

“One Just Man Found in Gomorrah”: Father Morrow vs. the Catholic Bishops of Britain in 1993

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ABSTRACT: In 1993, a Scottish priest named James Morrow made several attempts to stop the young comatose patient Tony Bland from being put to death by dehydration. The Bland case was the first instance of legalized euthanasia in Britain. Although Father Morrow was following the teaching of the Catholic Church in peacefully resisting this injustice, he was publicly rebuked by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Britain. He was put down not only for his actions on behalf of Bland, but also for his previous non-violent Rescues at abortion clinics. The disparagement of Father Morrow in 1993 goes a long way to explain why the Catholic resistance to the Culture of Death in Britain has been so ineffectual.

THIS IS THE STORY of one man's struggle against the culture of death in Britain in 1993. Between the Abortion Act of 1967 and the Bland Decision of 1993, which first made euthanasia legal, something like four million abortions took place in Britain, 85% of them on the specious ground that there was a risk to the woman's "physical and mental health."¹ By then the number of abortions every six years totaled twice the number of British casualties in WWII.² Next, the culture of death launched a new offensive in 1993 when the House of Lords ruled that a young comatose patient who was breathing on his own could be starved and dehydrated to death. The Bland decision parallels the recent

¹ Anonymous, "The Meaning of Life," Sunday Comment, *The Sunday Telegraph* (April 4, 1993), p. 22.

² Paul Goodman, "Human Rights versus Women's Rights," *The Sunday Telegraph* (April 4, 1993), p. 16.

American court decisions about Terri Schiavo. As with abortion, the euthanasia juggernaut would begin with the courts and eventually move to statutory law. The Bland decision led step by step to the Mental Capacity Act passed by Parliament in April 2005, an act legalizing euthanasia-by-omission.

Father James Morrow took direct action to save Tony Bland's life and afterwards tried to prosecute Tony's doctor for murder, for the sake of the hundreds of other patients henceforth at risk of being put to death by deliberate dehydration. Astonishingly, the Catholic bishops did not support Father Morrow. In fact, they criticized him for his actions on behalf of Tony Bland and for his three-year involvement with Rescue. Like the bishops of the 1530s who refused to support John Fisher against Henry VIII, they stood in awe of the legal system.

Yet they had to know that for a Christian, as Pope John Paul II emphasizes in *The Gospel of Life*, any civil law promoting abortion or euthanasia lacks all "validity." Such a law is not "morally binding," but only a "tragic caricature of legality," and the government enacting it a "Tyrant State."³

³ Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life* [*Evangelium Vitae*] §72 (New York NY: Times Books, Random House, 1995), p. 133; §20, p. 36.

Aquinas calls a civil law of this sort, which is opposed to natural law, *an act of violence*, and Pope John Paul II applies that phrase to any contemporary “civil law authorizing abortion or euthanasia.”⁴ The Pope insists that we have a “grave and clear obligation” to oppose such a law and that those prepared “even to be imprisoned” for opposing it show the “courage” that comes from God.⁵ In that encyclical he urges “everyone” to defend life, but especially the Catholic bishops, who are the “first ones called to be untiring preachers of the *Gospel of life*.” He tells them to give “particular attention” to abortion and euthanasia, so people will mobilize in a “united ethical effort” against what the Fathers of Vatican II had called “abominable crimes.”⁶ But in 1993, the Catholic bishops of Britain could not muster the courage to act in defense of life, and instead they rebuked the one who did.

Ordained in 1958 in Scotland, Father Morrow had participated in every sort of pro-life effort since 1967, yet had watched Britain sink ever lower into what he called the “sophisticated barbarism” of the

⁴ *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 93. a. 3, and q. 95, a. 2. Cited in *Gospel of Life* §72, p. 132.

