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Michael E. Allsopp

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fundamentally depends on the concept one forms of medicine. It is a matter of defining definitely whether medicine truly is in service of the human person, his dignity, what he has of the unique and transcendent in him, or whether medicine is considered first of all as the agent of the collectivity, at the service of the interests of the healthy and well-off, to whom care for the sick is subordinated.

He went on to remind his listeners that the Hippocratic oath defines medical morality in terms of respect and protection of the human person.

The consistent ethic of life is primarily a theological concept derived from biblical and ecclesial tradition about the sacredness of human life, about our responsibilities to protect, defend, nurture and enhance God's gift of life. It provides a framework for moral analysis of the diverse impact of cultural factors — such as technology and contemporary distribution of resources — upon human life, both individual and collective.

The context in which we face new health care agendas generated both by technology and by poverty is that the Catholic health care system today confronts issues both of survival and of purpose. How shall we survive? For what purpose? The consistent ethic of life enables us to answer these questions by its comprehensiveness and the credibility which derives from its consistent application to the full spectrum of life issues.

On Playing God: The Theological Center of Daniel Maguire’s Death by Choice

Michael E. Allsopp

Father Allsopp, who has lectured widely both in Australia and the United States, is the author of numerous publications. He holds college degrees from St. Patrick’s College, Sydney, Australia, and a doctorate in theology, summa cum laude, from the Gregorian University in Rome. From Gonzaga University, he was awarded master’s degrees both in religious studies and administration and curriculum, and he joined the Creighton University department of theology, as associate professor, in 1984.

Daniel Maguire is a moral theologian. Death by Choice, in its newly released and expanded edition, while informative on current law and medicine is, at its heart, a work of moral theology. And rightly so. As Maguire would agree. I am sure, ultimately when all is said and done, the decision to end one’s life, to die with dignity, to take steps to insure that the dark stranger will come quickly when we have reached that corner, is inherently theological, involving issues such as the role, place, autonomy and authority of the person in the cosmos. The acceptability of Death by Choice as a contribution to moral theology, especially to Catholic moral theology, whether it meets the tests of soundness and validity, depends largely upon Maguire’s stand on these issues. Here, however, I believe, the work is flawed, unacceptable as Catholic moral theology, and principally for one reason: the “homo agens” (the achieving person), as Maguire calls the new person he sees in our Post-Modern World — the person Maguire encourages us to be wears, in my mind, the mask of Prometheus, not Christ, the mantle of Nietzsche not Adam.

In dealing with objections to his thesis, Maguire considers such matters as: “The Domino Theory,” “Suppose a Cure is Found,” “They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?” and “The Hippocratic Oath.” Being a theologian, “Playing God,” posed special danger, obviously, and the rebuttal is written with poise and flair.
The objection is, at root, a kind of religious biologic determinism. Now that we are aware of the processes of human physical and biological nature. When God wants you to die, your organs will fail or disease will overcome you. Organic collapse is the medium through which God’s will is manifested. Positive action to accelerate death, however, would amount to meddling in the matter out of God’s hand and taking into your own. It is a sin of arrogant presumption.

If this objection were taken literally, it would paralyze technology. And this, of course, would mean that it would paralyze medicine. . . . Is not medicine tampering with God’s purpose? By putting off the moment of death and thus frustrating God’s effort to reclaim his property?

Persons who believe that God’s will is manifested through the physical facts of life would have to sit back and await the good pleasure of Nature. All efforts to take over by reshaping the earth in accord with our own life would have to be blanketed.

The mentality of this objection is utterly at odds with genuine Christian theology. According to the Christian view, persons are created in the image of the creator God. They are the stewards of the earth.

