

John Wyatt Issues of Life 30-11-2013

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 November 2013

Preacher: John Wyatt

[0 : 00] Thank you so much. Okay, well, I'm sorry about the delay, but it's a real privilege for me to be able to come and talk. I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself, and then we're going to be tackling this very painful and difficult issue about abortion, and issues of the beginning of life.

I want to say straight away that there are two things that we always need to remember, particularly as Christian people, if we're talking about this kind of extremely painful and difficult subject.

And the first is that we must always remember that these issues start with human pain. In fact, pretty well all the issues of medical ethics start with pain.

They start with people who struggle, who agonise, who weep, who struggle. And our first responsibility as Christian people is actually to empathise with the pain, to try to enter into it, to understand it.

And I think there's a great deal of damage that's being done by well-meaning Christian people who talk about this kind of subject in a very harsh, dogmatic way, with harsh rhetoric.

[1 : 10] You've probably heard slogans like the holocaust of the unborn, or the slaughter of the innocents, words like that. And actually, although I understand why people do that, I think actually it definitely does a lot of harm, a lot of damage.

Because these issues touch so many people, and that when you get harsh things like that, it probably causes more damage than hell. So, the first thing is that we have to talk, if you like, with tears in our eyes, rather than with judgement or with rhetoric in our voices.

And the second issue is that these issues are not just issues out there, in Ewing, out in secular society. No, these are issues in here. I don't know anything about nearly all of you, but I can guarantee there are people sitting here who have been touched by some of the issues we're going to talk about.

The statistics say that somewhere between about one in three of all women are going to have an abortion in their lifetime.

And for every woman that's affected is a man. And the statistics within the church are probably not that different from what they are in the society as a whole.

[2 : 24] And yet, there's a whole conspiracy of silence. It's never talked about. I know that my own church has also, there are a number of people, women and husbands and wives and so on, who've had abortions in the past.

And yet, they don't feel they can ever talk about it because of this such a great stigma, a sense of a sort of unforgivable sin, and so on. So, these are issues that touch all of us, not just our people out there.

And I can guarantee that there are many people here who will be touched in some way, either you yourself, or somebody known to you in the family, or a close friend, or whatever. So, I've worked most of my life as a baby doctor in central London, at UCH, caring for very sick and some extremely premature babies.

And we go right down to the very limits of viability. That's about 23 weeks of gestation. So, I have a normal 40 weeks of nine months of pregnancy. A baby's down to about 23 weeks, even 22 weeks. Some babies are capable of surviving. They weigh as little as 500 grams, or just about a pound weight. And in fact, it's just about fitting my hands like that.

[3 : 41] I've carried little babies like that. And we invest a lot of money and resources into caring for these babies. That's actually an older picture of the intensive care unit.

What I usually say is that part of the problem on a baby intensive care unit is trying to find the patient. But actually, that's the baby's head, and that's the baby's body. Everything else is the equipment, which is keeping alive a tiny little baby.

It costs about 1,200 pounds per baby per day to give this level of care. And the total cost of caring for a premature baby is as much as 50,000 pounds or more.

All paid for by the NHS. So, clearly, we as a society, we value these as lives. We think it's worth investing in them. We think it's worth sending resources on them.

Actually, that's my hand. I'm one of the babies. And it just gives you an idea of the scale. But just one floor away, in the same hospital, is the fetal medicine unit.

[4 : 46] Another very sophisticated area of medical technology. And here, pregnant women are referred from a wide area of London and South East if a problem has been detected in the fetus, the unborn baby.

And a range of sophisticated tests will be performed. And investigations such as ultrasounds and other tests. This test is amniocentesis, where amniotic fluid is taken and is analysed.

And quite often, chromosomes and other things are obtained. These are the chromosomes from an unborn baby. We know she's a little girl because she's got two X chromosomes.

Instead of an X and a Y, she was a boy. But she's got an additional chromosome here. 21 extra. 21 chromosome. Now what that means is that she's going to get Down syndrome.

If she survives. And we don't know how severe it's going to be. It could be very severe. Even life-threatening. It could be relatively mild. But if that pattern of abnormality is detected, what will happen is that the mother will be offered the option of an abortion.

[5 : 59] And I wonder if you can estimate what percentage of women who are offered that choice will choose to have an abortion, if it's with the diagnosis and Down syndrome, in the UK in 2013.

Would everybody like to make a guess as to what percentage of women will choose to have an abortion? Very much. 90%? 99. Well, it's 92%.

No, 92%. So, as you suspect, the vast majority of women will choose to have an abortion. And what's, I think, particularly troubling is that because the amniocentesis test itself has a risk of causing miscarriage and therefore the death of the fetus, you can estimate that for every one baby who's detected with Down syndrome, approximately between two and four healthy fetuses will also die as a result of a testing procedure.

So here, as a society, we seem to be saying that it's better to risk the life of healthy fetuses in order to detect a baby who has Down syndrome in order to have the option of an abortion.

And what's also troubling is that it's legal in the UK for abortions to be carried out for, because of the medical problems such as Down syndrome, it's technically legal for abortions to be carried out at any stage in the pregnancy all the way up until term.

