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The Physician As Priest

Rev. Charles P. Carroll

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The physician can serve as priest only if he takes quite seriously the words "what is happening to our people is the way back to Auschwitz."¹ These words, spoken by West German Parliament member Hartwig Holzgartner can be, and will be, lightly dismissed by many.² But they cannot be dismissed by those who know our common history.

What happened in Germany was not the result of a momentary aberration in the life of a great people. It was rather the culminating event of 150 years in the history of the West.³

Since the Reformation and the division of Christendom, power has continued to flow from church to state, and the de-divinization of the state which began with Augustine's *City of God* has come to an abrupt end in the totalitarian states of the 20th century. When Roland Friesler, president of the People's Court in the last years of the Third Reich, said: "We demand the whole man," he was simply articulating a truth which could no longer be denied.⁴

What has brought us to this state? Why could the events of 1933 to 1945 in Germany be repeated anywhere within those nations comprised by Western civilization?

First, the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the subsequent secularization were all precursors of this development. The French Revolution with its enthronement of the goddess of reason in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, the Enlightenment with its adulation of reason and its failure to recognize man's capacity for evil, and the secularization of monasteries, convents and other church property which served as prelude to the secularization of the European mind in the 19th century⁵ turned the West from adherence to the *Corpus Christianum* in its promulgation of the law, from belief in the sovereignty of God to assertion of the sovereignty of man, and finally, from theism which consoled and strengthened the faithful to a deism which left man vulnerable to the inexorable laws of history, the class struggle, and natural selection.⁶

Concomitant with these developments was another of no less importance, and that was the growth of romanticism and the emergence of the irrational.

As the world moved from an emphasis upon being to an emphasis upon becoming, these events served as harbingers of the new world in creation.⁷

In the early part of the 19th century, the German philosopher Hegel first articulated his principle of mediation. This, which he envisaged as a struggle between ideas, Marx was later to envisage as a struggle between classes, and still later Kuhn in his *Structures of Scientific Revolutions* envisaged as a struggle between paradigms in the evolutionary development of scientific theory and advance.⁸

A simultaneous development which was little observed and seldom studied was the relationship between *industrialism*, militarism and materialism that accompanied the growth of social Darwinism. Industrialism not only disrupted family life, but in its ultimate consequences it also forced man to a reappraisal of his priorities and values which stemmed from belief in the transcendent. The question posed to him was: is the primary community the family, or the state? Or phrased in another way, the individual or the collective?

In the development of the law in the 19th and 20th centuries, we see Germany struggle with the historical school of jurisprudence of Friedrich Carl von Savigny through the Neo-Kantian school of Rudolf Stammler to the unequivocal assertion of law as the expression of the sovereign's will by Carl Schmitt.⁹ The tragic failure of these efforts is to be seen in the life of Gustav Radbruch, a distinguished German jurist, member of the Social Democratic Party, former minister of justice of the Weimar Republic, former professor of law at the Universities of Berlin and Heidelberg, who time and again during the republican period, fought for liberalization of the abortion laws and only with war's end became aware of the tragic consequences of Germany's abandonment of the natural law.¹⁰ Even those who found themselves at the beginning of the Nazi period in positions of importance in the German judicial system harbored fears of the ultimate consequences of the descent from absolutes into the inferno of the relative. Erwin Bumke, chief justice of the German Supreme Court, in writing a colleague on Jan. 6, 1932, a year before Hitler's assumption of power, declared, "The thought that my name should be connected with a period in the history of the Supreme Court which must signify its decline and fall is for me an unbearable thought . . ." ¹¹ He continued in his position as chief justice until 1944, when he took his own life.

