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Rev. Carroll investigates the lack of acceptable, precise definitions of life, death, man in the discussions of life control and death control. The Chris-

tian must insist, he concludes, that such definitions and resultant standards of conduct safeguard the dignity and destiny of man.

Life Control and Death Control, Definitions and the Dignity of Man

Rev. Charles Carroll

To discuss the prolongation of life without also discussing the abbreviation of life, represented by abortion on demand, is to ignore the total problem — that of life control and death control. Justification for what is purported to be “liberalized abortion” was first sought on the basis of incest, rape, potential deformity of the fetus, and danger to the physical and/or mental health of the mother. Let us

examine each of these “reasons” for liberalized abortion.

Incest was advanced as a reason for abortion more because of the emotional value it can command in a debate rather than from any real concern for the woman. In fact, proponents of liberalized abortion were well aware of the fact that parties to an incestuous relationship would

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seldom, if ever, seek abortion on this ground because of fear of publicity.

In the case of rape as a cause for abortion, the distinction between statutory and criminal rape was rarely made. Infrequent mention was made of the pregnancies experienced by known rape victims and almost no mention was made of the freedom from fear that comes with immediate medical care.

As far as potential deformity of the fetus was concerned, frequent mention was made of recurrent rubella epidemics and of other possible deformities that could occur, although mention of new vaccines and new treatments was rare. The inerrancy of diagnosis was always assumed.

Threat to the physical and/or mental health of the mother was advanced as a reason for liberalized abortion, but it was never explicitly defined. The claim of threat to the mental health of the mother was considered substantial if it was confirmed by a psychotherapist following an hour-long interview. Similarly, threat to physical health was also advanced as a substantial claim, in spite of the fact that medical advances have rendered such threats minimal.

Even though the adequacy of the reasons for liberalized abortion is questionable, abortion proposals have been widely accepted. What are the underlying causes of this wide acceptance? First, man's loss of faith in the future; second, his fear of losing what he has; third, his naive belief that "the pursuit of happiness" will immunize him from pain and that his hedonism and others' hedonism will never bring them into conflict.

It is certainly no mere coincidence that insistence upon a woman's right to abortion on demand comes at a time when motherhood has been robbed of its dignity; when parenthood has lost its sense of privilege; when family life is disintegrating; when man and the society in which he lives are engulfed by nihilism; when men's anxieties for their own future would deny the unborn the right to life; and when biological determinists — with unsubstantiable statistics — have filled men with such fear of a population explosion that they feel driven to voluntary life control measures lest mandatory controls be imposed.

At no time in this controversy have men paused long enough to realize that by not defining what they mean by life, death, and man, they have accepted definitions which may well affect them as long as they live and even determine the number of years they may be permitted to live.

Most scientists agree that the uniquely human life begins at conception. In the U.S., prenatal life may be taken at different times in its development: In California, up to the 20th week of life; in New York, up to the 24th week. Some present abortion proposals suggest that no time limit should be specified.

If proponents of abortion are pressed to define life, they talk of viability. If pressed to define viability, they explain it as the point at which the fetus becomes capable of life independent of the mother.

Let us now examine what the word "independent" means to any defini-

tion of life. The retarded are not independent. Some of us can still remember the Gestapo's call upon Pastor von Bodelschwingh and their demand that he deliver up his young patients. The totally disabled victims of automobile and industrial accidents are not independent. Some of us wince when we hear hospital beds spoken of as "precious hospital resources," with the implication that they should be made available first to those who can be rehabilitated and who can again become productive. The disabled veterans of our wars are not independent. Some of us recall pictures in *Life* (May 22, 1970) of the treatment given to American soldiers who recently returned from the war in Southeast Asia to Veterans Administration hospitals in the U.S. The mentally ill are not independent. Some of us can still remember Hadamar near Marburg, Sonnenstein near Dresden, and similar institutions in Germany in which 240,000 of 300,000 mental patients were liquidated in the years 1939-45. The aged and the senile are not independent. Some of us know all too well the neglect shown them in our time (marked as it is by disruption of home life) and the decrease in Church giving and state aid, despite the increased need.