[7 : 31] And although the numbers are small, the statistics show that babies do have a late abortion, or sometimes called a fetus side, for chromosomal conditions, including Down syndrome, beyond 24 weeks at 26, 28, and on many occasions, I've been called away from the neonatal unit, where I'm struggling to save a tiny little premature baby, to go one floor up to the fetal medicine unit to talk to a pregnant woman who's considering having an abortion, and the baby in her womb is considerably bigger and tougher and stronger than the baby who is struggling to say one floor down.

And then you say, how is it possible in one hospital for these two apparently contradictory activities to be going on in one NHS, in one system?

And it's a very interesting and troubling question of how is it possible for these contradictory things to be going on. But one thing that's at the root of it is the idea that autonomy, which means my right to choose, is the central value.

And that in the end, mothers have the right to choose what happens to their unborn baby. And that even if that means that sometimes quite contradictory, activities will be going on.

If you think that's troubling, it's about to get a whole lot worse because of advances in technology, which mean that it's now technically possible to detect problems such as Down syndrome and other genetic evaluators simply by taking a blood test from the pregnant woman.

[9 : 17] But it turns out that during pregnancy, very small quantities of fetal DNA are actually circulating in the mother's bloodstream. And therefore, by taking a single blood test, you can analyse the DNA of the fetus.

So, fast forward about five years. At the moment, this is still a research project but it's being actively analysed to see whether this should become part of routine NHS care. So, fast forward five years.

You or your daughter or somebody known to you is pregnant and everything's just fine. The girl wants to see the doctor. They say, they just want to do a simple blood test. Subject with AIDS. All right, is that fine?

So, fine. Have a blood test. Go back two weeks' time and say, well, I've got some news for you. We know that you've got a little girl but actually she's got a 50 to 70% chance of developing breast cancer or ovarian cancer in the next, before she's 50.

We also think that she's carrying a gene for type 2 diabetes and there's also a risk of Alzheimer's disease developing before she's 70. Now, do you think it would be the right thing to bring this baby into the world or do you think it would be better to have an abortion and have another try of having a baby?

[10:38] And so you can just see the sort of complexity of the problems that are going to be raised in the future and that all new people are going to be struggling with these kinds of difficult issues.

And as somebody said, the problem is that as technology advances, including genetic knowledge, it's almost like we develop a God-like knowledge about the baby but God-like knowledge leads to God-like responsibility.

And the problem is how on earth do we make wise and responsible decisions when we have this kind of God-like knowledge? You can already use this test privately to work out the paternity of your unborn baby, who the father is.

This is an American website where you can send up a sample. Would you like the number?

Toll-free 1877. Are you my dad? So, there's a nationwide screening program run by the NHS which is designed to try and detect every single disabled abnormal baby before birth.

Of course, if it's a treatable condition, and there are some treatable conditions, then there will be the option of some kind of treatment before or after birth. But if it's not treatable, as unfortunately a large range of congenital abnormal answers are, then the only option that will be available is abortion.

[12:13] And so, this is the current screening program. First of all, that you have an early ultrasound scan of 8 to 12 weeks. Then you have a blood test or combined screening for Down syndrome and other chromosome problems.

And then you have a late ultrasound of 18 to 21 weeks, which is much more sensitive about detecting subtle feed-alaminsases. But, I think you can see that one of the interesting questions is why this whole...

A lot of money is being spent on this screening program, millions of pounds a year. Yet, why as a country are we investing all this money in order to try and detect abnormal babies so this will be abortion as they offer?

Was this ever discussed? Has there ever been any democratic debate about whether this should be going on? The interesting thing is, no, it's simply been introduced. Because the technology is there, we should be doing this.

Why are we doing this? Well, we don't think about that. We just do it. And many people and mothers find in pregnancy that they're confronted with extremely painful and difficult choices because, you know, they discover that they've got a 1 in 189 chance of some horrible lethal abnormality.

[13:22] And then you say, well, is a 1 in 189 chance a big chance or a little chance? Is it something to worry about or not? And then you go on the internet and you read about this horrific condition and then you have to start these images in your mind and you start to wonder whether you're carrying a monster in your womb.

And so the actual technology interferes with the relationship with your own horrible baby. Some sociologists have said that the effect of the technology is actually to cause women to distance themselves from the baby.

They don't want to, quote, bond with the baby because they worry that they might have to have an abortion. Some people never tell anybody they're pregnant until they've had all the screening tests because they don't want to have all the shame and embarrassment of having to admit they've had an abortion.

So much better to keep it all quiet until later on in the pregnancy when all the screening tests have been done. So these are some of the issues that this technology causes and one of the things not surprisingly that many disabled people feel they feel that this whole enterprise is like a discrimination for the majority quote, normal people as a way of weeding out people like them.

This is just discrimination against people with Down syndrome people with spine bifida people with dwarfism all of which can be detected and which people will have abortions for.

[14:53] Some people have gone on and said actually if you find out that there's a problem with your unborn baby you have a duty to have an abortion because that would be it would be quite immoral to knowingly bring a child into the world that has problems.

And something we at Petricians have noticed is how attitudes towards parents who continue the pregnancy when they know that there's a problem are starting to change.

Some people have even suggested that the NHS shouldn't have to provide for all the costs of a disabled child if you have chosen to continue the pregnancy after it was defective.