His brother, Oswald Bumke, a distinguished psychiatrist and professor of medicine, in discerning a tendency toward an economically determined ethic in medicine, had said a year earlier in a meeting with his colleagues in Munich: ". . . please for God's sake leave our present

financial needs out of all these considerations. This is a problem which concerns the entire future of our people, indeed, one may say without being over emotional about it, the entire future of humanity: . . . to introduce economic points of view is not only inappropriate but outright dangerous because the logical consequence of the thought that for financial reasons all the human beings who could be dispensed with for the moment should be exterminated, is a quite monstrous logical conclusion: we would then have to put to death not only the mentally sick and the psychopathic personality but all the crippled . . . , (and those) . . . who do not work,"¹²

Role Becomes Clear

The role played by *militarism* in these developments becomes transparently clear when one reflects upon the abandonment of any concept of war in which there was a clear-cut division between combatants and non-combatants.

While this concern was still given lip service in Napoleon's proclamation of "The Nation In Arms," even that distinction completely disappeared with Dr. Goebbel's declaration of "total war" in his Sports Palast speech in Berlin, Feb. 19, 1943, after the Soviets had stalled the German advance at Stalingrad.¹³

War also provided means for justifying the most extreme eugenic measures. In his discussion of "The Structure of Public Health in the Third Reich," Dr. Arthur Guett, who assumed office as director of Public Health in the Ministry of the Interior in 1933, said: ". . . ill-conceived 'love of neighbor' has to disappear, especially in relation to inferior or asocial creatures. It is the supreme duty of a national state to grant life and livelihood only to the healthy and hereditarily sound portion of the people . . . the life of the individual has meaning only in the light of that ultimate aim" ¹⁴ In his commentary upon "The Law for the Prevention of Congenitally Ill Progeny" in 1933,¹⁵ in which he was joined by Dr. Ernst Rudin, a physician, and Dr. Falk Ruttke, an attorney, allusion was made not only to the German experience in World War I, but also to Mr. Justice Holmes's decision in *Buck v. Bell* in 1927.¹⁶ On page 53 of that commentary, the following words from Mr. Holmes's decision are cited:

We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the state for these lesser sacrifices, often not felt to be such by those concerned, in order to prevent our being swamped with incompetents. It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes.

When one realizes that compulsory sterilization led to the castration or induced infertility of almost 100,000 German men and women in the 18 months from July, 1934 to January, 1936;¹⁷ when one further realizes that by administrative regulation the equation of eugenic with medical indications for abortion led to the compulsory abortion of almost 1,000 women in that same period;¹⁸ when one realizes that in the war years female workers from eastern Europe employed in the war industries of the Reich were forced to submit to monthly intra-uterine examinations, and if found pregnant, be *aborted*;¹⁹ when one realizes that as early as 1934 plans were made for compulsory euthanasia which led to the liquidation of a minimum of 60,000²⁰ Germans and a maximum of 275,000²¹ (the first estimate, that of the chief defendant in "The Medical Case" at Nuremberg; the second, the estimate of the Czechoslovakian War Crimes Commission); and when one finally realizes that this program led to the desensitization of the German medical profession which made possible the Holocaust (by the admission of Simon Wiesenthal of the Documentation Center in Vienna, who brought Adolf Eichmann to justice),²² it is no longer difficult to realize the idea lurking behind use of the phrase "*human material*"²³ or the validity of Hegel's contention that "the idea is not so impotent as to amount to no more than an idea."²⁴

At no point does this become clearer than in the study of the drift from sterilization, abortion and euthanasia upon demand of the patient in the 1920s to the same upon the demand of the state in the late 30s and early 40s, and in no one instance does the well-intentioned person's failure to reckon with man's capacity for evil become more evident than in the study of a dental weekly of 1925 which recommended the extraction of gold crowns, fillings and dentures from the dead prior to burial to ease the burden of German war debts and reparation payments,²⁵ and in the reading of the letter written in 1943 recounting the extraction of gold from the mouths of Israel and Sarah Tichauer *prior* to the "action," a euphemism for extermination.²⁶