⁵ *Gospel of Life*, §73, pp. 133-34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, §82, p. 147; § 85, p. 152; *Gaudium et Spes*, §51, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions, 1980), p. 955.

culture of death. In 1985 he founded Humanae Vitae House in Braemar, Scotland, unique for its uncompromising stand on life and for not ignoring, as others did in the U.K., the huge number of embryos killed by abortifacient contraceptives and by *in vitro* fertilization. In 1990, Father Morrow resigned as pastor to do full-time pro-life campaigning and rescuing. The media would soon describe him as “the leading anti-abortion activist in Britain”⁷ and “a thorn in the side of the authorities and the medical profession.”⁸

⁷ Gerald Warner, “Terminate Child Slaughter Now,” *The Sunday Times*, Scotland Supplement (April 4, 1993), [page number unavailable]. In addition, in the Catholic newspaper *The Universe* (July 11, 1993), p. 5, James Hastings calls Father Morrow “Britain’s best-known anti-abortion campaigner.”

⁸ Carlos Alba and Katherine Pacitti, “Why I’ll Go Ahead on Fan Murder Charge – Priest,” *The Press and Journal*, Aberdeen (March 5, 1993), p. 6.

In his autobiography entitled *Preaching Life* (PL), Father Morrow observes that by 1993 the voice of the British hierarchy on abortion had fallen to the “merest whimper.”⁹ Despite being the spiritual leaders of five million Catholics, the bishops had undertaken “very few initiatives for the protection of babies,” he writes, but had left the campaigning “to non-denominational societies” and refused to “force the issue of the babies on their own faithful and on the nation” (PL 190, 248). No bishop in Britain ever deigned to participate in a Rescue, though Mother Teresa herself came to the U.K. and joined one in Brighton in 1990 (PL 85). Nor would they give Father Morrow “a proper ecclesiastical appointment to fight for unborn children.” He was allowed to say Mass and administer the sacraments, but his pro-life work was “merely tolerated” (PL 180). As one writer in *The Times* put it: “[h]is Church, while proclaiming pro-life principles, effectively disowns him. On the day when a bishop blocks the door of an abortion clinic, the Church can make some plausible claim to renewal. In the meantime, Father Morrow stands alone. One just man has been found in Gomorrah.”¹⁰

⁹ Rev. James Morrow, *Preaching Life: Being much of my Autobiography* (Braemar, Scotland: Humanae Vitae House [Braemar, Scotland AB35 5YT], 2004), pp. 35, 63. Hereafter cited as PL.

¹⁰ Warner, op. cit.

Even worse, the Catholic hierarchy in Britain had spoken out against the Rescue movement from the start. In December 1989, the assistant secretary to the English Catholic hierarchy appeared on BBC to say, "Just because a law is unjust does not mean that you can ride roughshod over it." This is surprising, since three Popes (Pius XI, Pius XII, and John XXIII) had declared that when a government presumes by law to violate the fundamental rights of the human person, its "decrees" are "lacking in binding force."¹¹ Then *The Universe*, a newspaper "owned by the English Catholic Hierarchy," trotted out pro-abortion Diane Munday to denounce Father Morrow as "an arrogant fool" and "the type who would have approved of the burning of witches and delighted in the work of the Spanish Inquisition." Further, the press officer for the Archdiocese of Liverpool warned that Catholics must not use "direct action" or "break the law," but must try to change the law by "Parliamentary protest, pressure, and prayer." And last, the press officer of the Scottish hierarchy faulted Father Morrow for "breaches of the peace" in his Rescues (PL 57-58). The implication of these statements uttered in the name of the bishops (and not contradicted by them) was that civil law in Britain, however contrary to moral and divine law, was never to be met with non-violent passive resistance. On top of this, the Catholic hierarchy in England kept supporting *The Tablet* by selling it from their cathedrals, even though this paper had, since the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, continually undermined Church teaching. As late as 1994 there was still no "sound Catholic pro-life, pro-rescue weekly newspaper" in Britain, even among the diocesan-sponsored papers (PL 166).