Why should the rest of us pay if you've made the choice to bring a disabled child into the world? And sometimes parents will say if you're pushing a buggy with a baby Down syndrome or some other chromosome problem often the reaction is how sad to see a baby who's got a problem but sometimes the reaction is how could you?

How could you have chosen to bring that baby into the world? What kind of person do you? And so you see that sense of responsibility comes because of the technology.

[16:12] One of the good things about the UK is we do have pretty reliable abortion statistics unlike many countries where actually these statistics are suppressed and are not widely available. They're not completely reliable and there have been some questions about whether there are cases that are not always being recorded but these are anybody if you can google it if you google abortion statistics you can find detailed information these are the statistics for 2011 the total number of abortions in England and Wales was just under 200,000 compare that with about 700,000 live births so you can calculate that approximately between one and four and one and five of all pregnancies that are established from beyond the very early stages is going to end in an abortion at that present and the vast majority have done for so-called social reasons not because of a problem with the baby which is what we were talking about before nearly all of them these days are funded by the NHS even though many of them happen in private clinics and the number that are done because of a risk of disability the abnormality of the baby is actually very small it's only just over 1% and the number that risks the mother's life this is often used as a sort of hard case what if the baby is causing the risk of the mother's life thankfully with modern obstetrics that's extremely rare and there were only 45 in the entire country abortions that were done because of a serious risk of the mother's life and it's nearly always possible to save the life of the mother and the baby with modern medical care sometimes delivering the baby very early so that they can be cared for in a set of care unit this graph shows how the number of abortions per thousand women has been steadily rising and this graph is actually the despair of the health care planners because they made the assumption that it was blindingly obvious that once you had pre contraception and universal sex education it was obvious that the actual requirement for abortions would go down and down and down because people wouldn't need abortions once you had universal availability of contraceptive sex education and to everyone's surprise that is not the case and that in fact the abortion motives remain stubbornly high despite all the attempts of governments to raise and improve education and so on and in fact the reason why it is high is pretty obvious and that is when the people start having sexual intercourse in our modern society you know what's the age at which it's acting your hand now isn't it so you only have to look at 15 15 or 16 is the age at which people start having regular sexual intercourse but what is the age at which women want to have their first baby and the answer is 30 and in fact for graduates I saw some recent figures which said it was 35 as the age every baby women have their first baby so there's a huge gap of time where women want to have regular sex but they don't want to have a baby and therefore by definition you have to have a liberal abortion policy because there's going to be regular contraceptive failures and one night stands and all kinds of problems and people are going to get pregnant but they don't want to have a baby so you'd rather have abortion so that's actually once you separate making love having sex from making babies to modern people these two activities are completely unrelated my wife runs across the brain center in New Zealand and she says there's this woman in tears in front of her and she cannot understand it she just can't understand how she can possibly frame it and

yet she's been having regular sexual intercourse for years but it just hasn't crossed her mind that she might over get pregnant and so to modern people sex is a recreational activity it's basically about having fun about enjoying yourself it's a recreational activity and it's basically everybody's right have as much sex as possible as many people as possible recent survey showing that actually

the number of partners that people have including women is increasing this is now described in a wonderful euphemism as adventurous sexual activity which is obviously seen as a positive thing but basically you can be seen as having as much sex as possible but it's had nothing to do with having a baby having a baby happens over here and oh that's very different and you've got to go and see your GP you've got to have all the tests you've got to have to be very responsible but these two activities seem to have no connection at all of course in Christian thinking it's not an accident that the most intimate and profound physical way we have of expressing love to another human being is also the way in which we make a baby that's not an accident that's part of creation design that was the way God meant it to be that making love and making babies belong together that was part of the plan what's happened in our modern societies that these two activities have become totally separated and not surprisingly we see profound consequences this is one of the statistics which is often quoted and at one level this is technically quite accurate if you look at the chances the risks of having a baby of something going wrong it's not very common but tragically it does happen from time to time it's something I see repeatedly that having babies can be a very nasty dangerous business for mothers as well as for babies and if you compare the risks of having a normal baby at term with the risks of having an abortion in a properly controlled clinic actually the risks of the abortion are less than they're having a baby so therefore of course it's a much better option really much safer much nicer much cleaner who can possibly say having a baby is a really risky thing it's a bizarre kind of argument isn't it because if you think that having a baby is something that is part of by humanity whereas destroying the baby is something which is actually as many women know goes deeply against the deep rooted instinct of a mother so on the one hand we've got this very high rates of abortion and yet we've got actually very amazingly low rates for adoption especially for baby adoption so in 2012 there were 200,000 abortions how many babies were adopted in 2012 and the answer is 70 in the whole country and that's again why that's so low is a complex reason that basically social work is a desperate to try and keep the baby with the mother and even if the mother is not certain that she wishes to have the baby adopted or not the whole tendency is to keep the child with the mother as long as possible and that means that often children eventually when the relationship breaks down or the mother decides she can't cope with the child anymore or whatever by that time the child is often much older and then are much more difficult to adopt and so on and so on so why are the figures so high well one of it is because of this kind of promotion coming from these professional abortion things where abortion is being promoted as a very simple say obvious you know see me suggest you go to work in your lunch hour you know you can go to work in the morning go off to the

