

# LIFE or DEATH?

## . . . for Newborn Babies

**INFANTICIDE** - deliberately causing the death of an infant, usually a newborn with a handicap, either directly, or indirectly by refusing to give the baby food, water and necessary medical care, is being increasingly publicized in this country and is a serious problem in medical ethics.

### IS INFANTICIDE GOING ON IN HOSPITALS IN THIS COUNTRY?

Yes, according to a number of ethicists and concerned doctors including Dr. C. Everett Koop, Surgeon General of the United States and world-renowned pediatric surgeon. Dr. Koop has called the problem "widespread" and happening "in hospitals throughout the country," even in prestigious medical centers.

### ISN'T INFANTICIDE ILLEGAL?

Yes, infanticide is illegal in every state in this country, but most cases are never brought to public attention and no parent or physician has been convicted for bringing about the death of a handicapped newborn by denying nourishment or ordinary medical care.

### WHY HASN'T THE PUBLIC BEEN AWARE OF IT?

Because it happens in the confines of a hospital ward and death is usually attributed to some medical cause, the public doesn't hear about infanticide. However, it is beginning to be more openly discussed in medical journals and in the media. (A Boston TV station did a 4-part documentary in 1983 exposing over 100 cases in 20 different states in which essential medical care and even nourishment was denied to handicapped newborns.)

### BUT IS A DOCTOR OBLIGED TO USE "EXTRAORDINARY" OR "HEROIC" MEANS TO SAVE EVERY INFANT, EVEN ONE WITH SEVERE HANDICAPS?

No. "Extraordinary" or "heroic" means do not have to be employed when the chance for a child's recovery is very poor and medical intervention would only prolong the dying process. However, to deny customary and reasonable care and to deliberately starve a newborn simply because the child may be retarded or physically handicapped is extreme discrimination - discrimination that results in death.

### WHAT HAPPENED IN THE INDIANA "INFANT DOE" CASE?

A baby boy, born on April 15, 1982, in Bloomington, Indiana, had a deformed esophagus which prevented normal feeding. Because the baby also had Down's Syndrome which involves mental retardation, his parents refused permission for surgery to correct the malformation and ordered the hospital not to feed the child or give him intravenous fluids. Even though at least six couples offered to adopt the baby, the parents' decision to "choose" death for their child was upheld by a lower state court and by the Indiana Supreme Court. For four days the baby cried until he became too weak to utter a sound. Finally, after six agonizing days without food, water or medical care, he died. His death brought the widespread problem of infanticide dramatically before the American people for the first time.

### BUT WOULDN'T A HANDICAPPED CHILD LEAD A MISERABLE LIFE?

No one has the right to judge that another person's life is not worth living. Every human being has a basic right to life. Further, the assumption that people with handicaps enjoy life less than others has been shown to be false.

### BUT ISN'T IT COSTLY TO CARE FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN?

The question is should society treat, care for and help a sick or disabled person, or should we kill him? Will we measure the value of a person's life in money or utilitarian usefulness? A far more humane approach is to encourage continued research on birth defects, improve treatment of handicapped children, provide supportive measures for families raising children with problems, etc. These means are vastly more desirable than destroying handicapped human beings.

### WHY SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT BE CONCERNED WITH THE PROBLEM OF INFANTICIDE?

Infanticide involves causing the death of little girls and boys too young to defend themselves. The role of government is to protect the lives and rights of those who cannot protect themselves, therefore government must be concerned about this problem.

## **AREN'T DECISIONS REGARDING THE TREATMENT OF HANDICAPPED NEWBORNS BEST MADE BY HOSPITAL ETHICS COMMITTEES?**

While hospital ethics committees may serve the function of providing medical-ethical guidelines and professional discipline, society cannot depend upon these committees as the only protection for the lives and rights of human beings. Vulnerable children need the full protection of our American legal system. All of society has a stake in important human rights decisions. Protective laws are enacted by the people's representatives to protect basic rights and the American judicial system provides protection for these rights by allowing each person an advocate to represent him in court with strict procedures designed to protect individual rights. It would be unjust to exclude anyone from these important legal protections just because he is young, ill or handicapped.

## **HOW COULD THE GOVERNMENT INCREASE PROTECTION FOR HANDICAPPED NEWBORNS:**

Through federal and state administrative action, clarifying protection in federal statutes and strengthening state protective laws, we can safeguard the civil rights of these small and vulnerable members of our human family.

## **WHY ARE ABORTION AND INFANTICIDE LINKED?**

The same reasons used to justify killing babies before birth by abortion are now being extended to justify the elimination of some handicapped newborns. (e.g. Parental "freedom to choose;" "unwantedness;" "poor quality of life;" etc.)

Both abortion and infanticide can exist in a society that values and protects only those human beings who are wanted, perfect and productive and that accepts killing as a solution to individual and social problems.

## **WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THIS PROBLEM?**

You can become part of the pro-life movement, which is striving through education and constructive citizen action to protect the rights of innocent human beings who cannot protect themselves and to build a caring society where all human life is valued and protected.

A membership in **RIGHT TO LIFE OF UTAH** will bring you accurate, up-to-date information concerning the life issues, and suggestions for specific effective action.

## **HELP DEFEND INNOCENT, DEFENSELESS HUMAN BEINGS WHO CANNOT DEFEND THEMSELVES**



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