In Rome, France, and America, cardinals would applaud direct action and bishops would participate in Rescues. In Rome in 1990, Cardinal Edouard Gagnon, appointed by Pope John Paul "to campaign against abortion," defended Rescue as offering a "sane and holy resistance" to a "false justice" that had become the "accomplice of crime." Rescuers, he said, were a "sign" given to a "materialistic and

¹¹ See *The Gospel of Life* §71 n94.

atheistic age" (PL 91).¹² In 1993 Cardinal Albert Decourtray, Archbishop of Lyons, joined five other cardinals in expressing support for Rescue, while "wholeheartedly" defending the French Rescue movement and calling it a legitimate "last resort" to prevent "the act of death." (PL 155). Cardinal O'Connor of New York, who founded the Sisters of Life, gave Father Morrow for his Rescues "his encouragement, his admiration and his blessing" (PL 129, 247). But no such support was available in Britain.

In a 1993 letter answering the criticisms of the Catholic hierarchy in the U.K., Father Morrow explained that it was "elementary Christianity" peacefully to block the doors of an abortion clinic and to "endure the violence with which abortionists and police retaliate," because no man-made law could make the divine law of charity "illegal" (PL 149-51). That same year, his own bishop would denounce him in the press for attempting to nip euthanasia in the bud.

THE TONY BLAND DECISION

¹² This was in the preface to the French edition of *You Reject Them, You Reject Me: The Prison Letters of Joan Andrews*, ed, Richard Cowden Guido (Manassas VA: Trinity Communications, 1988); the preface was translated into English by Miss T. Geach and Father J. Morrow. The Cardinal was President of the Pontifical Council for the Family. The French edition: *[Le] Cri étouffé, lettres de prison*, trans. Marie Cerbelaud Salagnac (Paris, France: Téqui, 1990).

On February 4, 1993, five law lords in the House of Lords unanimously upheld the Court of Appeal's ruling that Tony Bland, age 22, a comatose patient in West Yorkshire, could stop receiving food and water. The Lords made a distinction between *ordinary* and *medical* care and decreed that feeding Tony was *medical care* (PL 236). One lord even called Tony's feeding tubes "invasive medical procedures." The decision was "a great relief" to Tony's parents, and *The Times* hailed it as "the first right-to-die judgment."¹³ The press noted that there were a thousand or so in the same condition who cost the state £20 million a year. But Keith Davies of LIFE lamented that Tony had been put into "the jaws of the NHS's cost cutting piranhas."¹⁴

On February 13, the press reported that Father Morrow, "convinced" that the Bland ruling would "open the floodgates to mercy killings and euthanasia," had twice tried to speak to Tony Bland's parents and twice "had the door slammed in his face."¹⁵ He wanted to tell them that "there were people willing to take care of their son for the rest of his life, if they would allow it," and that they would only prolong their suffering the way they were going, since it would "eventually dawn

¹³ Richard Ford, "Doctors Given Right to End Living Death," *The Times* (Feb. 5, 1993), p. 3.

¹⁴ Jeremy Laurance, "Judgment Affects 1,000 Patients," *The Times* (Feb. 5, 1993), p. 3.

¹⁵ Graeme Smith, "'Guerrilla Tactics' in Priest's Pro-Life Battle," *The Herald*, Glasgow (March 5, 1993), p. 13.

on them" that they had "killed their son."¹⁶ As he wrote at the time in a newsletter to his supporters, there exists "no moral difference" between shooting someone and deliberately depriving him of food and water, and so it is "patent nonsense" to speak of a death by deliberate starvation as "allowing nature to take its course." Not only did Tony's doctor refuse to feed his patient, he would not let others feed him, "however laboriously," by giving him drops of glucose a teaspoon at a time (PL 140, 167). Unlike Father Pavone in Terri Schiavo's case, Father Morrow was not allowed into the hospital where Tony Bland lay dying.¹⁷

¹⁶ Frank Urquhart, "Preaching to the Despairing with Shock Tactics," *The Scotsman*, Home News (Feb. 13, 1993), p. 5.

¹⁷ Alba and Pacitti, p. 6.