clinic have an abortion short acting anesthetic go back to work in the afternoon it's all gone no problem don't worry about it it's simple and safe so these kind of attitudes I think are underlying it my right to choose the only rule is love as long as I'm doing what is loving then sometimes the most loving thing to do is to have an abortion a technological fix I think that in many ways abortion is a classic male response to an extremely complex problem you know it's a bit like the equivalent oh dear she's upset buy some flowers she'll be fine it'll solve the problem so if you think of all the things that go into an unwanted pregnancy you think of all the psychological factors the relationship the social factors all the complex issues which go behind an unwanted pregnancy and what's the solution it's very simple ten minutes anaesthetic get rid of it's all gone wipe so clean try up again really does that sound likely that that kind of extremely complex painful emotional income is just wiped clean and of course it isn't and that's what the experience of so many is it's it's also interesting to see the way the language has changed about abortion so when the abortion act first came in in 1967 the language was in terms of compassion this was a compassionate response to the backstreet abortions that were going on in the east and it was for something in extreme circumstances then with the rise of feminism women's liberation the rhetoric changes now it's about my body my control my choice it's an act of liberation now the rhetoric has changed again now it's about being responsible now it's about a duty to have an abortion

I'm just very briefly going to refer to the opposite end of the spectrum which is fertility treatment so we said that something like one in three women are going to have an abortion in their reproductive lifetime one in seven couples are going to have inability to have children and are going to need some kind of fertility treatment in order to help them to have a baby and so what you often find in modern gynecology departments is this bizarre thing whereas some people are definitely trying to get rid of their baby and another group of people are desperately using every kind of technological help to try and have a baby and when I was a medical student which was a long time ago back in

the 1970s I went to a lecture on human reproduction and I sat in the lecture and I was basically told that the way to make a baby was that a man and a woman had to have sexual intercourse and then nine months later out came a baby

I ripped all down carefully in my neighborhood but these days it's rather different so basically if you want to make a baby what you need is you need a sperm donor you need an egg donor you need a uterus a womb and you need someone to look after the baby and basically there's no reason why any of those four things should have any connection to any of other four things and so you can see that the permutations and the combinations are enormous and the New York Times recently had the story of Amy Amy was a single woman who desperately wants to have a baby and she didn't really fancy being pregnant I mean who wants to be pregnant she really didn't even fancy the idea of having a partner and sex and nasty messages she just wanted a baby and so she went onto the internet and first of all she found a sperm donor well the

[28 : 26] California Cryobank has you can find a sperm donor in fact you can go onto the website and then you can please know that graduate donors are here you can select a donor and you can even select it on a celebrity lookalike so that you can choose what you want your child to look like so if you drill it down this was one donor on the website I chose at random and this gives you all the information about the donor he's six foot three you can't read it here but there's a whole sort of purple prose about how he's chunky and a charmer and things from his eye and all that kind of stuff and although you can't see it the donor look at this donor resembles Prince Andrew and then you see here it gets a bit there are vials available to purchase so you put your credit card and then courtesy of federal express a little path that arrives through the post hopefully not labelling what it is and then you need to find an egg donor and again you can find egg donors now donating eggs is much more dangerous than donating sperm because you need to take hormone treatment you need to have a technical procedure called a laparoscopy to harvest the eggs and there are risks involved so it costs a lot of money in fact it can cost as much as 20 30 thousand pounds or dollars to have an egg donor but you can find them and you can again find the characteristics it turns out there's a market value to egg donors I wonder if you could work out what kind of egg donors have the highest market value for their eggs

I'll make some suggestions I'll give you a clue blonde helpful anything else blue eyes tall slim intelligent how intelligent a graduate PhD preferably anything else you've got two more characteristics musical and sporty if you are all those things then you can your eggs will have got so if you're small and dark and into chess I've got value to the environment but it gives you this horrific view of the future all the men are going to look like Chris Andrew and all the women are going to look like Barbie doll with a PhD so then you've got to find somebody who is going to be a surrogate mother you're going to create this embryo but now you've got to find a surrogate mother so this is another website

I just found at random but this is a website from Delhi and that is because many of the surrogate mothers are actually in poor countries and so embryos are being created in the west and shipped across and being implanted into the womb as we speak what's happening is being implanted into the wombs of poor women and they are using this in order to fund their own family sometimes these are women who have children themselves and this is the only way they can get a decent education for their children but there have been all kinds of horror stories about the abuse of women who are being surrogate mothers the risks they take and so on but anyway this is what happened and then Amy commissioned an embryo she was implanted in a surrogate mother but then the surrogate mother discovered that Amy had a history of medical problems which the surrogate mother felt meant she wasn't going to be a good mother and the surrogate mother refused to hand the baby back to Amy and then there was a huge big court case even though

Amy had spent tens of thousands of dollars and that's why it's all here with his focus now that's an extreme case it just shows you how technology is changing the nature of how we make babies and in fact there are even some people saying this is a better way of making a baby than that old fashioned way I mean why leave it all to chance we don't think that chance is a very good way of running our lives for anything else why should you leave the genetic constitution of your baby to chance surely it's much better to do it in a controlled way and select the right kind make sure you haven't got inherited diseases and so on you can use this technique to select the gender of your baby this is technically against guidelines in the UK but it's possible to send an NGO across to Greece have gender selection in Greece and then come back and have the baby here in UK

apparently there are some people doing that to make sure they have the baby of the right gender this is a tragic story of a woman in India who had been infertile all her life she had terrible social stigma in her village and she eventually got together the money to have her own baby and she had that at the age of 70 because at last she was able to overcome the stigma and unfortunately the very procedure itself carried risks and the news report said that actually it caused serious health problems which ultimately to her death so you get this bizarre situation all this technology is being used basically to overcome social stigma and yet this child is a victim in all this whose 70 year old mother died in the process and there are all these