These unhappy events did not come about by chance. Social Darwinism in America came to us through Herbert Spencer of England and Albert Galloway Keller of Yale. It led to an acceptance of "rugged individualism" and the concept of the blessing of the fittest. As Richard Hofstadter in his *Social Darwinism in American Thought* reported, John D. Rockefeller could say in a Sunday school address: "The growth of a large business is merely a survival of the fittest. . . . The American Beauty rose can be produced in the splendor and fragrance which bring cheer to its beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grow up around it. This is not an evil tendency in business. It is merely the working-out of a law of nature and a law of God."²⁷

If, as Hegel contends in his *Reason in History*, history is a "slaughter-bench,"^{28, 29} it would appear that the "world-historical

individual" feels that he "may treat other great and even sacred interests inconsiderately" and "must trample down many an innocent flower, . . ." ³⁰

The social Darwinism that became *au courant* in Germany, however, went far beyond rugged individualism. ³¹ While Darwin did not interest himself in a social application of his theory, his cousin, Sir Francis Galton, did. It was through him that social Darwinism came to Germany where it was propagated by Prof. Ernst Haeckel. ³² Given the soil on which these ideas fell, which was prepared by the Comte de Gobineau in his essay on "The Inequality of the Races" and the subsequent writings of Houston Stewart Chamberlain in his *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, eugenics became a cult and the monists who supported such policies, a political force. They, perhaps aware of the ends to which the ideas would be carried, perhaps because of Nazi policy, disbanded shortly after Hitler's seizure of power. ³³

Zmarzlik's Sensitive Writing

No one has written with greater sensitivity and perceptivity about these developments than Hans-Guenter Zmarzlik in "Social Darwinism in Germany, Seen as a Historical Problem." ³⁴ Describing the social Darwinist's view of man, he wrote: "His personal worth is derived first from his biological origin and then from his biological efficiency. The inviolable and indivisible dignity of man is degraded to the level of a variable, measurable against the standard of what is desirable for the health of the people and subject to regulation by correction and planning. Thus almost imperceptibly the individual becomes *human material*, and the road is opened to State policies that ultimately equate the right to live with biological utility." ^{35, 36}

With the abandonment of the Hippocratic oath, with the denigration of the classics (particularly the works of Plato and Aristotle) and their selective use in support of racial hygiene; with the substitution of Schopenhauer's "pity" for "caritas," the rejection of love of God and love of neighbor led to the emergence of sentimentality; the denial of the humanity of the other, to the emergence of brutality; and the denial of the faith, to the emergence of the occult. Nowhere does this become clearer than in Alfred Rosenberg's *Myth of the Twentieth Century*. ³⁷ The reclamation of the German gods that began with Richard Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*, ³⁸ achieved its philosophical expression in this work and its theological expression in the cult of the blood as practiced on Party Day in Nuremberg. Having no other sources from which to borrow, the liturgy in "The Cathedral of Light" (a term used by Albert Speer) ³⁹ was redolent with Christian images. After the Fuehrerrede (speech of the Fuehrer) which served as the

sermon, came the solitary march of Nazism's high priest through the ranks of his followers to the open air "sanctuary" in which the blutfahne (blood flag) was held by one of his "acolytes." This flag which was "hallowed" by the blood of those who fell in the attempted putsch of 1923, was held aloft as one battery of loudspeakers read the names of those who had fallen in the course of the revolution. As each and every name was solemnly pronounced, a brief period of silence was observed, and then from still another battery of loudspeakers in no less solemn and dignified tones came the reply: "You are not dead. You live in Germany." With this, the "sacrament" had been observed and the "resurrection" proclaimed. As the eschatology of Marxism demanded the "withering away of the state," the eschatology of the Third Reich demanded the belief that "you are nothing, your people is everything" and in them is your salvation.⁴⁰