While popular in style and casual in method, this opening section of Maguire’s defense contains not one but several inter-connected, countervailing arguments. Who can deny the validity of the swipe about “biologic determinism”? Far too many issues in medical ethics are settled after a curious examination of quasi-biological concerns, the legacy of Spinoza’s Stoic manuals, not the Gospels. Authentic Christian ethics has never allowed the person to be a prisoner of his anatomy, nor has it opposed our efforts to reshape the earth. Maguire is absolutely right in saying that the mentality that upholds “religious biologic determinism” is utterly at odds with genuine Christian theology. The next section of the answer, however, contains the “problem” thoughts — Maguire’s views of moral authority.

“Many people have difficulty believing that they have moral authority over their dying,” Maguire writes. “One of the principal reasons for why this question is opening up for reconsideration today is that the idea of authority is being rethought. This is due in no small part to technological humanism’s new awareness of our abilities.”

Again, who would question the factual accuracy of these observations? Having tamed the oceans and walked on the moon, we have become more aware of our power. Education, the success of the American experiment in democracy, the wealth of capitalist and social options for Western men and women, have indeed contributed to a “major shift in self-consciousness.”

Many Europeans and Americans, people of Christian faith, do possess the belief that they have been commissioned by God as a fact of their human existence to “think and feel and listen and do all of the things,” Maguire continues, “that make moral beings fully alive in all of their sensibilities.”

This new awareness does not imply absolute autonomy or freedom to the point of license to do anything one feels. Maguire is quick to state, and his point is important, since it is crucial to his case:

Notice, however, that we are not entirely parting company with the ancients on the issue of whether direct termination of life could be moral, but only on how we know that it can be moral.

Moral authority is now seen as discoverable. Applied to the question of death by choice, we need not await a miraculous divine revelation of the sort that Abraham is said to have had.

Now, if Maguire destroyed a “straw man” he had set up for his own convenience in the opening section of this case, it is no less obvious that his last statement embodies not one but actually two central beacons in his defense of death by election. Surely, while the initial remarks deal with knowing right and wrong by the exercise of our own minds, the closing words move to applying our knowledge; to the right of the person to act upon the judgments of his mind. For Maguire, to conclude that some course is good inherently implies it is moral; to judge that an action is within the limits of God—given human freedom carries with it the right of action. According to this point of view, as I interpret it, each moral person in today’s world, as in ages past, must face the pain, must wrestle with the issues. Should he discern after prayer, thought and consultation that, assisting somebody to kill himself by providing the means, lies within the divine mandate, “increase, multiply, fill the earth, make it yours,” then this action may be done. Even those only casually acquainted with Catholic moral theology would be aware of the movement toward greater self-determination in decision-making, as well as the replacing of many moral boundary markers during the last hundred years. From Augustine’s defense of the right of the Christian soldier to kill in battle, to Richard McCormick’s stand on letting infants die, there is remarkable change, as Maguire’s book frequently reminds us. When one reads Suarez and Molina on rules for a just war, on the proper treatment of conquered peoples, it seems hard to justify today’s weapons, the legitimacy of conventional warfare; yet Catholic moral theologians do.

The question remains, however, whether the tendency, the drift of theology has a limit?

Few of us, I believe, consider it morally wrong to provide simply supportive care in the case of a spina bifida infant born with severe intracranial hemorrhage or some other major life-threatening anomaly. At the other end of life, with Pope Pius XII’s observations in mind about those being preserved “alive” by extraordinary means, most physicians. I am sure, do not scruple now when acting in accord with the Harvard Medical School’s “brain death” guidelines. But are there no limits? Are abortion, euthanasia, voluntary suicide simply the next steps along the moral path?

Here, I believe, lies the theological flaw in Death by Choice. Although the movement toward moral self-determination cannot be denied, nor the fact that the Christian belief in personal dignity has been extended to death, it seems to me that Maguire’s analysis gives insufficient place to the limits set upon the role and authority of the human species embodied in those monumental theological sources: the Genesis creation and fall narratives. Second, his case gives too little weight to Christian history and moral teaching. Since Vatican II, all things are possible, and it is dangerous to...
predict the future of theology, nevertheless, I think that Maegraith’s case suffers from the same defects as Nestorius’s Christology -- weakness of insufficient foundation in Sacred Scripture, and a lack of support in the writings of authoritative teachers in the Church.

