Mercy Killing
Is Murder!

by IGNATIUS W. COX, S.J.
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INHUMAN DENIAL OF HUMAN DIGNITY THE PAGAN PHILOSOPHY OF MERCY MURDERS*

The way in which the same moral question will thrust itself periodically on public attention is a curious phenomenon. It becomes a dangerous phenomenon, indicating a widespread moral malady, when with each periodic recurrence, more and more individuals of great potential influence take the wrong side, the ethically unscientific view, the immoral solution. Just ten years ago, in 1925, there were four so-called mercy killings within the short space of four months, two in Paris, one in the United States, and one in England. The cases cited started a rapid fire of comment. It was the old question of euthanasia, a good death, the right of men to die by their own choice or the choice of others, when death seemed preferable to life.

And now the whole question is up again and is being fiercely debated. According to an Associated Press dispatch from London, “A campaign to establish ‘the right of persons suffering from incurable disease to die,’ has been announced.” The occasion

*Delivered over Radio Station WLWL, on November 15, 1935.
of this campaign was the reputed confession by a British doctor of five "mercy slayings." An advocate of euthanasia, a distinguished British surgeon, Lord Moynihan, declares, according to the press, that he and other influential members of the medical profession with some clergymen will meet to make plans to put the whole question before the country. "The right to die is gaining support throughout the country," Lord Moynihan is quoted as saying, "And we believe we will not find opposition except from Roman Catholics who are objecting for obvious reasons." His Lordship does not state what these obvious reasons are. I presume that he means that the Catholic Church insists on what is an obvious philosophic, moral and religious fact, that human life in its beginning, progress and end belongs to God alone, and only God has the moral right to determine its end.

Approving Mercy Killing

This obvious fact, however, escapes men of great standing in this country. Dr. Alexis Carrel, winner of the Nobel Prize, in a press interview elaborates what he put in his new book, Man, the Unknown. "Sentimental prejudices," he is quoted as saying, "should not stand in the way of civilization. It is my opinion that not only incurables but imbeciles . . . habitual criminals, as well as the hopelessly insane, should be quietly and painlessly disposed of." Dr. Frederick Bancroft, member of the New York City Cancer Committee, according to the press, admits that the mat-
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But is difficult, but says: "I do not see why a person should be condemned to agony. I do not see why we shouldn't give humans the same treatment we accord to animals." And a Protestant minister and Jewish rabbi in Buffalo are said to have approved the appeal of Miss Becker for a mercy killing.

Other doctors and some of the public are shocked at these "mercy killings" and their outspoken defense. Many doctors have embraced the atheistic and materialistic liberalism which considers man as only an animal. Why be surprised if the logic of that doctrine be reduced to act by treating man as a mere animal? Many doctors theoretically and practically accept as a medical function the task of tampering with the source of life. To doctors in many States there is granted the so-called legal right to determine when and if life shall begin. Why not be logical, why not extend this legal right to include their right to determine if and when human life shall end.

As a matter of fact this power to pass sentence upon and to end under certain conditions unborn human life is the so-called legal right of doctors right here in New York State. Some doctors are not satisfied with the restricting conditions; they want even more power; they want to liberalize the law and gain further legal rights over unborn human life. Dr. A. J. Rongy, a Jewish physician in New York City, has written a book to promote this campaign. He thus puts himself on record, to use his own words, "as a true believer in the ideals of liberalism."
Unalterable Stand of Catholics

Like Lord Moynihan, the British doctor, "who expects only opposition from Roman Catholics," like the birth control propagandists, who became fanatical whirling dervishes at the mention of the Catholic Church, Dr. Rongy speaks quite frankly about the unalterable stand of the Catholics against tampering by the physician with unborn life. He states quite clearly that Christianity in the beginning launched a drastic revolution against pagan morality. And then note this: "The pendulum is swinging back and we are close to the ancient ways of thought." Right, Dr. Rongy. We are simply weltering in a damnable sea of pagan ideology and pagan conduct. Does that explain why a western District Attorney declared in 1932 that there were over fifty deaths in one year alone in his city from criminal operations, in violation of the doctor's famous Hypocratic oath? If the medical profession loses the confidence of the people it will be the medical profession itself which is to blame. The end of medical science is to save human life, not to stop it at its source, not to destroy unborn life, not to end disease and suffering by slaying the patient. The doctors in regard to contraception, sterilization, unborn life and euthanasia should refuse to be the gravediggers of the nation or of humanity.