The new gnosticisms, of which Marxism and social Darwinism are the best known examples, are precisely so disturbing because in the "hard competitive struggle of persuasion . . . (these are the) only two (which) have come out on top and essentially defeated all others: the ideology which interprets history as an economic struggle of classes, and the other that interprets history as a natural fight of races."⁴¹ That social Darwinism has assumed many guises and that the social Darwinism we encounter today simply proclaims "biologism" should not blind us to the affinity that Marx felt for Darwin.⁴² A distant relative and custodian of Darwin's library informed me on Dec. 28, 1960 at luncheon at the Brown Hotel on Albemarle Street in London that the noted father of evolutionary theory had received a copy from Marx of one of his most famous works, but the young Darwin with whom I lunched noted with interest that it had never been opened. Hannah Arendt, in the book previously mentioned, appeared to substantiate the Marxists' desire for a relationship in claiming that Engels could not think of a greater compliment to Marx's scholarly achievement than to call him the "Darwin of History."⁴³

In looking back on the immediate past it would be difficult to disagree with Raul Hilberg's assessment of *The Destruction of the European Jews* in which he claims that definition led to concentration, concentration to expropriation and expropriation to extermination.⁴⁴ Language is important.⁴⁵ We first must be defined out of existence before we can be exterminated. Looking back upon the last century and a half, it would appear that we today can say: first, secularization; then denigration; and finally, extirpation. The secularization of the Church's institutions which led to the secularization of the European and the Western mind has led to the abandonment of the doctrine of the separation of state and church and to the establishment of a new doctrine of the separation of church *from* state and with it the divorce of morality and law. The Greeks presumed that the morality of the citizen was the object of the law. Today, law views

citizens' obedience and acceptance of its policies as the sole object of its legislation. The pluralism that was protected by the *consensus iuris* is threatened by the creeping singularism which no longer presupposes this basic consent.⁴⁶

It is as true here today as it was in 1933 in Germany that "the capacity to differentiate between the Christian and unchristian (has) been lost." It is no less true that "the 'unchristianity' of Hitler and National Socialism in programme and practice could not have been overlooked had one not already been blind."⁴⁷

The denigration of the Christian faith was an essential element in the secularization process and this was aided and abetted by denigration and misuse of Plato and Aristotle. Hans F. K. Guenther in his book, *Plato as Protector of Life: Plato's Thoughts Upon Breeding and Education and Their Significance for the Present Day*,⁴⁸ which was published in Munich by J. F. Lehmann in 1928, cites Plato's *Republic* in substantiation of his claims no less than 11 times.⁴⁹ No mention is made by Guenther of Thrasymachus' exchange with Socrates on the nature of justice (in Book I, 351-354); or Adeimantus' and Socrates' exchange (in Book II); or Socrates' insistence upon the need of temperance and justice (in Book IV, 430); or Socrates' comment "that the State in which the rulers are most reluctant to govern is always the best and most quietly governed and the State in which they are most eager, the worst" (Book VII, 520), or that the tyrant "has to be a master of others when he is not a master of himself" (Book IX, 579); or Socrates on the need of absolutes (Book VI, 495).⁵⁰

Priest Espoused Sterilization

Unhappily, this desire to demean Plato and Aristotle was not limited to those outside the Church. Father Joseph Mayer, who espoused the cause of eugenic sterilization as early as 1927 in a work entitled "Legal Sterilization of the Mentally Ill,"⁵¹ was a man who, shortly before Hitler's seizure of power, sought a liberalization of paragraph 218 of the German Criminal Code which penalized abortion. In an essay which he contributed to *Theologie und Glaube* in the early 30s, he did precisely the same, enlisting Plato's and Aristotle's support for his arguments and went so far as to suggest that Thomas Aquinas would have espoused his views.⁵² Having engaged in a long study of this man's life and work, I am convinced that the work on euthanasia which Gitta Sereny⁵³ attributes to him and which she alleges was used to give a green light to the euthanasia program of the Third Reich was 1) written by him after he was blackmailed and impressed into the service of the Gestapo, 2) taken to Berlin and distributed in abbreviated form, and 3) written under the pseudonym,

