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From the Editor's Desk



“Choose Life”

What are we to think of when we see seminars, medical journals and the media talking about physician-assisted suicides, euthanasia, fetal experimentation, abortion, etc.? As Catholic physicians who are sworn to uphold the dignity and sacredness of human life, who are devoted to our Hippocratic traditions, we are appalled by these violations of everything we hold sacred and dear. It is difficult for us to understand how our colleagues and society can hold to these positions which are destructive of our fellowman and ultimately of our society.

When we no longer value the life of our neighbor, we no longer value our own and set the stage for our own destruction. To me, this modern utilitarian philosophy which permeates society is responsible for the present medical-moral morass in which we struggle. Where the end justifies the means, where the individual counts for nothing, where the social engineers decide what is best for society, we have the scenario for ultimate degradation of society. We no longer see lived out the sacredness and dignity of the human individual being sanctioned by society. When God, Who is the source of our sacredness and dignity, is replaced by society, we see the root cause of our present sorry state. Where society is no longer answerable to God, its Creator, but only to itself, we have a formula for utter chaos, tyranny, and enslavement of the individual.

Take, for example, physician-assisted suicide as practiced in the Netherlands. While these cases are done under the rubric of “mercy killing”,

it is already apparent that many are done involuntarily. It is a short step to eliminate those who are unproductive in our society. One must recall this policy as practiced in Germany in the 1930s by the German medical profession. One must never forget that this policy was begun by the medical profession and adopted by Adolf Hitler. It began with defective infants and mentally ill and wound up eliminating millions of Jews, Gypsies, political dissidents and others who opposed the state. Once one forsakes the sacredness and dignity of human life for the individual, no one is safe.

In the realm of fetal experimentation in which live fetuses are used, we have an even greater violation of human dignity. For here, the human fetus is not even given the right to live and reach its potential. The human fetus is fair game for those among us who wish to use its tissues for some human benefit. They are treated as "material" for another's benefit. Talk about a distortion of values. The end justifies the means. And yet we have serious discussions of this going on among medical and scientific groups.

Can we look to the medical profession for protection and an assertion of the dignity and sacredness of human life? I think not. The medical profession has become part of the problem, having adopted the utilitarian philosophy as much as has the rest of the world. The medical profession has abandoned its ethic and reduced itself to mere technicians and implementers of the utilitarian ethic. It is no longer concerned about the individual. It is concerned with scientific progress with no holds barred. It can no longer be counted upon to protect the individual.

It would not surprise me that if euthanasia is legalized in this country, the medical profession will go along with it, saying, "If it is legal, it is ethical." The AMA did this with abortion and will do it with euthanasia.

It seems to me that society would do well to stand with the Catholic Church, which is virtually the only institution which stands four-square behind the sacredness and dignity of human life. It has done this in season and out of season for centuries, against all comers. It is the only sane voice in this corrupt and crumbling world. There are many people of good will who stand with the Church in these perilous times. To them, the Church stands as a beacon. There are many physicians who look with dismay at what is happening and who stand fast to medicine's traditional ethic. There are many in society who look with apprehension at what is going on. With all of these, we look to the future, bearing in mind the words of hope that were uttered centuries ago by Moses in his farewell to the Jews who were to enter the promised land just before he died. "I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live in the love of Yahweh, your God, obeying his voice, clinging to him, for in this life consists, and on this depends your long stand in the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he would give them." (Deuteronomy 30:19-20.) And so as we look to the future with Moses, we should always choose life and prevail not only in this world but also in the next.

— John P. Mullooly, M.D.