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Herbert Ratner, M.D.
1907 - 1997



"He whom you love is no longer where he was before. He is now wherever you are.".....St. John Chrysostom

Dr. Herbert Ratner died on December 6, 1997, after a brief illness at age 90. He was for many a mentor, teacher, and friend. He was a convert to Catholicism from a liberal Jewish background and his love of the Church was exemplary and devout. He was unquestionably one of the outstanding medical philosophers of the twentieth century and his unique approach to healing as "doing for nature what she would do for herself if she were able" was an article of faith for his many students and disciples. His devotion to nature as God's handmaiden made his influence profoundly felt through the Catholic Medical Association, of which he was a past president, and the National Commission on Life, which he founded and directed. He was editor and publisher of *Child and Family* magazine, a journal whose influence was widely recognized and whose quality was particularly sustained by his insightful editorial comments.

His many contributions to Catholic thought resulted in his receiving the coveted Cardinal Wright Award from the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars. He was that rarest of personalities, a true intellectual who was at the same time warm, approachable and witty. I first met him 50 years ago when he was the Student Health Director at Loyola Medical School. The Jesuit presence notwithstanding, it was his strong Catholic influence which dominated the student dialogue.

He was consistently Socratic and provocative in his teaching style and never expected assent without debate. To every audience he was a fountainhead of respect for the sanctity of life and opposition to all attempts to convert medicine into a killing profession.

Dr. Ratner's willingness to swim against the tide was dramatically demonstrated when, as Public Health Director of Oak Park, Illinois, he challenged the safety of the highly promoted Salk vaccine just prior to the occurrence of multiple vaccine-induced cases of polio. He continued to critique the vaccine and was one of the first to call attention to the contamination of the vaccine with Simian virus 40. Later, he was to confront the mystique of the contraceptive pill and to educate both clinicians and theologians as to its basic problems for the patient and the penitent.

He was a constant proponent of Hippocratic Medicine and a thoroughly versed scholar of the corpus of the writings of Hippocrates. Recently, the Chicago Catholic Physicians' Guild undertook the project of publishing the collected works of Dr. Ratner (*Nature, Medicine, and the Family*, Tan Books). In the course of editing this important volume, I have reread his writings, first in galley proof and then in page proof, and have been constantly moved and inspired by his wisdom and originality as it leaps from every page of text. It is fortuitous that we were able to preserve this irreplaceable material, which will be a sublime and profound experience for anyone who reads the book. In recognizing the clarity and probity of his style it is obvious why he was chosen by Chancellor Hutchins of the University of Chicago to participate in the development of the original Great Books curriculum.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Dorothy Smith Ratner, who was his medical school classmate and whose quiet, perceptive style was a perfect foil for Herbert's boisterous gregariousness. Their daughters, Helen Dietz, Mary Tim Baggott, and Ann McNamara, are living testimonials to the rich diversity of their inheritance and their upbringing.

St. John of the Cross said, "At the end of life, we are judged by our love." On the standard of love given and love received, Herb Ratner's life was a huge success.

- Eugene F. Diamond, M.D.