On March 4, the press announced that Tony had died the previous evening, nine days after his "life-support systems" had been "switched off." They called him the 96th victim of the Hillsborough stadium disaster of April 15, 1989. His doctor Jim Howe told reporters that Tony's life had ended four years ago, that everyone felt "a great sense of relief," and that he had no qualms, because "nine senior British judges have chewed over the legal and moral arguments. It has been discussed endlessly in the newspapers and I think it is time to let it be."¹⁸ For Dr. Howe, the brand-new man-made law trumped the timeless moral law. At an inquest in December, the coroner declared that Tony had died from injuries sustained years earlier, and Father Morrow, who was present, was not allowed to cross-examine the witnesses (PL 163).

Right after Tony's death, the Catholic bishops in Britain failed to make it clear that a grave violation of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" had been committed. David Konstant, bishop of Leeds, in whose diocese Tony had died, merely said: "It is not fair for us to judge the personal morality of the decision individuals have taken. It can never be right to take the life of an innocent person, but Catholic teaching does not require that life should be prolonged by extraordinary means. The question is what constitutes extraordinary means."¹⁹ Thus he left it open to anyone's judgment whether deliberately starving and dehydrating someone to death was allowed by the moral law. And when he was interviewed by *The Times*, Bishop Konstant spoke as if Tony's death had

¹⁸ Frank Urquhart, "Priest Seeks Private Prosecution over Bland," *The Scotsman*, Home News (March 5, 1993), p. 3.

¹⁹ Cited by Colin Wright, "Bland Parents Mourn Mother [i.e., Tony's grandmother, who died in the same week as Tony]". Clipping from *Daily Mail* [page and date unavailable].

actually been beneficial to society: "It has pushed forward the boundaries of medicine and science. Whenever that happens there are always new moral and ethical questions to be considered."²⁰ He even added: "But I am certainly not in a position to criticise those who have taken the decision." Well, if he, the bishop in whose diocese this euthanasia-by-omission had been perpetrated, was not in a position to criticize, who was? This was surely no time, in the face of new form of judicial murder, to be irenic!

²⁰ Kate Alderson, "Tony Bland Doctor Asks Pro-Life Groups to Halt Protests," *The Times*, Home News (March 5, 1993), p. 3.

Some pro-lifers protested that the Bland decision was the first legalization of euthanasia in Britain. Keith Davies said LIFE was “totally opposed” to it: “We believe that future historians will look back at the Tony Bland case with horror.”²¹ Also, a spokesman for The Campaign against Medical Killing said, “Tony Bland will be remembered not as the last victim of the Hillsborough disaster, but as the first victim of legalised euthanasia.”²²

Father Morrow not only protested; he also acted. On the one hand, he called Tony Bland’s death a “crime against humanity” because “[a] helpless innocent has been deliberately deprived of his life by those appointed to care for him, with the full connivance and approval of public authorities, who have abandoned their sacred responsibilities.”²³ On the other, he announced that he would pursue a private prosecution for murder against Tony’s doctor, for otherwise “We face a holocaust similar to the abortion holocaust which began as a result of a court decision.” Dr. Howe dismissed as “foolish” such a private prosecution, insisting that Tony had died “after medical treatment was withdrawn.”²⁴

²¹ Urquhart, “Preaching to the Despairing,” p. 5.

²² Alderson, p. 3.

²³ “Living-Death Fan Tony Is at Peace / Furious Deeside Priest Says: I’ll Prosecute,” *The Press and Journal* (March 4, 1993), p. 1.

²⁴ “It’s Time to Let It Be, says Tony’s doctor,” *The Press and Journal* (March 5, 1993), p. 6. The same misrepresentation of food and water as “life support

Medical treatment? Father Morrow had hoped to argue in court that feeding, even by tube, was *ordinary*, not *extraordinary* care, and certainly not “medical treatment.” Meanwhile, Tony’s parents insisted his death had been “a dignified end” to his ordeal, ignoring the fact that he had been heavily drugged to hide his agony.²⁵

systems” is found also in “Let It Be, Bland’s Doctor Says,” *The Herald* (March 5, 1993), p. 9.

²⁵ Therese Halliday, Letter to the Editor, *The Press and Journal* (March 25, 1993), [page number not available].

