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Overriding the Protection of Life? A Shocking Development in England

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The British media reported shocking news in recent days as a major bioethics report is to be released, offering guidelines for the medical care of severely disabled infants. The Nuffield Council on Bioethics will release the report later this week, and will argue that extraordinary measures to save the life of premature and severely disabled infants are not always ethically necessary.

The report from the Council is troubling enough, but the really troubling development is the involvement of the Church of England. From *The Observer* [London]:

Church of England leaders want doctors to be given the right to withhold treatment from seriously disabled newborn babies in exceptional circumstances. The move is expected to spark massive controversy.

The church leaders' call for some children to be allowed to die - overriding the presumption that life should be preserved at any cost - comes in response to an independent inquiry, which is to be published this week, into the ethics of resuscitating and treating extremely premature babies.

More:

The decision by religious leaders to accept that in some rare cases it may be better to end life than to artificially prolong it is a landmark for the church. The Rt Rev Tom Butler, Bishop of Southwark and vice chair of public affairs of the Mission and Public Affairs Council, states in the church's submission to the inquiry, that 'it may in some circumstances be right to choose to withhold or withdraw treatment, knowing it will possibly, probably, or even certainly result in death'.

The church's report does not spell out which medical conditions might justify a decision to allow babies to die but they are likely to be those agonising dilemmas such as the one faced by the parents of Charlotte Wyatt, who was born three months prematurely, weighing only 1lb and with severe brain and lung damage.

This is genuinely shocking — even coming from the Church of England. Will this church really advise doctors and parents to deprive severely premature and disabled babies of medical care intended to give them an opportunity for life?

From the [BBC](#):

According to the newspaper the Church of England's submission was made by the Bishop of Southwark, Reverend Tom Butler:

It reportedly said that while it could not accept the argument that the life of any baby is not worth living, there were "strong proportionate reasons" for "overriding the presupposition that life should be maintained".

"There may be occasions where, for a Christian, compassion will override the 'rule' that life should inevitably be preserved," Rev Butler was quoted as saying.

“Disproportionate treatment for the sake of prolonging life is an example of this.”

Disproportionate to what? This is a tragic, life-denying logic. Why would the Church of England offer such advice? This proposal reverses centuries of Christian moral wisdom — wisdom that has insisted on the responsibility to offer aid and treatment to those most in need and least able to care or to speak for themselves.

We have now reached some kind of end stage in ethical confusion. What else can we think when the Church of England is involved in a proposal like this?

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