

Alfie doctors were right to rebuff Pope, says cardinal

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England's most senior Catholic has set himself at odds with the Pope over the case of Alfie Evans, the sick toddler who died on Saturday, backing the British doctors and judges who decided to end his treatment.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the head of the Catholic church in England and Wales, said that some of the groups who campaigned about Alfie did so for political aims and "didn't serve the good of the child".

He also disagreed with the Pope's view that Alfie should have been offered further treatment for his degenerative brain condition after doctors and judges deemed that it would not be in the toddler's best interests.

The position of English bishops has

brought them into direct conflict with the Pope and Catholic bishops in the US, who supported the Pope's position.

The Pope met Alfie's father, Tom Evans, in Rome last month and said: "It is our duty to do all that is possible to safeguard life." He also tweeted last week: "I renew my appeal that the suffering of his parents may be heard and that their decision to seek new forms of treatment may be granted."

His comments are believed to have been instrumental in the Italian government's move to grant Alfie Italian citizenship, hoping to facilitate a transfer to a hospital in Rome.

Speaking on a visit to Poland, Cardinal Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster, backed the decision of doctors and judges, and told a news agency: "The church says very clearly we do not have a moral obligation to continue a

severe therapy when it's having no effect, while the church's catechism also teaches that palliative care, which isn't a denial of help, can be an act of mercy."

Alfie, who had spent more than a year in a semi-vegetative state, was taken off life support on April 23 and died on April 28.

Cardinal Nichols said: "Wisdom enables us to make decisions based on full information, and many people have taken a stand on Alfie's case in recent weeks who didn't have such information and didn't serve the good of this child. Unfortunately, there were also some who used the situation for political aims."

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales last month backed staff at Alder Hey. The group and the Vatican declined to comment on the difference of opinion.