Soon the British press got wind of the fact that the British hierarchy did not support Father Morrow. On March 5, a writer for *The Herald* remarked, "There are those within the Church who believe that Father Morrow's tactics are counter-productive and alienate the very people to whom the Church should be offering support." He cited a "spokesman" for the British Church who said, "Our sympathy goes out to the family of Tony Bland who had to make an incredibly difficult decision, and a decision which could not be made in an objective way."²⁶ Thus the British bishops let someone assert in their names—without contradicting him—that the death-by-dehydration of Tony Bland was not a terrible injustice that required repentance, but rather a painful, subjective decision that merited our sympathy. As with abortion, there was compassion for those who had killed, but not for the defenseless victim.

Then came this Peter's denial—the spokesman for the bishops said: "It is a very, very difficult case and consequently because Father Morrow is in this instance acting as an individual, he is not representing the Catholic Church."²⁷ In fact, Father Morrow *was* representing the Catholic Church, while the hierarchy in Britain was departing from its teachings. For in the 1980 *Declaration on Euthanasia*, the Church had declared that the decision to deprive an innocent person of his life is always morally evil, and no "authority" can "legitimately recommend or permit such an action."²⁸ This is what Father Morrow was making clear.

²⁶ Graeme Smith, p. 13.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Cited in *The Gospel of Life* §57, p. 102.

It should have been the task of the bishops to make it thunderously clear as well.

Soon there followed a second Peter's denial, this one from the bishop of Aberdeen, Mario Conti, who declared that Father Morrow's actions in the Bland case in no way represented the Catholic Church: "I can understand how Father Morrow feels. He has dedicated his life to the Pro-Life cause. He is simply acting to his own conscience, and his action in no way represents the Diocese of Aberdeen for the Catholic Church." This was to say that Father Morrow was being subjective, whereas in fact he was embodying in his actions the objective and perennial teaching of the Church. In the same article the reporter hinted that Father Morrow had been pressured to resign as pastor in 1990 because of his involvement with Rescue: "He surrendered his parish two years ago to concentrate on the pro-life cause—he denies he was forced out because he was an embarrassment to the Church."²⁹ *An embarrassment to the Church*. Here we see how human respect prevented the British hierarchy from supporting Father Morrow's actions on behalf both of the unborn children about to be aborted and the comatose patients about to be dehydrated to death.

Later that month, Bishop Conti spoke twice in public against Father Morrow. His comments were published in two Scottish newspapers, *The Press and Journal* and the *Scottish Observer*. The bishop of Aberdeen complained that Father Morrow's "pro-active and law-confronting tactics" aroused controversy "not only outside of, but also within the Catholic Church." In a cruel cut, he said the bishop of Paisley was "apparently content to see him [Father Morrow] at some distance from home," while his host bishop of Aberdeen (Conti himself) found that "the support once given his Pro-life Retreat and Study Centre" was by now "stretched to the breaking point."³⁰ By the *support once given*, the bishop alluded to the fact that earlier, in 1990, he had affirmed that "direct, non-violent action" against abortion was "compatible with

²⁹ Alba and Pacitti, p. 6.

³⁰ "Bishop Breaks His Silence: Church Position on Father Morrow Clarified," *The Press and Journal* (April 24, 1993), p. 6.

Christian moral teaching” (PL 161). But when he saw how “incensed” his fellow bishops became when Father Morrow “invaded” their dioceses to speak out against abortion and euthanasia, he drew back from supporting the crusading pro-life priest.³¹

³¹ Ibid.