IVF doctors rattling human eggs lesbian couples become so it's perfectly possible for lesbian couples to have a baby this way and in fact the law has been changed so that on the birth certificate you don't have to have a man on the birth certificate at all you don't have to have a father in fact you have two parents who can be both females so the child has two parents but the law says in this case no man will be a father the child will not have a father and again you probably heard the other way around go to male homosexual couples this is Alison John who implants a sperm into a surrogate mother and they've got two children sperm so behind all this is a strange mixture of different forces on the one hand you've got consumerism I want I want to have a baby you've got moral relativism that says well why not we've done it properly it's controlled and we check to make sure that all the right tests are done it's regulated why not why should we stop people doing this and then technology says we can make it happen but it will cost it so these different forces in our society are coming together ok so I'm going to move on and talk about the Christian response but perhaps just before I do that are there any questions or comments as we've just raised some of these really difficult troubling issues and I have to say I don't have any simple slick answers in fact if you come expecting some nice simple answers to complex problems then you're going to be very disappointed because I haven't got any nice simple answers but I hope at least we can think about this from a Christian point of view how we should think as Christian people to respond to some of this is this true that there have been cases where people have actually deliberately chosen to have disabilities such as deafness because they themselves have both been deaf and they want to have that way that they are deaf so have there have been cases that's right so in the deaf community particularly where they feel that being deaf is not actually a disability it's just a different way of communicating and they haven't wanted to have a child who has had normal hearing and so they've actually asked doctors to select to use a selective technique to create a number of embryos and then select an embryo which has the same kind of genetic problem that they have to make sure that their child is going to be deaf now this has caused a whole lot of ethical debate in the

[36 : 53] UK and actually in the UK by and large the clinics have refused to do that they say to deliberately choose a baby who you know is going to have a disability they believe is unacadable but it has happened to other countries it has happened to the States so if you have a technique where you say a condition where you know half parents where they know half their children are going to inherit a not so insominent trait that's potentially quite serious they know half their embryos would be free of that it's okay to select those free of that yes correct but not the other way around that's what the guidelines say in the UK okay well let's move on here we go so I think this is one of the really important principles that Christian ethics the way we treat one another comes from

Christian anthropology the way we are made that what the Bible teaches us is that human beings are lovingly created and designed in a particular way and so what we need to do is to have a deeper understanding of the way that we are made because this will help us to understand more about the way we should treat one another and I'm just going to put three big headlines which we all get from the early chapters of Genesis and that is first of all that human beings are in some way designed to reflect the being and character of God secondly that human beings are made out of the dust of the earth and thirdly that we're part of a single human family so it's very important to understand that in Christian thinking human beings are not self-explanatory you can't understand what it means to be a human being just by looking at how human beings behave or by analyzing human DNA or human neuroscience or whatever there's a great emphasis at the moment scientists are trying to use science to try and understand what it means to be human but actually it's due to failure you will never understand what it means to be human and that is because we are not self-explanatory and in this important verse

God what the language that is used about human beings is different from the language that is used about all other things that's in good creation because it's only for human beings that God says let us

make and reading that through the eyes of the New Testament that's God the Father God the Son and God the Holy Spirit the Holy Trinity together say let us make human beings in our image and in our likeness and here's some kind of analogy suppose somewhere out on the Andromeda galaxy some incredibly intelligent alien beings are at this very moment receiving through space a very distorted image and you can imagine these super alien intelligences analysing this image now if you know anything about astronomy you will know this can't work because actually the Andromeda galaxy is over a million light years away and therefore they can't be receiving it would take a million light years for this image to get the end of the galaxy but let's sustain this belief at this moment they are looking at this image you can imagine these super intelligent beings trying to analyse every aspect of it drilling right down to the individual pixels looking at the frequency absorption range noticing the spatial characteristics they will never understand what they are looking at until they understand there's actually a map it's the underground maps and so that particular relationship of lines and colours reflects something completely different which is this these strange metal things that go from the around so in other words these two things which are utterly and totally different these things made out of metal this are abstract representations of lines and colours they have a hidden connection one is a map a reflection of the other and that's just some kind of analogy that's what the bible says is that we are a map of god himself that god chose to take a humble pathetic carbon based life form on a particular planet on a particular star system in a particular galaxy and use that humble life form as a map of the very being and character of god himself and that's why human beings are not self-explanatory unless you understand that everything that human beings do and are is utterly mysterious so each human life is not just a gift from god it's actually a reflection of its own character and being and human beings are god-like beings they're designed to be god-like beings and so each human life is like a masterpiece a unique masterpiece of irreplaceable value and our dignity and our significance it doesn't come from how bright we are whether we've got a PhD or whether we've got a master's it doesn't come from the fact that we've got you know opposable thumbs and we're bipedal and we've got some extra cerebral cortex compared to chimpanzees it doesn't come from any of these things it comes from our god-likeness and in fact in psalm 8 the wonderful hymn of praise to god the usual translation is it says that man was made a little lower than angels but in fact the literal translation for Hebrew and I have it from an eminent theologian is this each human life is lacking a very little of god that's actually what the psalmist was saying how amazing that human beings are lacking a very little of god and yet these wonderful god-like beings god chose to make out of dust so adam the name of the first human being is taken from the