All this shows a lowered estimate of human dignity, a denial of God's right over human life and its
life-giving functions. All this is a cancerous growth eating at the mentality of men and women in high places and camouflaged as sympathy for human suffering. It is a sympathy, which is the product of that pagan and cynical fatalism, which has no basis for a philosophy of suffering. It can only send forth its rebellious cry against the Christian philosophy of pain and suffering in the words of Swinburne:

“Thou has conquered, O Pale Galilean! The world is grown gray with thy breath.”

It cannot see as you can see the glory human suffering casts over man when endured with patience and Christian fortitude. It cannot see that every sorrow and pain may be shadow of Christ’s outstretched and caressing hand, or that crushed flowers give the sweetest perfume. However, modern doctrine on pain is the necessary and logical result of the false and unscientific liberalism which is its motivating force.

**Unvarnished Paganism**

Such liberalism is unvarnished paganism, and paganism historically and logically leads not to human liberty, but to the enslavement of man, the treatment of human beings as cattle, the inhuman denial of elemental human rights. After the inauguration of the Nazi régime in Germany, where we are witnessing an organized attempt to revive old German pagan-
ism, the Ministry of Justice announced its plan to authorize euthanasia. It was to be safeguarded so that no life still valuable to the State should be wantonly destroyed. And in that the secret of paganism is out. A citizen is not for himself, is not vested with rights antecedent to the State, is not a child of God, but is only the tool, the plaything, the instrument of the deified State.

And German paganism as exemplified by its ruthless sterilization program is gaining distinguished adherents in the United States. Dr. Cutten, of Colgate, advocated this fall, before students and faculty, sterilization for certain unfortunate classes in our social organism. And Leon F. Whitney, in his emotional and partisan book, *The Case for Sterilization*, expresses what is in the mind of many eugenists. In echo of Lord Moynihan, the birth controllers and Dr. Rongy, he says: “The main, and most seriously taken objection comes, as would naturally be expected, from the Roman Catholic Church.”

I could go on citing instance after instance of this cheapened estimate of human dignity and destiny, founded on inadequate knowledge of man. Every man today is the unknown man, due to a materialistic philosophy, begotten of the streets and incapable of rising to a view of man which transcends time and space. Recently Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a prominent writer and suffragist, committed suicide and explained it by a note which read: “Human life consists in mutual service . . . but when usefulness is over
it is the simplest of rights to choose a quick and easy
death.” So that is the meaning of human life, use-
fulness to others. The suicide was defended by an-
other prominent feminist. Suicide has been openly
vindicated by Lord Bertrand Russell and Sydney
Hampden.

And all this cheap and tawdry philosophy of hu-
man life masquerading under a maudlin sentimen-
tality, lack of fortitude and fear of pain, has gotten
to the masses. There is a wild outcry against gunmen
and racketeers, who are quick on the trigger in self-
defense and in aggression. Are these gunmen who
despise human life any more guilty than those in high
places who preach from the housetops a materialistic
and atheistic liberalism, which has enslaved the minds
of the masses with the idea that God, human dignity
and the natural law are without meaning?

**Denial of God’s Right**

I have not called attention to this sordid and de-
based mentality in order to refute it here and now.
Homicide is a denial of God’s exclusive right over hu-
man life. Nor is it my purpose to enlarge on the
fact that much so-called humanitarianism, the cry to
relieve the sufferings of incurables, the cry of the
right to suicide, the cry of the right and duty of indi-
viduals to tamper with the very sources of life, the cry
of the right of society to protect itself by annihilation
of the defenseless, is grounded on a hard-boiled, cruel,
fatalistic, cynical, pagan aspect toward life which cast out helpless infants on the mountaintops to be the food of vultures and wild beasts. It is the same ruthless philosophy which enslaved whole nations that Roman and Greek patricians might live in ease, rottenness and corruption. Many of the modern proposals are grounded on that evolutionary theory which maintains that human development must come by the rigid and ruthless elimination of the unfit. Euthanasia, social betterment, contraception for the poor, therapeutic abortions, eugenics by way of sterilization are humanitarian shibboleths and catch phrases covering up a cruel ideology and frequently a bitter and ruthless class warfare.