An editorial in the same issue of *The Press and Journal* praised Bishop Conti for finally breaking his silence after the many Morrow-inspired headlines “must have caused extreme discomfiture to the Catholic Church.” *Discomfiture!* In the face of the new attack on life in the Tony Bland decision, the British church was not indignant against legal tyranny, but only *discomfited* at Father Morrow’s actions! The editorial then praised the bishop of Aberdeen for being “astute” in his assessment—“astute, because that is pretty much how the public has come to see Father Morrow.” Thus, sad to say, Bishop Conti’s judgment of Father Morrow was in line with public opinion, the same public opinion that approved of the Bland decision³² and, in a 1993 poll, was 76% in favor of abortion in case an unborn child had a handicap.³³

At the end of that same month, Bishop Conti attacked Father Morrow again in a talk he gave to the LIFE march in St Andrew’s Cathedral, Glasgow. The *Scottish Catholic Observer* quoted him as making a derogatory comparison between LIFE’s “effective” campaign and “the confrontation, polarising tactics of the Rescue movement.” The bishop found it “very doubtful” that Rescuers were “effective, or more

³² “Bishop’s View of Morrow,” *The Press and Journal* (April 24, 1993), [page number unavailable].

³³ Paul Cuddihy, “Rescue Tactics Are Questioned,” *Scottish Catholic Observer* (April 30, 1993), p. 1.

effective" than LIFE. What Rescues "will not effect," he declared, "is a change of public opinion sufficient to change the law. In my opinion, it merely heightens confrontation between the committed on either side of the debate and exasperates those who might otherwise be gradually won over to the cause."³⁴

³⁴ Ibid.

This was spoken in Archbishop Winning's archdiocese of Glasgow, and the answer was printed in the archdiocesan journal called *Flourish*. Hugh Dougherty interviewed Father Morrow and was "struck by the sharp logic of the man." Dougherty hit the nail on the head when he wrote that Catholics in the U.K., and especially the bishops, lacked the courage of their convictions, whereas Father Morrow's "brand of Catholicism is a very public expression of belief. It does not take the easy road of keeping our heads down which most of us adopt as we try to keep our religion as far apart as possible from the nitty gritty of life..." Dougherty admitted that British Catholics feared any "conflict with the law of the country." And yet, he added, "[r]escuing unborn babies from being killed, and dissuading mothers from being party to taking the life of their child, is Christianity in action." He urged "the Church" to "rethink its position on Father Morrow." The bishops are making pronouncements on everything "from trade union rights to poverty," he said, but "for Father Morrow, actively carrying out the most basic child protection activity of all, there is nothing more than an embarrassed shuffle away from his activities." *An embarrassed shuffle!* How will God judge "us," Dougherty concluded, for not joining the Rescue picket line, for "turning a blind eye to abortion, and relegating Father Morrow to the status of dangerous fanatic"?³⁵

In another defense of Father Morrow, the Aberdeen solicitor Gerald Cunningham, like Hugh Dougherty, faulted the British bishops for lack of courage. He wrote that "if prominent people such as Bishop Conti, who know what goes on in these [abortion] centres, had the courage of their convictions on the pro-life issues and confronted the establishment by legal means," demanding "full public knowledge of the facts," there would be no need for Father Morrow's Rescues.³⁶

The public was much in need of bishops who would inform their consciences. People in Braemar were polled about Tony Bland's death

³⁵ Hugh Dougherty, "The Need for Action," *Flourish* (May 1993) [page number unavailable].

³⁶ Gerald Cunningham, Letters to the Editor, *The Press and Journal* (May 5, 1993), p.10.

and virtually all of them said it was a “relief.” One Catholic woman affirmed it was not “Christian” to prolong Tony’s life, and she wanted Bishop Conti to “get rid of Father Morrow altogether” instead of “pretending none of this has anything to do with the Catholic Church.”³⁷

So here was a Catholic who knew that the local bishop had disowned Father Morrow, but had no idea that the Catholic Church, in the Vatican II Council (*Gaudium et Spes* §51), had condemned such a death by deliberate starvation as an *abominable crime*. What a failure of catechesis! One brave woman in Aberdeen defended Father Morrow for awakening consciences and compared Tony Bland to the “speechless and defenceless” unborn child whose life depends on parents and doctors.”³⁸

³⁷ “Spare Parents Anguish of a New Court Case,” *The Press and Journal* (March 5, 1993), p. 6.

³⁸ Mrs Norma Campbell of Aberdeen, Letters to the Editor, *The Press and Journal* (March 25, 1993) [page number unavailable].