Hebrew adamah which is the ground so literally human beings are groundlings and in fact did you know that human the English word is derived from humus not the nice stuff you put on a piece of bread compost heap that's what we are we are made from the compost heap we are human and so part of god's plan was to take this amazing reflection and make it out of the compost heap to make it out of this physical stuff and therefore part of the design is that we should be weak and fragile and vulnerable and to use a philosophical term contingent so as I stand here my life hangs by a thread it would only take the most tiny little clot in my carotid artery and I would suddenly have a massive stroke and collapse to the ground it would only take the most tiny little change in one of my coronary arteries in my heart and I would suddenly have a cardiac arrest it would only take the most tiny little change in the neurotransmitters in my brain and I would start hallucinating and losing contact with reality our lives hang by a thread and guess what that's part of the design that's not the form that's creation that's part of the way that God wanted it to be he wanted us to be fragile and vulnerable and dependent and you came into this world utterly and totally dependent on the love and care of other people and the very fact that you're sitting there looking reasonably healthy and well cared for tells me that when you were born somebody loved you somebody kept you warm somebody fed you somebody wiped your bottom because you could do nothing for yourself we go through a phase and other people then depend on us that's the phase I and my wife are still going through we've got three granite boys this phase of dependence that other people depend on you seems to go a long time the phone rings dad dad dad can you put a thousand pounds in my account a thousand pounds can I borrow the car for three months this period of dependence goes on an awful long time but you know guess what most of us are going to end our lives utterly and totally dependent on the love and care of others and that is not an evil thing actually no that's part of the design and this was brought home to me very strongly my mother who was a very intelligent evacious christian believer was struck down by a horrible kind of dementia and at the end of her life

she was completely dependent on other people's love and care she could do nothing for herself she was hallucinating she was trapped in a body that she couldn't move she was incontinent she was receiving 24 hours and near the end I was visiting her and somebody thrust a yogurt pot and a teaspoon in my hand and I was trying to feed her and it was open your mouth open your mouth here it comes open your mouth open your mouth and I suddenly had this flashback this is exactly what she did for me and now the tables were turned and I remember thinking at the time you know this is the way it was meant to be

I am learning more about what it means to be a son and she is learning more about what it means to be a mother because dependence is part of the story and in fact we are designed to be a burden to one mother it's impossible not to be a burden to one mother I hear a lot of old people including Christian old people say something like I just don't want to be a burden to anybody I'm very happy to look after others I'm very happy to care for others but if I ever come to the point when I'm a burden to somebody else I'm going to say to God thank you very much goodbye goodnight thank you I'm going to heaven if you hear anybody say something like that you must immediately say that when you are wrong you are designed to be a burden to me and I'm designed to be a burden to you and the life which God has given us including the life of the Christian church is one of mutual burdensomeness that's why Paul says bear one another's burdens and you will fulfill the [47 : 30] Lord Christ so it's actually very radically different isn't it instead of the autonomy of modern society the most important thing is to do your own thing live your own life enjoy yourself make your own choices that's not what Christian faith teaches us from creation that we are designed to be a burden to one another and to care for one another but our heavenly father doesn't forget as a father has compassion on his children so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him for he knows how we are taught him he remembers that we are first he doesn't forget who we are and what we're made from just moving on I'm coming towards the end the third thing is that we're made into a family and it turns out that people have been going around looking at DNA all around the world and it turns out every single person on the planet every single human being is related to every other human being on the planet in fact if you turn to the left and the right when you are sitting you are looking into distant relatives every single person you look is related and if you could look into your

DNA you could work out that you're my fourth cousin three times a roof on my mother's side and as you walk out and go down Ewing High Street every single person you part is a relative and that's why Christian social ethics are actually family ethics we treat even the stranger even the immigrant even the person who's totally unlike us with dignity and respect and care why? because we are family and in a family the strong care for the weak and the rich the poor that's what families do and amazingly enough the human family and that's again part of the creation because of the indwelling image of God it's very clear in the Bible that to deliberately destroy human life innocent human life is like an affront against God himself it's almost like spitting in the face of the creator it's to say this person isn't good enough I want to get rid of this person whereas there's a wonderful quote from a Christian priest who said love is a way of saying to another it's good that you exist it's good that you are in the world what abortion says is it's bad that you exist it would be much better for the world if you didn't exist but love says always it's good that you exist it's good that you are in the world the same thing about elderly people often elderly people who feel unwanted rejected lonely of no value

Christian love says it's good that you exist it's good that you are in the world but then the most amazing thing and I'm coming towards the end is that God himself didn't just set up this bizarre project of taking this pathetic life form and turning it into his image no because God himself enters into the story so he takes on a body made out of dust and he turns himself into a baby and he can do nothing for himself and he has to be fed and he has to be kept warm and he has to have his bottom white and yet the Christian faith teaches us that at the very moment that Jesus is utterly and totally pathetic in Mary's arms and having his bottom white he is still the second person trunty of holding the universe by the word of his power in other words his divine dignity and status is in no way touched by his dependence and so you need to remember that and I need to remember that because if I end up and you end up in hospital and we are utterly and totally dependent and we are needing to have our bottoms and whites and there's nothing we can do our divine image our dignity our status of being a beloved prince or princess of the most high is in no way touched by our dependence and Jesus shows us that and so he comes into the world he can do nothing for himself

and at the end on the cross he's stretched out with his arms and all he can croak through parched lips is