Erich Warmund, a "theologische sachbearbeiter" in Vienna in 1940.⁵⁴ In this study which gives evidence of his scholarly credentials, he not only distorts the teachings of Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, but he also quotes out of context his colleague, Franz Walter at the University of Munich, and in one instance misquotes him.^{55, 56}

The tragedy of the relativist is not in his denigration of all absolutes, but rather in his inability to perceive the need of absolutes to the existence of relatives. Even in Einstein's famous theory of relativity — $e=mc^2$ — the speed of light squared is a constant, i.e., an absolute.

When one dwells upon the banality of evil, one often overlooks the reality of evil. When one abandons the Judeo-Christian doctrine of man, one often embraces — willingly or unwillingly — a Nietzschean doctrine of man.⁵⁷

While the roots of our present problem are to be found in the 19th century, and, indeed, perhaps earlier, some in our own time have clearly discerned them. D. M. Templemore in his work *Plus ou Moins Bête* wrote: "All man's troubles arise from the fact that we do not know what we are and do not agree on what we want to be."⁵⁸

It is also clearly discernible in David Lipton's *Ernst Cassirer: The Dilemma of a Liberal Intellectual in Germany, 1914 to 1933*: "Ultimately no thoughtful person could escape answering the question: What is man? and by answering this question one either implicitly or explicitly took a political stand, for one's conception of man, as Cassirer's own fate was to show, was irrevocably bound up with a specific political vision."⁵⁹

Unfortunately, even the Neo-Kantian's insistence that man is always to be treated as an end rather than a means proved insufficient in its defense of man when the law was bent to serve as instrument of the sovereign's will: medicine was prostituted to serve the improvement of the race and the advancement of science; and the state, in consequence, became the chief physician; and society, the primary patient.

In Paris in 1955 at the First International Congress of Medical Morals, members of the French community of medicine, concerned with the independence of the physician and mindful of their own recent past, reviewed the history of the Napoleonic era in which their colleagues of an earlier age had refused to sacrifice their plague-stricken patients in Jaffa in face of the strict orders of their emperor and compared this to their conscientious refusal to deliver the wounded Maquis of the Resistance in 1944.⁶⁰ They justified these practices on the basis of two fundamental medical principles: medical ethics and the need of the patient's confidence in his physician. They argued that their independence was not a privilege but rather a right, insisted that their primary patient was the individual patient, and called upon the community of medicine to defend the priority tradition accorded the patient as person. Still, they failed to ground their arguments on any

meaningful philosophical or theological presuppositions. Indeed, they might well have asked: If man is nothing more than a conglomerate of biologicals and chemicals, can we say that Napoleon or Adolf Hitler was wrong? Unfortunately, tradition unexamined is often sacrificed to the spirit of the times.

Moreover, we live at a time when a recently retired senior editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* bore living witness to this truth in suggesting that each physician be his own philosopher, and this, five and a half weeks before Bernard Nathanson took his first steps toward abandonment of his abortion clinic and abortion practice in New York.⁶¹

Recent events as well as recent writings merely underscore the fragmentation of what was once a commonly held medical ethic. The Hippocratic oath, which for thousands of years served as a bulwark against the attacks of state and society, in recent years has been more honored in the breach than in the observance. Indeed, it has been abandoned by some practitioners. The Judeo-Christian ethic which reinforced adherence to the Hippocratic oath has been subjected to one attack after another, particularly by those who see in it an obstacle to the achievement of their aims. In Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, it is clear that "for the Hebrew the concept of (*hayyim*) is much more than the objective verification of an elemental fact. It embraces at the same time a very emphatic value-judgement; not so much because life is the first prerequisite to all choices and aspirations, but because the possession of life in the whole Old Testament is felt, *per se*, to be an absolutely unqualified good, in fact the highest good."⁶² In the New Testament life is "from God (or Christ), so also it is only for God (or Christ)."⁶³

