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The Sleeping Giant

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What word does one say to his peers, their wives and widows in the
dearth of a chapel remembering the
deceased doctor he has been
quiet of a chapel remembering the
peers,
on the nobility of the calling of the
privileged
but remain true to
physician - the total dedication that
speak of the long years of difficult
inspirations and aspirations. One might
prepare occasionally longer than
seeming
viewed in the eyes of the
world.
the years left to practice and of the
seeing
could in this day of discovery and
fullest
commitment, involvment and bearing
mention the words conscience,
what doctor's wife or widow among
you has not known the delayed or
physician has lived these words in their
engagement, the putting the children
to bed alone, the shortened evening, or
witnessed the bone weary fatigue due
to medical conscience, personal
involvement and commitment and all
because, "Someone was sick - I was
needed." And with what magnificent
generosity of spirit have not you wives
and widows responded? I suggest to
you that it probably will not be a
dedicated doctor or his wife who will
say "Lord when did we see you sick or
suffering or in want?" For by the
nature of his calling rival only by
the priesthood if he but be spiritually
perceptive the doctor has seen and
dedicated his wife in the sick, the
dying.

I would then pass these things by
and give to you words of hope -
literally the promise of salvation from
the gospel of this mass, "No need for
surprise - an hour is coming in which
all those in the tombs will hear His
voice and will come forth those who
have done right will rise to live." And
finally the liturgical reflection that is
the raison d'être for this evening. "It
is a holy and wholesome thought to
pray for the dead" and why that the
quiet prayer Oh Lord remember in
your kingdom, the deceased member

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The Sleeping Giant

Eugene F. Diamond, M.D.

One great legacy left by the
Catholic community to the American
historical scene is a succession of
leaders, usually operating from
a minority political base, have
achieved positions of influence and
control through a combination of
economic power and organizational
bargaining and an inborn
division of the unspoken will of the
people. To a large extent, these politi
cal leaders have been first or second
products of European
dsocieties which were characterized by
persecution and coercion of the disen
franchised. Though their pursuit of
power was born of a desire to escape
certain vulnerabilities, their use of
power has, by and large, been char
acterized by a sensitivity of the needs of
the underdog and a dedication to the
obligation of government to protect
the defenseless elements in the society.
Since most ethnic politicians achieved
office after a power struggle with an
entrenched Anglo-Saxon Protestant
adversary, there was little occasion to
aginzize over the proper role of a
Catholic minority in a pluralistic
society. Fierce identification with a
conspicuous Catholic position was fre
quently the key to amalgamating a
collection of other minority groups
against an intolerant and oppressive
overlord. The infrastructure of this
Catholic political system still exists in
many areas although there has been a
dilution of its homogeneity by the
need for some of its principal to
broaden their appeal in order to fulfill
national aspirations. There has also
been a modification of its social pre
occupation as its constituents move
from the sweat shops to the country
clubs. The most unfortunate develop
ment in the function of the Catholic
political system, however, has been its
estrangement from the institutional
church during its current episcopal
battles.

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The accumulated expertise and political genius of the many able Catholic politicians is seldom evident in the abortion reform controversy as it develops state by state. This is not to demean the yeoman performances by individual legislators in leading floor fights and developing parliamentary approaches. The problem has been that politicians have tended to defer to the clergy in the development of overall strategies and grassroots campaigns. At the parish level, the clergy have tended to be particularly inert and ineffective and, at times, even antagonistic toward developing organized lay protest against abortion law repeal. The non-involvement of the clergy would seem to derive from a confusion regarding the real issues involved. Instead of keeping the abortion issue in its proper context of life and death, young curates have tended to lump it with contraception. Nothing, it would seem, conflicts so much with young priests post-copulator self image as an issue even slightly tainted with "pelvic morality". Deprived then of a coordinated and broadbased voter's protest, the Catholic tactic has typically settled for lofty and inspiring episcopal statements, couched in theological phraseology and devoid of any real or implied threat of political action. Into the void left by the lack of a diocesan grand strategy, there typically surges a zealous and incredibly energetic group of physicians, lawyers, and other lay people who patch together a Right to Life group out of volunteers already overcommitted to professional obligations and child care. Because these people are high-energy types and because they are absolutely guilt-ridden if they shirk a single opportunity to speak out against abortion, their achievements have been monumental. When arraying against a sleek and affluent opponent, however, they are constantly frustrated and usually feel as though they are carrying water in a leaking bucket. All of their meager resources are expended in reacting to the manifold legal and legislative threats of the anti-life activists. Typically, a suit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of a coterie of medical school deans and department heads will send Right-to-Life attorneys into nightfrantic sessions to prepare briefs which are usually lucid and well researched. Nowhere to my knowledge has there been the ordination of a diocesan lawyer a full-time legal staff to conduct energetic and imaginative defenses to bring test cases to court structured to dramatize those issues on which we want higher courts to weigh in the balance. It was tax our credibility to accept the assertion that there are not adequate financial resources available for such an effort. Meanwhile, state and district courts strike down a succession of statutes because of the alleged imprecision of language relating to a third to the life of the mother. Yet, as physicians, we recognize that this language is so precise and meaningful in a practical sense that, for all intents and purpose, no abortions are permitted or performed to save a woman's life.

Many have spoken of the problems related to the coexistence of bills to repeal abortion laws and bills to provide aid to private education on the same legislative calendar. It should be obvious that this situation is capable of exploitation by opponents of either bill if we give the slightest indication of a willingness to trade one for the other. It is also obvious that no legislative program of this type ever succeeds through compromise. No one can imagine a civil-rights program which offered to sacrifice jobs or the vote in return for housing or medical care. From a practical standpoint, it would also seem obvious that any threat to close parochial schools loses its political impact when it is tendered with hand-wringing and timidity and fears regarding its ecumenical consequences. In many areas, Catholic school boards are now in the position of the poker player who bluffed with two ducses and lost. In Chicago, for example, after the Catholic school board announced that it would not close its schools, as previously threatened, the public school board refused even to discuss a proposal for shared time.

The same type of situation can now be seen developing with regard to Catholic hospitals as suits are filed to attack conscience clauses and the rights of Catholic hospitals to withhold their premises from abortion, sterilization, and public birth control activities. The same voices of opposition and accomodation are raised. The same prophets of doom stride to the podium to invoke gloomy prognostications regarding the untenability of the Catholic legal position. We hear that the code of the Catholic Hospital Association is being "revised" and anxieties are now being voiced in doctor's lounges from coast to coast that we may again be on the brink of a corporate cave-in before the battle even gets to the ramparts. Again we listen, in vain, for the language of power play and confrontation. Where is the forceful and charismatic leader who will lead us to show down at the gap? Where is the loud ecclesiastical voice which will call for the summary close-down of every Catholic hospital on the day that first Catholic hospital is directed by a court to schedule an abortion. Not in the orderly transferral of facilities from the sisters to the community will we find any political leverage but only in the abrupt and unforewarned control of this large segment of the health care delivery system.

While we scan the horizon for banners and listen for the sound of trumpets, we sink deeper into ennui and Nirvana. The winter of our discontent is lengthening but there is still ample time. As the dominoes continue to fall and as attacks on potential life give way to attacks on nascent life and, ultimately, to attacks on deformed life and life nearing its quietus, we still have hope. We hope for the miracle which will cut away the ties which now bind down the energies of our Church, so that this sleeping grant will arise in time to salvage some of our society's values.