how bioethical issues should be regulated?

We know that people sometimes make decisions on the basis of financial self-interest, or because of professional or national prestige, rather than out of respect for the ethical issues. This is why research is not a 'free for all' but is regulated, and regulations are ultimately set by Parliament. Nevertheless, politicians also may act for political rather than ethical reasons. We also realize that there are some deep disagreements within society on bioethical issues, from abortion to genetic modification of food. The expertise society needs to make decisions well in this area is not purely scientific knowledge but is also understanding of what is good in human life. The reason for having a representative range of ethical opinion on a bioethics commission is not because democracy automatically gives the right answer, but it is because a broader range will be more likely to include and identify the relevant ethical considerations.

4.7 What are the arguments the government raises against a National Bioethics Commission?

The main opposition to a National Bioethics Commission has come from the government and, in particular, from the Department of Health. They argue that the Human Genetics Commission, the HFEA, various Parliamentary Committees, and other advisory bodies provide all the ethical advice that is necessary.

4.8 What are the counter arguments?

It is precisely because there are a number of different bodies that give ethical advice, but none of them has particular weight or statutory authority, that ethical issues can take a second place in the debate. In practice decisions are made by the HFEA or by the government for political as well as ethical reasons. The Bill gives more scope to the Secretary of State to make decisions, but does not ensure that these decisions are made in a transparent way. Decisions on new issues with bioethical significance should not be taken without seeking a range of expert ethical advice, and making this advice public. There is widespread support among professionals and academics for a transparent, representative, independent and expert body set up by statute to advise the government on ethical matters.

4.9 Should religious representatives be included?

There are some who accept the idea of a National Bioethics Commission but who do not think that religious voices should be included. They argue that in a secular society, public decisions should not be made on religious grounds. However, in every culture, religion is a major source of human values and provides a context for ethical reflection. Including religious representatives is a way to ensure that the experience and wisdom of their ethical traditions is included in the discussion.

4.10 What changes should we push for in the Bill?

To amend the Bill so that future decisions about the implementation or interpretation of the law are taken by people with a full range of views and with proper ethical scrutiny. To press for the establishment of a National Bioethics Commission of the kind that exists in many other countries.

5. Abortion

5.1 What is the law at present?

The Abortion Act 1967, as amended in 1990, allows abortion up to twenty-four weeks if the risks 'of injury to the physical or mental health' of the mother or of her other children, are lessened by abortion rather than childbirth. This effectively allows abortion for personal and social reasons up to twenty-four weeks. If there is a 'substantial risk' that the unborn child is disabled, then abortion is allowed up to birth. The Abortion Act does not apply in Northern Ireland.

5.2 What is proposed in the Bill?

The Bill contains no proposals on abortion, but some Members of Parliament have already said that they want to amend the law to make abortion more easily available. These proposals may include:

- Dropping the requirement for two doctors' signatures to certify abortion
- Allowing practitioners who are not medically qualified to perform abortions
- Extending the Abortion Act to cover Northern Ireland without a mandate from the people of Northern Ireland or their elected representatives
- Removing the right of doctors to conscientiously object to arranging or performing an abortion

It is also likely that amendments will be proposed that would limit the harm done by the law. These may include:

- Lowering of the twenty-four week upper limit for abortion for social reasons
- No longer regarding disability as a ground for abortion
- More rigorous requirements of informed consent for women seeking abortion

5.3 What does the Church teach?

The Church teaches very clearly that every human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. (**Catechism of the Catholic Church 2270**) The first victim of abortion is the unborn child whose life is ended (**Cherishing Life 173**). The fact that the unborn child is totally dependent on his or her mother, and that his or her life is terminated with the consent of the mother, makes it more terrible, not less. In a secondary sense, the woman is also a victim for she loses her child but is unable to grieve effectively. The Church 'does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even a shattering decision.' (**The Gospel of Life, paragraph 99**) There may be financial or other pressures, and those around the expectant mother may fail to give her the support she needs and deserves. 'Sometimes the woman is subjected to such strong pressure that she feels psychologically forced to have an abortion.' (**The Gospel of Life, paragraph 59**).

5.4 Is it right for a politician to vote for an amendment to a law that still allows some abortions?

Laws that permit direct abortion are unjust and involve discrimination against the unborn child. Politicians should not support or promote permissive abortion laws. However, in a country where abortion has come to be accepted, it may not be possible to achieve a just

law. The Church teaches that, if it is not possible to overturn a pro-abortion law, a politician whose absolute personal opposition to abortion is well known, may morally support 'proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences'. (**The Gospel of Life, paragraph 73**)

5.5 What can natural reason tell us about abortion?

Natural reason tells us that at fertilisation, a new human life begins that is neither the life of the mother nor the life of the father. Abortion brings this new life to an end. Even those who approve of abortion and embryo experimentation measure the development of the embryo in days from fertilisation. The Bill explicitly states that 'references to an embryo include an egg that is in the process of fertilisation'. Natural reason also tells us that even from the sixth week of development fingers and toes are visible. Ultrasound pictures by Professor Stuart Campbell at London's Create Health Clinic show the unborn child at twelve weeks stretching and kicking – long before the mother can feel it.

5.6 What are the arguments of those who wish to see abortion made easier?

Those who wish to see abortion made easier, say that the child in the womb, particularly in the first eight or nine weeks, is not fully developed and is not yet a human baby. They emphasise that it should be the mother who should make the decision as she is most immediately affected, and that she should have freedom of choice. They sometimes allege that opposition to abortion is purely a matter of religious belief and that religious belief should not be imposed upon others. Some people argue that access to abortion ought to be recognized as a human right and as part of 'reproductive autonomy'.

5.7 What are the counter arguments?

In 2006 there were over 200,000 abortions in England and Wales. The great majority of people in England and Wales (over 80% polled) think that we should be looking for practical ways to reduce this figure. In the current situation, when writing to Members of Parliament or to the newspapers, it may be better to stress what is accepted by most people in this country: that abortion is always tragic; that many women regret the decision; that it should be properly informed; and that we should be trying to find ways to make abortion rarer. Even if the unborn child does not have the same status in law as a born child, we all recognise the child in the womb as a baby when it is a wanted child. Most people accept that the developing life in the womb should be given at least some legal recognition, especially when it begins to look like a baby. Abortion should never be seen as equivalent to contraception. Abortion for reason of disability involves a double discrimination and many disabled people find it offensive that this is a ground for termination of pregnancy. The law should not give the impression that disabled children are better off dead. Abortion is not primarily a matter of religion and it is more than a matter of personal choice. Freedom of choice is not absolute.

5.8 What changes should we push for in the Bill?

To oppose any amendment that would make abortion easier and more common. To support amendments to the Bill that would help make abortion rarer.

DECEMBER 2007

I hope you will find this Parish Resource Pack useful. It sets out a number of key issues contained in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill, which was introduced in the House of Lords in November 2007 and is to be debated in the House of Commons in the Spring of 2008.

The pack explains the key issues, sets out the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding those issues, and includes practical suggestions for individual and parish action.

I would like to thank especially Professor David Jones of St Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill, London for the great contribution he has made in producing this material for the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, and of Scotland.

Archbishop Peter Smith

Chairman, Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship
Bishops' Conference of England and Wales