The physician who would be priest must bear these developments and this history in mind. Some resistance must be passive. Other resistance must be active. This is true for physicians no less than it is for priests. During the euthanasia program of the Third Reich, Pastor Fritz von Bodelschwingh seldom spoke up and out against the Nazis, but he kept up a steady correspondence with men engaged in the euthanasia program in Berlin and saved all but a handful of his 6,000 patients in the Bethel Institute in Bielefeld when colleagues in other less well-known institutions lost most of, if not all their patients. A devout Lutheran pastor, his nephew and successor as director of the Institute, Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, heralded his uncle's opposition in a speech given in Bielefeld in 1963⁶⁴ and at the same time paid his deep respect to Clemens Cardinal von Galen, Bishop of Muenster, who in three memorable sermons in July and August of 1941 publicly pronounced his opposition to the measures taken by the state against the Church and, on Aug. 3, 1941, to the euthanasia program of the Third Reich.⁶⁵

Dr. F. Hoelzel, in an Aug. 20, 1940 letter written to Dr. Pfann-

mueller of Eglfing-Haar near Munich, in refusing to take part in the euthanasia program, wrote of the difficulty which existed "between Judge and executioner" and went on to add that "in spite of all intellectual insight and goodwill on my part, I cannot escape the realization that according to my personal nature I am not suitable for this job."⁶⁶

While it has been said that it would have been easy and riskless to refuse, resistance was not as "riskless" as implied.⁶⁷ Indeed, the Evangelical Church of Wuerttemberg-Baden published Hoelzel's letter of refusal, documenting the resistance of the churches to the euthanasia program.⁶⁸

Example of Passive Resistance

Another example of passive resistance is to be found in a brief work edited by Karl Bonhoeffer in 1934.⁶⁹ A man who has become known to history as the father of an even more famous son, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Bonhoeffer was an eminent psychiatrist, professor at the University of Berlin, and recipient of the Goethe prize during the war years while his son was in prison. In his contribution to the collection of lectures upon *The Psychiatric Tasks (Implicit) in the Implementation of the Law for the Prevention of Congenitally Ill Progeny*, he pleaded that each individual case be reviewed, admonished his colleagues to be precise in their use and careful in their acceptance of medical terminology, and emphasized the creativity of the neurotic.⁷⁰ What effect his words had, can be seen in an article by Manfred Stuerzbecher in 1974.⁷¹ In writing of the compulsory sterilizations and abortions of the mid-30s, he noted that of the applications made for compulsory sterilization in 1935 only 2.35% were made for reasons of manic-depressive psychosis of which Professor Bonhoeffer had written, and of the sterilizations undertaken, only 2.09% were for the same reason.⁷²

Active resistance can be more clearly discerned in a report of the Security Service of Heinrich Himmler on Oct. 25, 1943 for Bayreuth in which it was stated: "The decree on interruption of pregnancies (*note rhetoric*) on female Eastern workers and Poles has called forth objections on the part of a minority of reactionary Catholic physicians. Even physicians who hold the right political views occasionally voice objections."⁷³ In words reminiscent of those used by their French colleagues in 1955, 10 years after the war, the report observed that "these physicians argue that the decree was not in accordance with the moral obligation of a physician to preserve life. Individual physicians pointed out that a discriminating evaluation of fellow nationals and of foreign nations should not be permitted to lead to such distinction in the field of medicine."⁷⁴

A physician, if he is to serve his patients, *must* be a priest. Quite obviously, at this time, as in all other times in world history, there are those who see medicine and religion in conflict. The physician-priest, however, must "not curry favour with men," but rather "seek only the favour of God, who is continually testing our hearts."⁷⁵ Like the priest at the altar, so, too, the physician-priest at the bedside must realize as Ezekiel that he serves as God's representative to His people and as His people's representative to God, and the gifts that he has been given are 1) of God and 2) for His people.⁷⁶