"...the primal legend of Paradise, of original sin and of the punishment of subjection to the powers of death and pain, and of enslavement by the anguish of living may be clothed partly in mythical elements by the sages, as von Balthasar in his _Theological Anthropology_. But it is the concern of this essay to show that there is a real difference between the heights of the demands of the gospel and the possibility of satisfying them which man carries round within him always as a dark mystery. The legend also expresses a realistic understanding of other boundaries within life, that the human species may be, with sound reason, the summit or center of the cosmos, the supreme work of the power of God and a microcosm of the universe, but "God is God, and we are simply humans." A feature of the Biblical world, and the Christian view of the universe, according to Emil Brunner, is this awareness and acceptance of roles and borders, relationships and limitations.

The Genesis creation narratives take us into a world not of our own, where Heracleitus’s "All is change," rules. While these narratives are patently anthropocentric, and we are nowhere depicted as simply a "bit of the world" like the other works of God’s hands; while we are "special" and alone seen to have been fashioned "in the image and likeness of God," nevertheless, Brunner reminds us, we are the ones who receive, not the ones who give. We are "images", not self-sufficient "lights." Created out of dirt and slime, never eternal nor omniscient. Adam is master of Eden because, and only insofar as, God makes him His steward, and gives him the world, with its inferences which outweigh its rights. "Man is not unconditional and not conditioned," Brunner writes, "not autonomous and self-sufficient, but wholly dependent upon the posthumous act of God."

For Christians facing the close of this 20th century, Christ not Adam, the New Testament not the Old, should be our guides and models, many will retort. "The cosmology, the social stratifications of the ancient Hebrews, are not obligatory for us. They are not part of Revelation," others no doubt will aver. "Jesus Christ is the Word. He is the word and language as such," von Balthasar reminds us correctly. "As mortal man he is the speech of the immortal God." But in Christ Himself, in the New Testament faith, the awareness of roles, borders, limits and relationships remains.

"As child, youth, and man, as a mortal, dying, and resurrecting man, the eternal Word underwent limitation in order to be still the whole within the fragment," von Balthasar states. We, however, His disciples (by definition a relational word) are inescapably also male or female, Jew or Gentile -- people separated by nationality, borders, ideologies, frontiers, of blood, thought and time. Furthermore, human freedom and obligation, our autonomy and our responsibility, are inextricably tied to such realities as the cosmos itself, Truth, Beauty, Virtue, Conscience. The authentic Christian is not an existentialist fixed upon self-realization in the future, but a person, an essential part of whose being springs continually from the past.

Now, it is my opinion that Maguire’s interpretation of the divine mandate, “to think and feel and listen and do all of the things that make moral beings fully alive in all of their sensitivities,” as well as his _Weltblink_, are not authentically Christian in their acceptance of the realms of relationships and limitations. In his chapter, “Ethics: How To Do It,” as in this chapter, the model of the “achieving person” fits neither the Old nor New Testament anthropologies. For Maguire’s moral person, “all is possible,” whereas, for Adam and Christ, the divine command “But of the tree, . . . always remains a feature of the human condition. Maguire’s “achieving person” is a Post-Modern, not a Christian person.

This study is not the place to record the history of the Church’s teaching on killing in war, abortion, suicide, the exposure of infants or mercy-killing. Some illustrations of that tradition alone are in order.

Who can deny the truth of Richard McCormick’s closing remark on the subject of letting infants die? “Any discussion of this problem would be incomplete if it did not repeatedly stress that it is the pride of the Judeo-Christian tradition that the weak and defenseless, the powerless and unwanted, those whose grasp on the goods of life is most fragile -- that is, those whose potential is real but reduced -- are cherished and protected as our neighbor in greatest need. Any application of the Hippocratic maxim that forgets this is but a reason of the adult world profoundly at odds with the gospel.”

