



The Case of Charlie Gard



The matter of the English baby Charlie Gard and his parents has meant both pain and hope for all of us.

We feel close to him, to his mother, his father, and all those who have cared for him and struggled together with him until now. For them, and for those who are called to decide their future, we raise to the Lord of Life our prayers, knowing that “in the Lord our labor will not be in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:58)

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales issued a statement today that recognizes above all the complexity of the situation, the heartrending pain of the parents, and the efforts of so many to determine what is best for Charlie. The Bishops' statement also reaffirms that “we should never act with the deliberate intention to end a human life, including the removal of nutrition and hydration, so that death might be achieved” but that “we do, sometimes, however, have to recognize the limitations of what can be done, while always acting humanely in the service of the sick person until the time of natural death occurs.”

The proper question to be raised in this and in any other unfortunately similar case is this: what are the best interests of the patient? We must do

what advances the health of the patient, but we must also accept the limits of medicine and, as stated in paragraph 65 of the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, avoid aggressive medical procedures that are disproportionate to any expected results or excessively burdensome to the patient or the family. Likewise, the wishes of parents must be heard and respected, but they too must be helped to understand the unique difficulty of their situation and not be left to face their painful decisions alone. If the relationship between doctor and patient (or parents as in Charlie's case) is interfered with, everything becomes more difficult and legal action becomes a last resort, with the accompanying risk of ideological or political manipulation, which is always to be avoided, or of media sensationalism, which can be sadly superficial.

Dear Charlie, dear parents Chris Gard and Connie Yates, we are praying for you and with you.

✠ Vincenzo Paglia
President