In 1924, in his book on *Euthanasie: Das Problem der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens*, Dr. Fritz Barth made a comment (p. 68) which should be of interest to any Catholic physician, for in it he claimed that he concerned himself solely with Jewish and Catholic moral theology. He justified this on the basis that each represented a unified, well-founded system of thought. Commenting upon the orthodox Protestant churches, he insisted that they, in most questions, would find themselves close to the Catholic or Jewish position and dismissed the liberal position as unsystematic and incomprehensible.⁷⁷

If the priest is to defend his people and the physician his patients, the Church in the United States, unlike some of the churches in Nazi Germany, must hold to the Christian doctrine of creation. Man is the creature of a common Creator. He is not man-made. As creature, he is defensible. As man-made man, he can be destroyed by man. In the clarification of this issue Catholic, Protestant and Jew have a common cause.

The present debate over evolution and creationism tends to obscure the fact that science and religion are not enemies, but allies. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in the address of Pius XII to the Pontifical Academy of Science, "The Proofs of God in the Light of Modern Natural Sciences."⁷⁸

The doctrine of creation and the doctrine of man, however, imply still another doctrine — the doctrine of good and evil. No modern psychologist has more precisely formulated that doctrine than St. Paul in his letter to the Romans: "The good which I want to do, I fail to do; but what I do is the wrong which is against my will; and if what I do is against my will, clearly it is no longer I who am the agent, but sin that has its lodging in me."⁷⁹ In the debates which have marked the life sciences over the last 15 years, there have been very few who have commented upon the relevance of this doctrine to medical practice. Still, one of the principal architects of the euthanasia program in the Third Reich, Prof. Werner Heyde, commented shortly before his death: "After mature consideration, I believe, whatever one's views upon euthanasia, that the problem is insoluble because of the impossibility of (any program's) implementation (by law) and this is true of every political system and true simply because of the imperfection of

human beings no matter how idealistic their motives. Even well-intentioned statutory laws cannot change that.”⁸⁰

In *Recueil International de Legislation Sanitaire* in 1980,⁸¹ there appeared an article providing more than ample substantiation for Heyde's claim, for there it is clearly shown that the laws on human experimentation adopted by the German government in 1931 were as uncompromising (if not more uncompromising) in their defense of the human person as the Nuremberg Code.⁸² Still, while they were never annulled by Hitler's government, they were totally disregarded during the 12 years of the Third Reich. Further proof of this is evident in a recent work published in Germany, *Die Sterilisierung der Rheinland-bastarde* in which it is made clear that the Weimar Republic would gladly have sent the children of German mothers and French-African fathers back to France or sterilized them, but the authorities at the time had sufficient respect for the law to refrain from doing so.⁸³ The Nazis, after their assumption of power, traced down each and every one of them and forced them to be sterilized “voluntarily,” even though there was no law in force at the time which authorized any government agency to do so.

Relationship Between Idea, Event

What we as a society have failed to observe is the relationship between idea and event. Nowhere is this more evident than in the article “When Doctors Play God,” in the Aug. 31, 1981 issue of *Newsweek*. Like Adolf Jost in 1895,⁸⁴ the editors write of the “Right to Die” (p. 49); like Binding and Hoche in 1920, they write of “lives (that) might not be worth living” (p. 3), a concept which contributed more than any other to the holocaust.

As John L. Stoddard wrote to me in an April 3, 1931 letter, we have failed to realize that we cannot “measure progress by speed; our wonderful inventions advance us materially, but not spiritually; our machines can be, and probably will be, used for purposes of slaughter . . . Behind them all is the *spirit*, on which human destiny depends.”⁸⁵

As early as 1895, “racial hygiene” had become an acceptable concept in German thought. At that time, A. Ploetz, in a book entitled *The Skill of Our Race and the Protection of the Weak*,⁸⁶ advocated cleansing the gene pool on the one hand and improving the race on the other.⁸⁷ Denial of the right to marriage, birth control, sterilization, interruption of pregnancy — all these were advocated by him and those who shared his concerns. It is no wonder then that the idea of the “right to death” was propagated by Jost in the same year,⁸⁸ or that all these ideas were proclaimed at the same time as the Christian faith was mocked and ridiculed.