When Robert Ardrey writes in *Life* (Feb. 20, 1970) that "The humanist's preoccupation with the numbers game has sacrificed quality for human quantity," the reader cannot but be reminded of the use of this very term "quality of life" by the masters of Auschwitz and Buchenwald. When Ardrey complains that "Life must be prolonged, whatever agony it presents the dying. A child defective must somehow be saved sufficiently to join the breeding population. To restrict the reproductive rights of the genetically afflicted is considered an act of

discrimination," the reader readily perceives the relationship between this ideology and population control and prevention of "pollution of the gene pool," both coming at a time when we have broken the genetic code and fashioned a gene.¹

Ardrey's solutions become clear a few paragraphs later. "We," he insists, "must consider enforced contraception, whether through taxation on surplus children or through more severe means such as conception license. Abortion should be freely available to those suffering unintended pregnancy." Whether women today who seek abortion on demand have ever contemplated the possibility of abortion on demand of the state, they should consider Ardrey's words. Taxation on surplus children or limits on state aid are merely subtle forms of demand.

That these proposed solutions would be international in their application and that the "haves" would apply a policy akin to that of *triage*² to the "have nots" in the distribution of food surpluses becomes indelibly clear when Ardrey declares, "In international relations any aid to peoples who through ignorance, prejudice or political hypnosis fail to control their numbers might be forbidden."

He does not identify who the "we" are who will make and implement these decisions or by what means they will be made. Neither does he specify what world agency would support them or what power would be made available to them for enforcing their aims. What is clear is that an elitist "we" is bent upon gaining public acceptance of its population control policies at a time when the Census Bureau concedes that its 1967 projec-

tion of the population of the U.S. in the year 2000 may be an *overestimate* of 100,000,000.³ Such a program as Ardrey proposes — to quote from the late Thomas Merton's commentary on Ardrey's "African Genesis" — is rooted in the "tough and callous romanticism of the street gang or of the fascist storm troop — a romanticism no less fallacious and deceptive for the fact that it also on occasion covers itself with a veneer of 'realism' and pseudo-science."⁴

When *Life's* editors headed Ardrey's paragraphs on the birth rate with the words "Man Has Lost Birth Control Instinct" and his paragraphs on proposed solutions with "Compassion Has Sacrificed Man's Quality" they were apparently accusing our fathers of committing crimes against humanity when they educated men to care for their fellowmen; constructed hospitals, schools, and churches; built dams, roads, sanitation, and water filtration systems at home and overseas. In other words, to the proponents of Ardrey's arguments compassion has become a sin and charity a vice. This philosophy ordains that man live by selective breeding and science alone. It erases the last vestige of difference between physician and veterinarian and rewords the *Book of Job* (1.21b) to read: "Scientific Man gave, Scientific Man has taken away; blessed be the name of Scientific Man."

If the life control arguments have left individual human life undefined, the death control arguments have left individual human death similarly undefined, with no less significant implications.

"The Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School to Examine the Definition of Brain Death" listed four criteria:

"Unreceptivity and unresponsivity"; "no movements or breathing"; "no reflexes"; and "flat encephalogram."⁵ While the authors might be faulted for failure to use the term "total brain death" and while there were some infelicitous uses of the term "brain damage," this definition represents an honest effort to be more precise than traditional definitions of death have been. However, it may raise more questions than it answers. As Dr. David D. Rutstein of Harvard suggests: We are saying that in man life "exists only when he is aware of and can respond to his environment." Dr. Rutstein himself asks: "Does acceptance of this concept mean that it is no longer necessary to treat . . . the senile?" "How do eligible donors differ in principle from totally feeble-minded individuals?" "Does this new definition . . . open up new channels of criminal activity that will lead to the burking⁶ of patients to increase the supply of eligible donors?"⁷

The demand for a new definition of death is obviously linked to the question of prolongation of life and no less obviously linked to that of organ transplantation. The question of prolongation of life reflects the need for new definitions of "ordinary" and "extraordinary" means of preserving life, because Pope Pius XII's definitions have been rendered obsolete by recent medical advances. Its concern is with withdrawal of life support systems, allowing the patient to die. No direct intervention in the patient's dying is contemplated. The question of organ transplants reflects the need for organs in a viable state and possible reestablishment of *life* support systems after a declaration of death. When the death of the organism as a whole has been declared, death of the whole organism can be postponed.

