

*Salt and Light Papers provide important information and analysis to help Christians and Churches to engage with 21<sup>st</sup> century social issues*

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## DISMANTLING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HUMAN LIFE

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There has been nothing like it for almost 20 years. It is set to dismantle the fundamentals of human dignity, good medicine, family structure and even human life itself. In May 2007, the Government published a draft Bill called the Human Tissue and Embryos Bill. On Thursday 8 November, it had its first reading in the House of Lords under its new title of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill (2008). From November to February, the Upper House has been voting on amendments to this Bill. It is expected to enter the House of Commons after Easter, probably in early April.

This HFE Bill (2008) is primarily an overhaul and updating of the HFE Act (1990). The fruit of the Warnock Report (1984), this Act was bad enough, with its legalisation of assisted reproductive techniques, destructive embryo experimentation and surrogacy. But by comparison, this 2008 Bill makes the 1990 Act appear positively restrictive.

So far the HFE Bill (2008) looks set to legalise:

- 1) the creation of animal-human hybrid embryos – now officially called ‘human admixed embryos’.
- 2) saviour siblings for ‘serious’ rather than ‘life-threatening’ conditions.
- 3) sex selection of embryos for ‘social’ rather than medical reasons, such as ‘family balancing’.
- 4) the deletion of ‘the need for a father’ in considering the ‘welfare of the child’ prior to IVF treatment.
- 5) advertising and fees for surrogates to encourage surrogacy.

Furthermore, since the HFE Act (1990) modified the Abortion Act (1967), amendments to abortion law are likely to be introduced during the passage of the HFE Bill (2008). As if 200,000 abortions each year in England and Wales are not enough, some MPs are planning to:

- 1) increase access to abortion, up to say 13 weeks, with no questions asked.
- 2) scrap the two doctors’ signature requirement.
- 3) extend the Act to Northern Ireland.
- 4) repeal the conscience clause, thereby hunting down pro-life doctors.
- 5) encourage nurses to oversee chemical abortions.

On the other hand, pro-life MPs are planning for:

- 1) a reduction to 20, perhaps even 18 weeks – anything that lessens the slaughter.
- 2) proper informed consent – rehearsal of the physical and mental risks.
- 3) a cooling-off period for women, that is, proper counselling.
- 4) parental involvement for minors (under 16s) considering abortion.
- 5) a ban on abortions for disability, including cleft palate, club foot, etc.

The stakes are high – very high. If the Bill succeeds in its present form, human life will not be the same again. But Christians are not simply to moan about the state of our society and sit on our hands. We must:

- 1) Pray about these issues, especially for MPs engaged in the debates.
- 2) Educate ourselves, our families and our churches about this Bill.
- 3) Agitate. Be salt and light. Write to, or meet with, our MP.
- 4) Care for the disabled, the infertile, the senile, the vulnerable.
- 5) Join and give to organisations fighting this Bill.

There has rarely been a more pressing time to contact your MP. He or she will be voting on this Bill. Write to, or preferably meet with, your MP, or both – it can be a grand educative experience! The timid can form a small delegation. To find the name of your MP go to, [www.parliament.uk/people/index.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/people/index.cfm). All MPs hold regular ‘surgeries’ and your local newspaper and library will have the details of dates, times and places. Letters can be sent to, The House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. You can e-mail your MP at, [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com). Be brief, polite, firm, but winsome. Copy-cat letters, signed postcards and suchlike do not cut much ice at Westminster – it’s like junk mail.

If you are unsure what to say, help is at hand from the excellent websites of the Christian Institute ([www.christian.org.uk](http://www.christian.org.uk)), the Christian Medical Fellowship ([www.cmf.org.uk](http://www.cmf.org.uk)), or the Lawyers’ Christian Fellowship ([www.lawcf.org](http://www.lawcf.org)). There is also an on-line petition which can be signed. Go to <http://www.aliveandkickingcampaign.org:80/petition>

**If evangelical Christians will not speak up on these great issues, who will? We were all silent about the 1967 Act. Some of us spoke against the 1990 Act. Now we have the greatest, maybe last, opportunity to defend human life with this 2008 Act. If just five people in every church affiliated to Affinity contacted their MPs, those 6,000 visits and letters would begin to make a real difference. One hour of your time is all that is required.**

Dr John R Ling

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