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James V. Schall

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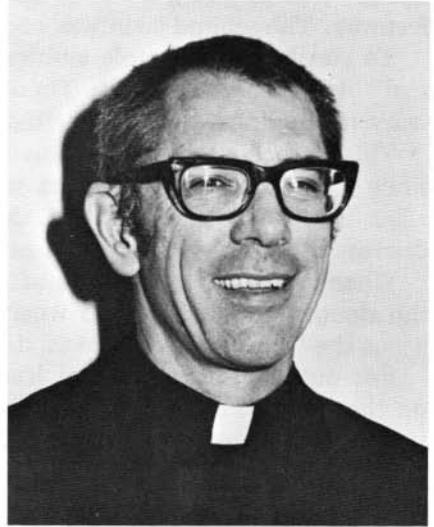
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Surgical Death

Rev. James V. Schall, S.J.

The following article appeared in The Monitor, official newspaper of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, on June 10, 1982. It is reprinted with permission.

Father Schall is an associate professor of political theory at Georgetown University and is the author of several books, among which are Christianity and Life and The Church, the State and Society in the Thought of John Paul II.



The New York Times (April 11, 1982) carried a brief item of thirty-one column lines on page thirty-seven called "Surgical Death," no doubt a strange place to put something that would better be called "The Death of Western Civilization" and emblazoned in banner headlines on Page One.

This title of "Surgical Death" did not, of course, mean that someone died during the process of a legitimate surgical intervention. Rather it specifically meant that a doctor used surgery to kill something alive.

Plato long ago asked, "Who could do you the most harm?" His answer was, using the physician as an example, not just anyone, but the person who could do us the most good.

The article, in any case, had a completely antiseptic tenor, almost as if we were reading a cook book or an engineering journal. There was only a brief hint that something more was at stake when "Some physicians criticized the procedure as 'misuse of medicine.'"

Just what was this procedure? A forty year old woman was carrying twins, one of whom evidently had Down's syndrome. With permission

of the unnamed parents, as if it were theirs to give and the physicians' to receive, two doctors decided that the child with the disorder did not deserve to live.

So they coolly, unerringly "inserted a long needle," quite scientific it all was, "into the heart of the child" to "destroy" it, as the article said with as much emotion as if it were telling us we had just swatted a fly or shot a skunk.

Naturally, when you put long needles into the hearts of any living thing, it stops being a living thing. It is destroyed, like a dog on a freeway. The second twin was born normally.

To clarify the principle involved: Nothing presumed to be "abnormal" deserves to be born. Therefore it ought to be destroyed. Contrary to the Pope, there is no "right to be born."

This "procedure," as I intimated, was criticized as "bad medicine" since most of us want doctors to keep us alive, not kill us before or after birth. We think that if there is something "wrong" with us, doctors should try to correct it or help us live with our problem.

When we go to a doctor's office, we do not want to worry about the doctor's philosophy, to worry about Plato's problem of who can do us the "most" harm, that is, destroy us.

For public consumption at least, this particular killing was justified on the grounds of saving the second child. This same lethal procedure was tried elsewhere, with both twins lost.

To clarify the principle: If my life as such threatens yours, some doctor can destroy me, however questionable the facts about whether the simple existence of me is what threatens you.

Lest we doubt what is at issue here, George Will followed the similar case of a baby, this time already born, not merely in fetal status, with Down's syndrome (*Washington Post*, April 22, 1982).

Here, the parents, doctors, and the State of Indiana, using such merciless ideas as "freedom of choice" and "treatment to do nothing" let the already born baby starve to death rather than perform a simple surgical intervention or allow others to adopt it and feed it.

To clarify the principle: No imperfect human life, whether in the pre- or post-partum stage — this includes all of us, of course — should be allowed to live. Only the "perfect" are "human," protected by our morals and laws.

Those of us who have been following these issues all along have known that both in logic and in fact, it would come to this. First, "conceive" unwillingly (or "willingly" and change your mind), then abort "willingly" but reluctantly, then abort "legally," then let "die" willingly, then let die legally, then "make" die "unwillingly" but "legally" if life does not meet "perfection" standards.

Soon enough, if it has not already happened, we will read a coldly clinical article, probably in *The New York Times*, about how some "merciful" doctor put "a long needle" accurately into the heart of a

born child, with permission of "caring" parents, watched over by the "scientific interests" of the profession of medicine, since no life but a perfect life was worth saving anyhow. Notice how all the "death" adjectives have suddenly become "Christianized" in the process.

Then, finally, we will get a philosopher, at some big university, backed by one probably at a theological faculty, finding out suddenly that there are many opinions on this wonderful topic about what it takes to be declared unworthy of life.

There will be not only Down's syndrome, but also other physical, mental, moral, racial, national, or species criteria. *Mein Kampf*, in fact, had already thought of a lot of these things.

In other words, by calling a surgical intervention in a womb with a long needle "care," by allowing a baby to die unattended for the greater good, we erect the eugenic state, to which we subject all our lives.

No longer are family, medical professions, and state required to protect our lives as their goal. Rather they are required to decide who shall live and who shall die, on the basis of whom they decide is perfect.

I prefer to follow John Paul II who said bluntly at Kaduna in Nigeria (February 14, 1982) that "abortion is the murder of an innocent child. It has to be condemned by society."

The destruction of a fetus with a long needle, the starving to death of a born child — these should be called murder. The society that does not say so has prepared us all for execution in advance at the hands of those who get legal and political control of "What Lives Are Worth Living?"

The essence of civilization, of morality, of dignity is this: All life, Down's syndrome or whatever, is worth living. Unlike the readers of *Mein Kampf*, we would do well in time to check who it is wielding the long needles and letting babies starve on court orders in the State of Indiana.