It is precisely this aspect of the problem that troubles the philosopher. Hans Jonas, professor of philosophy at the New School of Social Research in New York, insists that no definition is a substitute for knowledge; that "it is one thing when to cease delaying death, but another when to start doing violence to the body . . . For the first purpose, we need not know the exact borderline . . . between life and death — we leave nature to cross it. . . . For the second purpose, we must know . . . ; and to use any definition short of the maximal for perpetrating on a possibly penultimate state what only the ultimate state can permit is to arrogate a knowledge which, I think, we cannot possibly have."⁸

Moreover, there is reason to fear the use to which such a definition can be put. As Jonas points out, "If the comatose patient is by definition dead, he is a patient no more but a corpse, with which can be done whatever law or custom or the deceased's will or next of kin permit and sundry interests urge to do with a corpse. . . . Why turn the respirator off? Once we are assured that we deal with a cadaver there are no logical reasons against (and strong pragmatic reasons for) going on with the artificial 'animation' and keeping the 'deceased's' body on call, as a bank for life-fresh organs, possibly also as a plant for manufacturing hormones or other bio-chemical compounds in demand. . . . Tempting also is the idea of a self-replenishing blood bank. And that is not all. Let us not forget research. Why shouldn't the most wonderful surgical and grafting experiments be conducted on the complaisant subject-nonsubject, with no limits set to daring? Why not

immunological explorations, infections with diseases old and new, trying out of drugs?"⁹ Professor Jonas might also have mentioned present-day discussions of the purchase and sale of human organs and of amending anatomical gift laws by declaring human organs a natural and national resource.¹⁰

To say that any one of these things *can* happen is not to say that it will happen, but the temptation to do what one can do has been known to become irresistible. History and definitions have often unwittingly provided a rationale for man's inhumanity to man. In less than five hundred years, the West has moved from the concept of *maiestas* (sovereignty) of Jean Bodin¹¹ to the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV; through the "nation in arms" of Napoleon to the *Wehrwirtschaft* and *Totalkrieg* of Hitler.

We have moved from slavery to its abolition; through the reinstatement of slavery in the form of racism to a genocide "so sterilized by terms like 'Losungsmöglichkeit,' 'Sonderbehandlung,' 'Evakuierung,' and others that it is possible to ignore the fact that human beings are being annihilated."¹²

We have moved from the Industrial Revolution through the Technological Revolution and the Cultural Explosion with such speed that, as Edward Schillebeeckx perceives, "The constraint imposed by rationality — the principle which is above all operative in the designing of a new society and a new future — is threatening to reduce man himself and the future to the level of things — more material for objective analysis and planning."¹³

The bombing of Rotterdam; the attempt to "erase" Coventry; the 900-day siege of Leningrad; the concentration camps of Nazi Germany; the fire storm of Dresden; the detonation of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima; the brutal imposition of Soviet rule on Hungary and Czechoslovakia; the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians; the attempted "liquidation" of monarchist Yemenites, South Sudanese, Kurds, Tibetans, and the Patachus Indians in Brazil; the starvation of the Biafrans; and the Great Power rivalries reflected in the present wars in Southeast Asia and the Middle East — all have merely brought the premises of an earlier age to their inexorable conclusion, and violence "simplifies" human relations by denying the other exists.

Moreover, "the revolution that is taking place now (is) in the danger of a self-made future" and the "real danger (is) no longer a flight from the world, but a flight from the future, and in many different forms — the 'world' has, in fact, become the 'future'."¹⁴

For this sickness unto death, Christianity has an antidote. As Karl Rahner sees it, Christianity is not only the religion of the future, but the religion of the absolute future.¹⁵ The significance of Christianity for intra-mundane society and its goals lies in its hope. "By its hope for an absolute future," Rahner declares, "Christianity defends man against the temptation of engaging in the justified intra-mundane efforts for the future with *such* energy that every generation is always sacrificed in favour of the next, so that the future becomes a Moloch before whom the man existing at present is butchered for the sake of some man who is never real and always still to come."¹⁶