Father Morrow's response to the flood of public criticism was succinct: "If Tony Bland died of natural causes, then I am indeed an uncaring, unchristian, distressing, hurtful, terrible, errant priest urgently needing to be brought into line by any bishop who can manage to do it. If, however, Tony was murdered, then my efforts to save his life, and now the lives of many others who are poised to share his fate, are at the very core of Christianity."³⁹ To the accusation that his tactics were "polarising," he replied: "you either love all your neighbours, without exception, or you abandon Christianity and all civilised standards. The more polarisation, the better."⁴⁰

The British bishops were convinced that Christian love meant never having a confrontation. In the month of April 1993, Nuala Scarisbrick, a founder of LIFE and a columnist for *The Universe*, the newspaper owned by the English Hierarchy, attacked Father Morrow for his Rescues. She condemned "the scuffles and shouting inevitably involved with the tactics imported by Rescue America, or by any confrontational picketing," because these "do not convey love, care, and understanding of women's problems." She said she feared the "bad image of Rescue" would "rub off" on LIFE and jeopardize their "ready acceptance into schools." She was perfectly willing to spend years "calmly telling the truth" until someday by and by, abortion would go the way of slavery and child labor.⁴¹ Meanwhile, of course, babies and comatose patients

³⁹ "Father Morrow Replies," *The Press and Journal*, Letters to the Editor (March 25, 1993) [page number unavailable].

⁴⁰ "Father Morrow Clarifies," *The Press and Journal*, Letters to the Editor (May 3, 1993), p. 10.

⁴¹ Nuala Scarisbrick, "Compassion, not Confrontation," *The Universe* (April 11,

would be put to death, but she did not mention that fact. As for the scuffles and confrontations involved in Rescue, one journalist hit the mark by saying, "The truly distressing and violent scenes are enacted inside abortion clinics, not on their doorsteps."⁴²

1993), p. 4.

⁴² Gerald Warner, *op. cit.*

In reply to Scarisbrick, Father Morrow wrote, "What message does she have for the babies, now safely born alive and growing up, who were rescued by us at abortion centres? Will she tell them it would have been better if they had not been born?" He found it "sad" that "many Catholics and pro-lifers still refuse to support our efforts when even the secular media is beginning to grasp the rationale of our getting between an assailant and his victim."⁴³

THE SEQUEL

On March 16, 1993, Father Morrow went to Bingley Magistrates' Court, laid a complaint that Dr. Jim Howe had "murdered his patient Tony Bland by starvation and dehydration," and sought to bring a private prosecution against him, because the criminal law had not been altered by the ruling of the House of Lords. However, it was immediately reported in the press that "the Attorney General has promised Dr. Howe that he will interfere with any private prosecution and ensure that it does not proceed." Should this be so, Father Morrow responded, then an officer of the Crown in charge of enforcing the law had pledged "to pervert the course of justice" (PL 139). Morrow lost his appeal for legal aid. Later, when he appeared at the High Court in London on April 13, he was not allowed to present his full case. The judges left the room to read the Lords' decision on Tony Bland and then, when they came back, simply refused to let him proceed to the Queen's Bench divisional court (PL 144,166).

⁴³ Letter to the Editor, *The Universe* (April 12, 1993), reprinted in *Preaching Life*, p. 143.

In 1995, Pope John Paul II issued his encyclical *The Gospel of Life*, a work that amply supports the Rescue movement by declaring that any civil law permitting abortion and euthanasia is invalid and not morally binding. In a newsletter that year, Father Morrow invited his supporters to compare his earlier *Programme for Life* with the new encyclical and see that “the Holy Father could scarcely have written a better Encyclical for me if he had tried. He contradicts none of my principles, endorses most of them explicitly and some implicitly but very clearly” (PL 210). Even so, the British Hierarchy did not soon change course. In 1996, they published *The Common Good*, in which they dismissed as single-issue politics a grass-root effort to elect pro-life candidates. They were oblivious to the fact, Father Morrow observed, that to end abortion would be to inaugurate “a whole new society” (PL 252). As a consequence to their failure, a Catholic newspaper observed in 2001 that in the recent election “the silence of the churches on pro-life and pro-family issues stood out,” adding, “One might at least have supposed that the churches would have raised these issues from the pulpit. But, with a few exceptions, there was nothing.”⁴⁴