In these developments, the record of the Catholic Church is clear. At the Cardinal von Galen Foundation in Muenster, opposition to national socialism can be seen in reading the *Journal of the Diocese* of Dec. 31, 1930, and opposition to sterilization, in reading the official Church journal for Jan. 12, 1934. At a meeting of the International Hospital Association in Rome on May 24, 1935, Pope Pius XI expressed his own opposition to eugenic sterilization and compared such proposals to a pagan ideology, all this in the course of an audience accorded visitors to the Conference.⁸⁹ Few statements on race in the pre-Hitler years can equal that made by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* of March 14, 1937.⁹⁰ Moreover, the Church's opposition to abortion continued throughout all the years of Hitler's rule, and the first public denunciation of euthanasia in Germany came in Bishop (later Cardinal) von Galen's sermon of Aug. 3, 1941.⁹¹

How important the Faith was to the defense of human life can be read in reports of the Gestapo on German public opinion when killing of the insane, retarded, asocial and unproductive became known.⁹² In a report on Jan. 12, 1942, it became clear that the Catholic Church (and the evangelical churches, for the most part) refused the entire idea and program, and this in spite of a film, *I Accuse (Ich Klage An)* (again note rhetoric) which had recently been shown and which had been produced to demonstrate the churches' lack of concern for the pain and suffering of the terminally ill in rejecting euthanasia. Younger doctors, when interviewed, proved to be more willing to accept euthanasia, especially those who had no relationship to the Church. Lawyers seemed to be troubled by lack of a law. Others feared that those who today were irreversibly ill might tomorrow be healed by some new-found drug. Principal opposition, however, came from those who were thoroughly grounded in the Faith, chief among them the clergy.⁹³ How important the Christian witness was during these years can probably never be fully assessed. That there were Christians — Catholic and evangelical — who failed in their witness is undeniable, but that there were Catholics and evangelicals who did not fail and who risked and, in some instances, gave their lives in witness to their faith in Jesus Christ, cannot be said often enough. The Church has given more martyrs to Christ in this century than in any other.

During a conversation with Prof. Gerhard Rose, one of the most competent defendants in "The Medical Case," at his home in Obernkirchen near Hannover on Jan. 1 and 2, 1977, he told me of deformed and hopelessly incurable children of Volga German parents who were brought to Berlin after the lightning advance of the Wehrmacht in the first days of the war against Russia. They, in his opinion, should have been accorded a "mercy death." In the face of their parents' insistence that they be kept alive so long as humanly possible and because of the fear that the parents would turn against

the government if their expressed wishes were not honored, these children were saved. When I asked Dr. Rose the reason, he said quite simply: "The parents' Christian faith."⁹⁴

The physician who would be priest today must take quite seriously the word of our Lord: "This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you."⁹⁵ This demands involvement with the patient, commitment to the patient, genuine love of the patient, unborn and born, living and dying, of sound and disturbed mind, the chronically ill and the terminally ill. In His love of us, He accepted the cross. We are called to do the same.

On the grave of a German physician in Marburg, whose son was for many years Eaton Professor of Government at Harvard, there are inscribed the words which follow this new commandment of our Lord: "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." The patient is not only your neighbor; he is also your friend. And as the history of this century has proved, *not* science, *not* technology, *not* the law, *not* pity, but the Christian — sensitive to the demands of the Christian doctrine of creation, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of the fall, the doctrine of redemption, and Christ's injunction to love "*as I have loved you*"⁹⁶ — can and must defend life and ennoble it.

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