

embryo. The analogy was drawn between the embryo and those many groups of human beings who at different times in history have been regarded as non-persons, despite their appearance of human status. Recent evidence of prisoners-of-war being used by the Japanese for experimental purposes illustrated the implications of any principle that would permit the use of human subjects for inhuman ends.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the debate was the speeches from the floor, as students made able contributions to discussion. The great majority - to the embarrassment of those proposing the motion! - were firmly against not merely experimental use of the embryo, but the developments of which it is an integral element. One student spoke of her friendship with handicapped colleagues, and of how this made her feel about the discarding of embryos with abnormalities, and abortion for fetal handicap. Another speech, perhaps the most memorable, was from a woman with a teenage child with Down's Syndrome who spoke passionately of her revulsion at the attitude of those who would dispose of the abnormal. She added that her father had suffered at the hands of the Japanese who had degraded him and treated him as sub-human.

What of the vote? It was close. The floor debate was plainly unrepresentative, perhaps, one might suggest, because those who had reflected most on the questions at issue had been most strongly influenced against the *in vitro* process, while the unreflective assumed that recent developments must necessarily be good. But the motion was won: 97 for, 93 against, 12 abstentions. It may be that this is an augur of the public debate now in process.

N.M. de S. CAMERON

#### Medicine and Mores

As previously accepted mores crumble into the melting-pot of contemporary values, those involved in the social services find themselves beset by conflicting demands. This is particularly true in the medical field. What moral values, if any, can a doctor in practice maintain? Is he or she simply an agent of the state to meet any request a patient may have? Should a Christian doctor concede the "consensus morality" of the age rather than apply Christian principles? We believe that it is vital for us to understand what lies behind these issues, and to support each other in working out their practical application with God's help.

By way of background perhaps we should consider what the characteristic attitudes of our society are. These are difficult to appreciate when one is in the middle of it oneself and the perspectives of Alexander Solzhenitsyn who saw western society in a very clear light when he came from Russia are most illuminating. In his Nobel Lecture in 1970 he says, 'The intimidated civilized world has found nothing to oppose the onslaught of a suddenly resurgent fang-bearing barbarism, except concessions and smiles. The spirit of Munich is a disease of the will of prosperous people; it is the daily state of those who have given themselves over to a craving for prosperity in every way, to material well being as the chief goal of life on earth.'

Such people ... choose passivity and retreat, anything if only the life to which they are accustomed might go on, anything so as not to have to cross over to rough terrain today because, tomorrow, see, everything will be all right.' <sup>1</sup>

Such an attitude can become part of our outlook on life unawares, depriving us of the courage to seek first the Kingdom of God - though we are left with an uneasy sense of guilt when faced with increasing rates of divorce, personal violence, incest and abortion (over 130,000 in Britain last year). A guilty conscience may make us align ourselves openly with Mrs Gillick, Mary Whitehouse or the pro-life movement. If we are to provide effective moral leadership in society and cross over to "the rough terrain" a more positive basis is needed - which is nothing less than a change of heart. The social reformers of the 19th century were effective because they spoke with conviction and were deeply aware of the value of each human being in God's sight. Dr Bernard Nathanson ran an abortion centre in America for some years before he came to the conclusion that the human embryo was a human being and that in fact he had supervised the destruction of 60,000 individuals. <sup>2</sup>

It is relevant that this is Christian Heritage Year, and we need to be reminded that, as Lord Tony Pandy said, when Speaker of the House of Commons, 'the emphasis on the individual being precious in the sight of God Almighty - no-one an unimportant person - that is the corner stone on which we built our democracy'. Democratic freedom for every individual is conditional on absolute moral standards that are the basis for ethical decisions throughout society. Against this background we can challenge others to face the ethical questions confronting us - particularly relating to the control and exploitation of children, before and after birth. A human embryo either is, or is not, a human being. Children either are the responsibility of their parents, or are allowed to be subject to whatever their peers or other adults devise for them. Pornography is either harmless or it is an evil influence in society.

It is our desire that this newsletter will provide a forum for debate. May it also be a means of uniting all Christians concerned with ethical issues, with mutual encouragement, that in the name of Christ we may "raise a banner of duty and service against the flood of depravity and despair" in our society. <sup>3</sup>

1 Alexander Solzhenitsyn.  
Nobel Lecture 1972, Noonday Press, N. York 1970 date given.

2 Bernard Nathanson.  
New England Journal of Medicine, 28th November, 1974 p. 1189.

3 Sir John Glubb.  
Fate of Empires, William Blackwood, 1976 p. 21.