I am thirsty he can do nothing for himself so there's a sense in which there's nothing we can go through in our human experience which in a sense God in the form of Jesus has not experienced as somebody said he was with us in the darkness of the womb as he will be with us in the darkness of the tomb that actually Jesus has been there and experienced that he hasn't just told us that we should get on with it and make the best of a bad job and nobody's been there in the midst of that and when we think about the status of the unborn baby one of the verses which has meant a lot to me is this verse in Luke's gospel I like Luke's gospel I have special affinity because of Luke was a doctor and it's so interesting to see what Luke selects to put into his gospel and one of the amazing little incidents that Luke selected to put into his gospel was two pregnant women having a matter he must have interviewed all these people he goes to Mary he's interviewed

[53 : 17] Mary he's interviewed Elizabeth he's interviewed Peter he's interviewed some Roman soldiers he's got the whole story now he's writing the gospel and he's decided to put in a little incident a little home incident of two pregnant women having a matter why on earth does he put it in the gospel answer because he sees something very profound because Elizabeth is pregnant she's towards the end of her pregnancy you can work out she's something like seven or eight months pregnant close to term and Mary has just received the news from the angel and she runs to see Elizabeth and she's probably something like three weeks pregnant and she runs in to see Mary to see Elizabeth and Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and she says blessed are you Mary and blessed is the fruit of your womb but why should it be why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears the baby in my womb left for joy and the word for left is a huge great spasm of joy it's not a normal baby kick it's a huge great exultant explosion but what's so amazing is the mother of my

Lord and do you know how big my Lord was she's not happy and yet Elizabeth filled by the Holy Spirit says you are the mother of my Lord and in fact what Luke realised was that this little vignette there weren't two people in this room there were four people in this room Elizabeth and Mary there's John the Baptist and there's Jesus and John the Baptist is leaping for joy because Jesus is there in the same way that the lame man is going to leap for joy thirty years later when Jesus walked on in other words the unborn baby is actually an actor the story has already started once part of the story and so I think just in that little vignette you find elsewhere in scripture as well even at the very early stages of pregnancy we can see that that little being is someone special is someone unique it has a story it has a meaning and a purpose so it seems to be that when we're thinking about this being we have to hold together the already and the not yet if you're interested in theology you will know that that's a common thing you find in theology already and the not yet this being is already a human being it is not yet what it's going to be and we have to hold together the physical and the immaterial so this being in the womb is just made of cells it's just one cell click two cells click four cells click eight cells but at the same time something utterly amazing is happening because God is calling into existence by name

God knew you and loved you and called you by name when you were a tiny little speck in your mother's womb and he knew and loved you and in fact in Psalm 139 it says that every single day in your life God knew before one of them came to be so presumably he knew that we were going to a meeting in this room tonight and we will be talking about this very subject so God how can those two things be going on the cells going click two cells four eight and at the same time this unique person coming to existence and I have to be honest with you and I tell you I haven't a clue but I know they're both true and therefore we hold together the physical and the immaterial but often a question I'm asked is when does life begin in the womb and I have to say usually I hope politely but actually that's the wrong question because everybody knows that whatever it is in the womb is living so it's not the question about when life begins the question is when is there a person in the womb that we have a duty to protect now it seems to me that the evidence resources from that passage in Luke suggests that there's a person there very very early on at the very early stages but the important thing is that you don't find a person by using an electron microscope that's what philosophers call a category mistake you don't find a person with electron microscope how do you find a person ask you find a person by love and there's a nice illustration I came across on the internet so this is a transvaginal ultrasound which is what used to detect the very earliest stages of pregnancy and this is a tiny little embryo and if you look at the thing it's actually five millimeters long

so if you think what five millimeters is that's a sort of quarter of an inch and yet look we're expecting a baby in other words love has seen that this is more than just a tiny little blob now it's a person a loved person someone that you've anticipated it's very interesting to me that nowadays photo albums the baby's photo album don't start at the moment of birth every single photo album starts with a gray ultrasound image that's you there we're up so we intuitively understand that there is a person there and as we reach out with love we see the person and so Oliver and Armand said we must approach new human beings including those whose humanity is ambiguous and uncertain to us with the expectancy and hope that we shall discern how God has called them out of nothing into personal being and so that's what that's what that's what that's what you were 28 weeks this is what you looked like at 18 weeks this is what you looked like at 6 weeks this is what you looked like at 3 weeks this is what you looked like at 3 days is there any point as you go back at which you can say that's definitely not me

I don't think you can because that's actually what you looked like and even when you were like that God knew you and loved you and was calling you into existence but then as you said Jesus enters into the experience that he becomes I hope you've wondered what did Jesus look like? wouldn't it be amazing to be in Galilee and actually see what God in human form looks like? well I'll tell you what Jesus looked like isn't that mind-blowing?

