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President's Page

Catholic Physicians' Guild

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Today, a killing operation, abortion, is the most frequently performed operation in the U.S. — more frequent than tonsillectomy. To make manpower available for an operation that is distasteful to most physicians, medical schools admitting new students and obstetric-gynecologic departments screening new residents are increasingly excluding those who object to doing abortions. Catholic applicants are a particular target.

The insidious manner in which this is transforming our medical profession has not been grasped by most physicians. Active infant euthanasia at leading medical centers is becoming accepted practice, with large scale adult euthanasia on the horizon. Lethal experimentation on the terminally ill and dying and those marked for abortion is becoming common practice among avant-garde medical scientists funded by government or voluntary health agencies. I hesitate to call them physicians. Twelve years ago this change in the philosophy and practice of medicine would have been unthinkable. The parallelism with pre-Hitlerian developments in German medicine which softened up the medical profession for a Nazi-takeover and which led to the *Medical Atrocity* Nuremberg Trials is striking.

The decline of German medicine started with the acceptance of adult euthanasia in contrast to fetal euthanasia. It began in 1920 with the publication and general acceptance of a book entitled *The Release of Life Devoid of Value*. Authored by a leading jurist, Karl Binding, and a prominent psychiatrist, Alfred Hoche, it brought euthanasia into the mainstream of German medicine. During the 20's it led to the extermination of hundreds of thousands of human beings, whom physicians classified as incurable, worthless and costly. Killing — exterminative medicine — became a proper and legitimate end of medicine along with curative and preventive medicine.

Dr. Leo Alexander, one of two U.S. medical experts at the Nuremberg Trials on the medical atrocities, writing in the *New England*

Journal of Medicine in 1949, did his best to warn us that the same thing could happen in the U.S. He noted:

Whatever proportions these crimes finally assumed, it became evident to all who investigated them, that they had started from small beginnings. The beginnings at first were merely a subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitude of the physician. It started with the acceptance of the attitude, basic in the euthanasia movement, that there is such a thing as life not worthy to be lived.

After describing the development of the killing centers in Nazi Germany, this Boston psychiatrist concluded that,

The killing center is the *reductio ad absurdum* of all health planning based only on rational principles and economy and not on human compassion and divine law.

Then he prophetically added,

To be sure, American physicians are still far from the point of thinking of killing centers, but they have arrived at a danger point in thinking, at which likelihood of full rehabilitation is considered a factor that should determine the amount of time, effort and cost to be devoted to a particular type of patient on the part of the social body upon whom the decision rests. At this point Americans should remember that the enormity of a euthanasia movement is present in their midst.

He urged,

... that American medicine must realize where it stands in its fundamental premises. There can be no doubt that in a subtle way the Hegelian premise of "what is useful is right" has infected society, including the medical profession. Physicians must return to the older premises. . .

We would be naive if we believed that fascism in America depends on the emergence of a little black-moustached rabble-rouser. Today, the rationalistic, utilitarian, biologic ethic which destroyed German medicine is already captivating American medicine. Its most striking expression appeared in an editorial in the September 1970 issue of *California Medicine*, the official journal of the influential California Medical Association. Entitled, "A New Ethic for Medicine and Society," it notes that:

The process of eroding the old ethic and substituting the new has already begun. It may be seen most clearly in changing attitudes toward human abortion. In defiance of the long held Western ethic of intrinsic and equal value for every human life regardless of its stage, condition or status, abortion is becoming accepted by society as moral, right and even necessary.

It concludes,

It is not too early for our profession to examine this new ethic, recognize it for what it is and will mean for human society, and prepare to apply it in a rational development for the fulfillment and betterment of mankind in what is almost certain to be a biologically oriented world society.

If there ever was a "call for action" this is it. To stop and reverse these trends and their consequences for our profession, our children and society at large, it is imperative that, as a beginning, we hold and consolidate the ranks of those Catholic physicians who, as Christians, believe in the dignity and intrinsic worth of each human being regardless of stage or condition and who believe in the destiny and freedom

of the Catholic hospital. Till now, we have been handicapped by the many good physicians who, under the pressure of practice and family obligations have withdrawn into their small, private professional shells. They have simply forgotten that a learned profession is an "*organized calling*," and that, if it is to survive, it will only survive collectively.

The National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds is a strong organization ready to uphold its role in the struggle. Of current interest is a bill now in the U.S. Senate, which is based on a Federation study on discrimination conducted by one of our officers, Eugene Diamond, and introduced by Senator Schweiker of Pennsylvania, forbidding medical schools to query applicants on their position on abortion and sterilization.

We need the utmost strength and support for the crucial fights ahead. Toward this end, we appeal to you to recruit Catholic colleagues to join us in our work. Not everyone is in a position to give much of his time. But everyone is in a position to back up those who can by becoming a member and broadening our base.

Herbert Ratner, M.D.
President

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