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President's Page: A New Ethic

Joseph M. Gambescia

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President's Page



A New Ethic

In September of 1970, the *California Medical Journal* editorialized about a new ethic for medicine and society. They took the position that the Judeo-Christian heritage, which was the basis of many of our laws and social mores, had lost its meaning in the face of technological advances and the social atmosphere of the modern world. Consequently the overriding reverence for life which was part of the heart of the Judeo-Christian "ethic" was to give way to a "quality of life" lifestyle which relegated to human life a relative and variable value. The editorial was meticulous in avoidance of the word or even the concept of "religion," relegating everything to an ethic. Undoubtedly this mind-set, pervasive in America, had much to do with the Supreme Court's 1973 abortion decision.

The Judeo-Christian ethic proclaims God as creator of the universe and of man and as the Supreme Being. This new ethic is obviously a challenge to the Judeo-Christian God. In this secular ethic, God, at best, takes a back seat and He is treated in the main as though He does not exist. Thus, with such technological advances as have occurred and those which are perceived to be possible and man's ability to perform feats previously only dreamed of, the new ethic proclaims man as the measure of man. Science, at this time, projects a world without God.

In the July, 1983 issue of *Pediatrics*, a commentary by Peter Singer reveals the full aspect of the development of this new ethic and places the value of human life in its actual framework when viewed from the standpoint of this new ethic. It is obvious that he places science and religion on a collision course. I quote in part:

Once the religious mumbo-jumbo surrounding the term "human" has been stripped away, we may continue to see normal members of our species possessing greater capacities of rationality, self-consciousness, communication, and so on, than members of any other species; but we will not regard as sacrosanct the life of each and every member of our species, no matter how limited its capacity for intelligent or even conscious life may be. If we compare a severely defective human infant with a nonhuman animal, a dog or pig, for example, we will often find the nonhuman to be superior capacities, both actual and potential, for rationality, self-consciousness, communication, and anything else that can plausibly be considered morally significant. Only the fact that the defective infant is a member of the species homo sapiens leads it to be treated differently from the dog or pig. Species membership alone, however, is not morally relevant.

It is evident that every effort is being made to separate not only the practice of medicine, but our entire way of life, from religion. We can safely say that we are being presented with a new religion where man is god.

Through the medium of *Linacre Quarterly* and our national conventions, we have pointed out that there is no contrariness between science and religion, but rather a "complementariness." We must continue to do this. Thus, the National Federation's role in placing religion in its proper place in the total care of the patient is paramount and pressing, as well as compelling. In the last presidential message (November, 1983), I noted that the Federation's role is a prophetic one. Now we see what we must pursue in this prophetic role.

The 1984 annual convention of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians will exert all its efforts to demonstrate the vital role that religion plays in the practice of medicine. Please set aside time to come to Philadelphia in October.

— Joseph M. Gambesoni, M.D.