[59 : 59] that God himself and in fact you know where we just said in Luke the mother of my Lord that's about there that's the mother of my Lord isn't it mind-blowing?

so this idea that God himself has invaded the womb that's and we're about to celebrate this so I hope you'll think about this when we come to Christmas the amazing we're so familiar with the Christmas story we've actually lost how amazingly outstanding how strange it is such a strange story sounds like a bizarre fantasy and yet 2,000 years later over a billion people around the surface of the planet are going to be celebrating the birth of that special baby so our humanity is not a barrier which comes between us and God no it's the very means by which God is revealed and so as I have often looked at this photograph I've often thought you know where is God in that picture? I mean do you imagine yourself as that this is the tiny little hand and this is God the big hand who's reaching out and supporting me and of course that's right that is what God is like he's like the great supporter and I'm the tiny little hand but you know amazingly and wonderfully you can turn the picture around and God becomes the tiny little hand the hand that is dependent the hand that is vulnerable the hand that is fragile and he does it to teach us that dependence is part of the soul and part of his plan I'll close with this story that Alan and Verity were close friends of ours at All Souls and they were married they were desperate to have a child and they were waited and waited and then wonderful news she was pregnant and then she went and had some scans and it turned out that she had a genetic condition called Edwards Syndrome which is like Down Syndrome and much worse which is universally fatal and in this situation nearly everybody all doctors will nearly all doctors will strongly recommend abortion because what possible reason for carrying on the brain and sick you know the baby can die but Alan and Verity felt how can we destroy this baby that God has given us and although they were very sad and there were much tears and agonising they felt we have to care for this baby and so little baby Christopher was born and to everyone's surprise he didn't die straight away he was much loved and they used to bring him along to All Souls where he became like a mini celebrity and he used to be passed around from arm to arm and he was being cuddled to death and everybody loved cuddling him he was a very placid baby but people just loved to be able to hold him and also to see what was going on and to see the strange miracle of the baby he was also going to die and he survived for about seven months and then he got weaker and weaker and eventually he died and at the memorial so there were 400 people that came to remember the life of little baby Christopher when he died he was 2.5 kilograms which was exactly what he was when he was born he was exactly the same size when he died but you know one of Alan and his friends said you know Christopher couldn't grow but he helped other people to grow and it was true so sometimes we see God most clearly not in the perfect specimens of humanity not in the Nobel Prize when it's in the Olympic athletes sometimes we see

God most clearly in the weak and in the bruised and in the battered and that's part of the Easter story that God reveals himself in the broken and bleeding body of a man on the cross he shows himself in weakness and so it seems to me that Alan and Verity said to baby Christopher it's good that you're alive it's good that you're in the world and it's been my privilege over the years to care for

many babies with severe and lethal abnormalities after birth and help them babies to die well and actually I think it's one of the great success stories of modern medicine is if you can help we can't make every day better but we can care for every baby with compassion and with love and with respect and help them in their little short lives to have an impact on others so I'm going to stop there thanks so much and I'd be happy to answer especially if you're going to have a little bit but it's a bit of time for some questions some silence

[64 : 57] I'm going to have a small thing really is there any reason why in the statistics that it was only covering even in the world living through Scotland I mean the statistics in Scotland are very similar it's just Scotland has a really different health system and they cut all their statistics separately but it's not significantly different the same kind of ratios the same kind of factors are going on it's a little bit the only place which is different is Northern Ireland where they have a much stricter law and abortion for social reasons is not legal of course what does happen is that quite a lot of people travel in terms of England where they do have an abortion so there's been a lot of debate and discussion about that well let me just say something about positive responses which is

I got off the website list as choices evening see look there you are so one of the wonderful positive things that Christians have done because whenever we say that something is wrong it's not good enough for Christians just to say it's wrong it's wrong it's bad you mustn't do that whenever we say that something is wrong we must immediately say and here is a better way and so what this work of the Christ's pregnancy census is a wonderful Christian response to the problem of abortion it's not about rhetoric it's not about campaigning and trying to change the law and doing that it's about a compassionate practical response reaching out to women who have unplanned pregnancies so my wife runs a centre like this in Islington on the Calabernian Road and they advertise in local libraries and on Google on the internet and among geeky surgeons and so on and they have a steady stream of women coming with unplanned pregnancies asking for advice they also provide post-abortion support so women who've had a previous abortion and were often quite traumatised sometimes something that happened years ago even decades ago which still causes deep anxiety and unease and distress so they have a whole recovery programme of helping women come to terms with what happens they have a supply of used clothing and baby buggies and other stuff they're native

Christian churches in the area which are available for people free for people who are single parents or unsupported and they carry on their pregnancy and they've also got a fantastic work going on in Holloway Prison where they're doing the same kinds of work for women prisoners which is in our patch just close to the Caledonian Road and again just offering love and compassion and care and it's a wonderful work there's something like over 120 centres like this around the country nearly all run by volunteers and Christian people who just want to have a practical response and if you've been touched by anything you've talked about and if you're thinking it would be wonderful to go and do something practical then here's an opportunity on your doorstep to get involved and to so I could I recommend you to think about being a volunteer here and supporting this kind of work

I understand the church does support choices in healing and I think it's a great ministry if you're interested you can find out more obviously from the trustees who are here or you can go onto the website who have