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President's Page

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President's Page



“... the office of medicine is but to tune this curious harp of man's body and reduce it to harmony.”

Thus in 1605 did Francis Bacon demonstrate, if somewhat poetically, the delicate task which is the function of the true physician.

Look now to see what governmental interference is doing to that delicate physician-patient relationship! Some months ago there burst upon the headlines a story of two hapless little girls who had been rather summarily sterilized at about the age of 12-13 at government expense. A furor ensued. A committee (as from all furors) was born in Congress and hearings were held the length and breadth of the land.

Those of us who appeared at the hearings as participants were given a list of twelve propositions concerning which we were invited to make comments on twelve major issues.

Number seven will suffice.

“The appropriateness of funding sterilization of people who are *mentally incompetent* but who *nevertheless* have the *capacity to understand the nature and consequences of sterilization* and to *consent voluntarily to its performance.*” (emphasis W.A.L.)

Among other things my comments were two:

1. A distinguished Boston attorney 30 years in the medico-legal field some years ago made a valiant attempt to prepare a document which would encompass informed consent to an inguinal hernia operation.

He offered his 27-page magnum opus to some 30 experienced surgeons in the Boston area — to a man they felt that the subject had *not* been covered adequately.

2. Such a proposition (Number seven) could only have been born of U. S. Government bureaucracy!

Far from tuning this curious harp or reducing it to harmony, this type of attitude bespeaks "the type not worth saving," — the human being as a thing.

This kind of committee investigation is callous in its view of the helpless and handicapped. It violates the Golden Rule (if it doesn't, we're a sicker lot than we appeared to be) and it's un-Christian.

Some years ago the sour-sharp worded H. L. Mencken sneered at some ex-liberals: "They have come to realize that the morons whom they sweated to save do not want to be saved and are not worth saving."

The answer to Mr. Mencken by G. K. Chesterton is classic:

Catholic theology has nothing to do with democracy, for or against, in the sense of a machinery of voting or a criticism of particular principles. It is not committed to support what Whitman said for democracy, or even what Jefferson or Lincoln said for democracy. But it is absolutely committed to contradict what Mr. Mencken says against democracy. There will be Diocletian persecutions, there will be Dominican crusades, there will be rending of all religious peace and compromise, or even the end of civilization and the world, before the Catholic church will admit that one single moron, or one single man "is not worth saving." ("The Thing," G.K.C.)

These then are among your generous tasks:

To maintain the dignity of the patient and the family;

To keep the government out of medical practice;

Within the spirit of the Divine Physician to "tune this curious harp of man's body and to reduce it to harmony."

— William A. Lynch, M.D.