While he wrote these words in "Marxist Utopia and the Christian Future of Man," they are peculiarly applicable to a world which would appear to be willing to sacrifice the principle that utter helplessness demands utter protection; a world which would appear to be unmindful of the fact that denial of the right to life to anyone is a threat to the right to life of everyone; a world in which a distinguished few in science are asking if parenthood is a right or a privilege and insisting that only if it is viewed as a privilege is there hope for mankind.¹⁷

Men may scoff at Dostoyevski's dictum that without God nothing is immoral, but surely some of the greatest scientists of our time have found these words worth pondering. If the life scientist is to avoid the experience that the physical scientist had in the development of atomic fission and if he is to be spared the gnawing after thoughts that plagued Max Planck, Otto Hahn, Albert Einstein, and J. Robert Oppenheimer, he would do well to reflect upon the ambiguity of progress, the fallibility of human judgment, and man's proclivity to self-centeredness in a world in which Jacques Ellul feels "That violence is so generously condoned . . . shows that Hitler won his war after all."¹⁸

There is a reason why Max Planck observed: "Everything that is relative presupposes the existence of something that is absolute."¹⁹ A reason why Albert Einstein declared: "Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth. I never had any interest in the Church before, but now . . . I am forced to confess that what I once despised I now praise unreservedly."²⁰ A reason why J. Robert Oppenheimer stated: "I believe the

strength and soundness of Christian sensibility, the meaning of love and charity have changed the world at least as much as technological developments."²¹ This statement was made by the same Oppenheimer who said that the construction of the atomic bomb brought him to recognize sin.

Man is asking again who he is and what he wants to be. He is looking to his past and to the future to find answers. And while he may find it easier "to fall into (his) own emptiness than into the abyss of the Blessed Mystery,"²² he is not finding it more courageous or more true.

The Old Testament talks of life "neither in the idealistic nor the dualistic sense."²³ Rather it talks of life as the highest good and of God as Lord of Life and death.²⁴ Indeed, "God did not," as von Rad points out, "allow the man who had become a fratricide (*Genesis* 4:15) to be completely outlawed — even his life he took into a mysterious protective relationship."²⁵

The New Testament talks of life in Christ, "the life of Resurrection (which) . . . only reaches full development in the future . . . and (while) . . . to this extent, still an object of hope . . . is nevertheless in a certain sense a present reality."²⁶

With Jurgen Moltmann, man is asking if "the real category of history is no longer the past and the transient, but the future."²⁷ He asks if "To expect and seek a deliverance which does not embrace all that is and all that is not yet, has disastrous results when everything is staked upon it."²⁸ And whether it is not true that man "Always . . . stands both *within* history and also *above* history."²⁹

Shortly after the first World War, Karl Barth insisted that "If Christianity be not altogether and unreservedly eschatology, there remains in it no relationship to Christ."³⁰ Almost 15 years after the second World War, Karl Rahner insisted that "Anything that cannot be read and understood as a Christological assertion is not a genuine eschatological assertion."³¹

Man questions whether both may not be right, and he also asks — in whatever words he may use — if Rahner may not also be right in asserting that "Christology is the end and beginning of anthropology."³² Think of the implications of this statement.

If Alexander Solzhenitsyn, this year's winner of the Nobel prize for literature, can raise his voice to claim that "The meaning of existence (is) to preserve unspoiled, undisturbed and undistorted the image of eternity with which each person is born,"³³ can we not raise ours in concert with him to speak again of the *imago Dei*? Surely "Scripture knows of no life not worthy to be definitive, it does not recognize any life as superfluous."³⁴

Finally, we must realize how inextricably interwoven are the *re-missio peccatorum* which redeems us from our past; the *missio* of love to which we have been called in the present; and the *promissio* of a future in which man and the whole creation will be redeemed and in which history will find its fulfillment. (*Romans* 8:22, 23)

The question that is fundamental in the present controversy — whether the specific issue be abortion or "updating" death, euthanasia or genetic

engineering, artificial inovation or cloning, dominion over one's person versus society's dominion over one person — is not so much a question of when individual human life begins or when it ends. Rather it is a question of who man is. While man cannot be described in a few words, some from the pen of Karl Rahner speak with peculiar eloquence on these issues: Man "is not merely an instance of the universal, each man is something unique and ultimately never someone who can be totally deduced. . . . Because he is an individual, he has a valid existence which, as a real existence, does not coincide with his spatio-temporal existence; he is 'immortal' and the subject of an eternal destination and destiny. This is why the individual man, who is now, may never be forcibly sacrificed, in a manner which destroys him, for the future of 'humanity', of the others who come after him."³⁵