While the Hippocratic Oath has set a standard for Christian health care professionals, McCormick’s allusion to the gospel’s teaching should immediately bring to mind that for Christians, Luke’s parable of the “Good Samaritan” provides the model par excellence of compassion, going that second mile, and caring for the dying.

The monastic tradition of hospitality is inextricably tied to a tradition of medical attention that pre-dates the Christian era. The fact that England, for instance, had so few community hospitals was due to the role of the monastery. St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in London being a classic example. Even in the fever of the crusades, the establishment of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, the Hospitalers, reflects the deep Christian “difficulty” with war, plague and death, that they were at best “corruptible evils.”

Life’s journeys are often like that tale of Ulysses cyclic, and Germaine Greer’s seems to be in this pattern. In her latest book, _Sex & Destiny_, one of her strongest themes is “No human society exists in which human beings may copulate at will; no human community has ever been organized around the principle of free love, or could be, as long as reproduction and sexual activity were inextricably connected.” And at the close of this chapter, “Chastity as a Form of Birth Control,” she touches a nerve which Daniel Maguire in his elemental analysis (what is closer to death than sex in the psyche and bonding of any society?) has missed. Greer writes, "Instead of teaching reverence for the body, we chose to teach callousness, instead of exploiting concern for children (tread the dying) and the passionate desire for them to survive, we assumed that too many were living already. The chance to develop the human propensity for sexual restraint in the interests of the congested world has been missed.” How well, and with what little alteration, do these comments speak to our times and our changing reverence for life?

Forty years ago, Romano Guardini in his monumental book, _The End of the Modern World_, showed incredible foresight, seeing with remarkable
clarity the society ahead of him. "He saw a "new" man, an "old" faith. Death by Choice, had Guardini possessed even greater vision, would have been cited, I am sure, as proof of his thesis, namely, that Modern World had ceased to exist, a new person was being born, and the distinctive character of the quickly shaping Post-Modern world.

REFERENCES


2. Ibid, p. 119.

3. Ibid, pp. 119-120.


5. Ibid, p. 121.

6. Ibid.

7. This statement is based on the judgment of R.B. Zachary, "Life with spina bifida," British Medical Journal, 2(1977), pp. 1460-62. Infants born in such condition would not be selected for surgery or the myelomeningocele, "because it could have no bearing at all on whether they lived or died.


9. With von Balthasar, Brunner represents the last voice in recent years on this subject, an authority in the field whose opinion does not need the bolstering of a cluster of supportive writers. For his remarks, Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology, (Westminster: Herder, 1947), pp. 406ff.


11. von Balthasar, op. cit., p. 239.


The Church and Human Sexuality

Wanda Poltawska, M.D.

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Sex education as such does not exist, in fact. It is a conventional term, because the subject cannot be isolated from education of the entire person who in his very substance is sexual, is a man or a woman and education of man is a complex process. Its result depends on many factors; and this process, in fact, lasts for the whole life of man. In the light of the current discussion rooted in the proposal of introducing sex education into school programmes, one might conclude that the sex education issue is a very new idea, thus indicating that the previous education of man missed, or shunned, problems related to the sexual life of man. As a matter of fact, sexual problems were always considered in the total context of education, though more implicitly, and more modestly presented than is now the fashion.

Isolation of Sex is Degrading

Nowadays, some try to isolate the sexual problems of man and set them up as a subject independent from the whole of education, which I consider to be impossible as well as destructive. Although man is a complex being, yet he is a complex unity, and sex in isolation does not exist; while sexual man and his fate does. Education of man depends on the culture of the society in which a human person lives, and on the accepted anthropology, for there is always some purpose or other to education; man is always educated for sanctity. Nowadays, it is a question not only of a school program in sex education, but primarily it is a question of the whole notion of man; and as a matter of fact, an ideological struggle is taking place in this field.