How does one account for such a complete failure to uphold the Church’s teaching on abortion and euthanasia? Father Morrow said of the British bishops, especially in England, that they were in “Contraceptive Schism” with Rome (PL 279). In *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II noted that the pro-abortion culture is particularly strong where the Church’s teaching on contraception is rejected.⁴⁵ In Britain, the Catholic bishops themselves rejected that teaching for decades. When the Vatican Council for the Family in 1994 denounced “supposedly contraceptive pills as abortifacient” and demanded “the *full* protection of the law for the child in the womb,” the response in the U.K. was a panel of “unsound” speakers at “a public meeting promoted by the English hierarchy to celebrate the Year of the Family” (PL 178, 184).

In 1998, Cardinal Hume was “persuaded to give his blessing

⁴⁴ Phyllis Bowman, “Why This Humiliation of William Hague?” *The Catholic Herald* (June 15, 2001), p. 6.

⁴⁵ *Gospel of Life*, §13, p. 23.

privately to some regular pavement counselors who got near enough to him to ask," but he admonished them by saying, "no violence." When he heard of it, Father Morrow commented: "As far as we are concerned this admonition was quite superfluous. All the violence comes from the other side" (PL 280). Then in 1999, on the eve of his death, Cardinal Hume made a public statement about the "disaster" of contraception. Sadly, Father Morrow could not remember when that Cardinal or any English bishop had previously raised this matter in a pastoral letter (PL 302).

Finally, in May 2004, the Catholic Bishops published *Cherishing Life*, in which they spoke together against contraception—35 years after the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*—and acknowledged that "some chemical contraceptives" kill embryos by preventing them from implanting (PL 337). It was too little too late. By then, contraceptives were being handed out to schoolgirls aged ten, and Parliament was at a farther frontier in the culture of death—it was on the verge of legalizing euthanasia-by-omission in the Mental Incapacity Bill of 2005.

Father Morrow sees our age as engulfed beyond all others in a "sickening moral decadence." While sin has been around since the dawn of the human race, our age is unique, because "the avalanche is something new and the legalization of sin (however invalid) equally new. The ruins and ashes of our countries are there for all to see." And yet, in spite of this, our age is uniquely a "time of grace," because virtues that could not be practiced in Eden "are on offer in the wilderness." Father Morrow believes the garden can be restored if Catholics will mobilize the world over. After all, there are around a billion Catholics on the planet, and if a large proportion of them joined the struggle for life, the culture of death, like Communism, would be overturned in a day. Is it an impossible dream to hope that Catholics will summon up "all the spiritual resources we inherit from Christ and his Church" and fully expose the lies that support abortion and euthanasia? (PL 329, 273, 34)

Pope John Paul wrote that Catholic bishops are the "first ones called to be untiring preachers of the *Gospel of Life*." They must preach in season and out of season, rebuking, exhorting, and drawing "particular attention" to abortion and euthanasia, above all other types of

injustices.⁴⁶ Tragically, in Britain, this call has gone unheeded, yet not for lack of a prophet. Father Morrow is surely a sign of contradiction to our age, a modern Elijah who has shown Christians the way to stand up to this new Jezebel—the atheist State erecting itself against God—and to resist the tyranny of its statutes that brazenly affront the divine and unalterable moral law.

NOTES

I wish to acknowledge Dave Parry, of Braemar, Scotland, for his generous, invaluable help in sending me his collection of newspaper articles from 1993 on which this essay is based. Dave has worked for the pro-life cause for forty years (starting in 1966, after the Second Reading of what became the 1967 Abortion Act) and for *Humanae Vitae* House for twenty years. Recently he prepared the index for Father Morrow's autobiography, *Preaching Life* (2005). His email address is dparry@toucansurf.com.

⁴⁶ *Gospel of Life*, §82, pp. 146-47; §85, p. 152.