Furthermore, "When we have said everything about ourselves that can be described and defined, we still have said nothing about ourselves, unless we have included or implied the fact that we are beings who are referred to the incomprehensible God."³⁶

In St. Ambrósé's time, it was necessary to speak of "Agnoscenda gratia, sed non ignoranda natura."³⁷ Henri de Lubac said: "I would wish to assert both terms of this precept to the full."³⁸ But there remains the question of whether modern man in *agnoscenda natura* has not fallen into *ignoranda gratia*.

Let us — Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant — insist upon precise definitions of life, death, and man. Let

us caution medicine of the precedents that it is abandoning and the new ones that it is establishing; of the socio-ethical issues with which it has involved itself in the abortion debate and of the fears which it has engendered in many in our society who recognize the socio-ethical issues implicit in the definition of brain death. Medicine has its rights, but it also has its duties. The jurist has an interest in the socio-ethical. So, too, do the philosopher and theologian. If Clemenceau suggested that wars are too important to be left to generals, is it not possible that Scientific Man may find that his fellow human beings consider science too important to be left to him, especially in consequence of his unilateral assumption of prerogatives which society did not delegate to him alone? Imagine for a moment the anomaly of Scientific Man's position on abortion and his definition of death. If a functioning brain is to serve as man's claim to life; if death of the organism as a whole is to be declared on the basis of brain death, then by what logic can the fetus with a functioning brain be treated as sub-human or non-human?

Medicine has to confine itself to the medical or insist that it alone of all disciplines has the right to define and legislate; that, in abortion, it alone has the right to effect social and ethical change under the cloak of the confidentiality of the patient-doctor relationship; that, in transplant surgery, it alone can assume the exclusive right to define death, declare death, and then devise implementations of those decisions on the basis that it alone has the knowledge to do so. Society has not only the right but the duty to call for multidisciplinary dialogue and decision-making on such issues.

The spectre of Galileo may well have haunted the deliberations of Vatican II, but the spectre of a Hiroshima haunts many a sensitive scientist in his research. Nothing less than the future of man is at stake. However pluralistic the society is in which we live, we should not only insist upon precise definitions but upon precise standards of conduct in the implementation of those definitions. We must accept only those definitions and standards that recognize the dignity and destiny of man — definitions and standards with which all men, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, can live and die.

Let us also be mindful of the educative role of the law in our communities and mindful of the need for Christian witness — a witness of word and example. Only free man can unite; only in Christ's service can their freedom be perfect; only in His will can they find peace.

The present mood of the world may be of another mind, but in the currents and cross-currents of claim and counter-claim, the use and abuse of statistics, the insistence upon humanizing the machine and mechanizing man, upon relativizing the absolute and absolutizing the relative, let us remember that love of God and neighbor go hand in hand. Lest there be doubt of the kind of love which calls us and to which we are called, it is that described in the new commandment: "Love one another, even as I have loved you." (*John 13:34*) To adopt any other course is to fail Lord and neighbor. As the German Jesuit martyr, Alfred Delp, wrote from his prison cell in 1944: "At their core, these times through which we are living also carry the blessing and the mystery of God. It is only a matter of waiting and knowing how to wait until the hour has struck.

"... Let us pray for receptive and willing hearts that the warnings God sends us may penetrate our minds and help us to overcome the wilderness of this life ... lest those who are our executioners today may at some future time be our accusers for the suppression of truth."³⁹

Never has there been greater need than now for those who in Christ's name and for His sake would serve mankind as Jurgen Moltmann proposes "not ... that this world may remain what it is, or may be preserved in the state in which it is, but in order that it may transform itself and become what is promised to be."⁴⁰

Is there hope? Yes, from those whose hope arises from hope in Christ; those who, in the words of St. Augustine, at the same time realize that "there is no love without hope, no hope without love, and neither love nor hope without faith."⁴¹

Man-made men — "self-created man"⁴² if you will — may be viewed as an experimental laboratory. God-created man can be viewed only as a privileged sanctuary.

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