What I do want to emphasize is the cheapened regard for human life, based on materialism and atheism, which has become widespread under the impulse of a false, unscientific, and immoral liberalism. This is fact number one. Fact number two is the growing hatred, contempt, fear and snarling opposition to the Catholic Church by those liberals who see clearly that Catholic philosophy and Catholic dogma alone stand in the way of their propaganda. The so-called liberals are growing in power and influence, their ideas have penetrated to the masses. Their assaults on our juridical structure have been in large measure successful. They have been busy in liberalizing our laws, that is, in paganizing them. The struggle has reached the stage of bitterness and resentment.
"It Can’t Happen Here"

Are educated Catholics blind to the fact that we have here all the elements of persecution. Sinclair Lewis has just written a book on Fascism under the title, "It Can’t Happen Here," meaning it can happen here. Catholics in the United States are living in a fool's paradise. They read of and hear of the persecution of Catholics in Mexico, in Germany, and in Russia. They fold their arms and beguile and hypnotize themselves with the phrase, "It Can’t Happen Here." Well, it can happen here. As a matter of fact it is happening here covertly at this moment.

A bitter conflict between false liberalism and the Catholic truth which makes men free is being waged anew. A spark can start a conflagration, the end of which no man can foresee. Nor can the Catholic laity, least of all the Catholic educated laity be indifferent or neutral in this struggle; you are the body of Christ and members of His members. Christ is in you and you in Him. To be indifferent to the sufferings of Christ’s body in Mexico, in Germany, in Russia is to be indifferent to Christ; it is the right, nay the duty, of educated Catholics in America to be prepared for the inevitable struggle. I advise my listeners to read the Encyclical of that brilliant Pope and leader, Leo XIII, on the "Chief Duties of Christians as Citizens."
ARE MERCY KILLINGS JUSTIFIED?*

Pain is a strange magician when courage, intelligence and graciousness stand behind. It is an initiator into secrets—a high priest who handles and dispenses mysteries unknown to those who do not or will not suffer.

Go into a hospital for incurables. Many there die fearlessly, even joyously, though racked with pain. There you will find heroes and heroines, both those who suffer and those who minister to the suffering, diffusing courage and joy. Such examples of fortitude are great contributions to our social organism.

Yet the supposition gains ground that only death by euthanasia is pleasant and easy. Such euthanasia, in the modern twist of the word, is an easy and pleasant death, willed by the sufferer, legalized by the State and induced by painless medical means.

Such a death is no different from homicide, if inflicted by others, or that species of homicide called suicide, if self-inflicted.

The question as to whether the State has the right and moral power to legalize such euthanasia resolves itself into the question as to whether the morality of an action, its goodness or badness, ultimately rests on a governmental fiat.

It is true that an old ethical system, which is resurrected today by the promoters of the absolute

* A reprint from the New York World-Telegram, November 27, 1935.
and totalitarian State, held precisely that theory. It is a theory contrary to our own Declaration of Independence, which holds that basic human rights, and hence basic morality, are antecedent to the human governments set up for their protection.

Holders of the untenable theory that the State is the determinant of morality must admit logically that the State can make unnatural actions morally good, and can deprive individuals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

No intelligent person—and this is the reason why dictatorships appeal so vehemently to mob-emotion—can hold that the State is the ultimate determinant of morality. Hence the question as to whether the State can legalize euthanasia reverts to the question as to whether painless homicide, self-willed, if not self-inflicted, and motivated by self-pity or the pity of others, is right and good in itself. Has the sufferer the right to a termination of his life by his own free choice?

No Mortal Ownership

All will agree, I think, that the right to destroy anything belongs only to the one who has exclusive dominion or ownership over that thing. Has any mortal power, then, such an exclusive dominion over human life, whether its own or another’s?

For two thousand years the Catholic Church has answered NO!

From the beginning of Christianity, the Catholic
Church has laid supreme emphasis on the individual value of human existence.

It straightway set out to reform that pagan ideology which held in cheap contempt the dignity of individual human life.

On that cheap valuation was based pagan slavery, the right of life and death over slaves, and sometimes even over children. This cheap estimate of individual life found expression in infanticide and a new profession, that of the practiced poisoner.

Value of Life

The value of human life, as Catholicism teaches, is founded on the facts that every individual belongs to the exclusive dominion of God and that for every individual Christ suffered and died.

Life begins by a creative act of God, producing the human soul and cooperating with the procreative activity of the parents; and human life is destined ultimately for happiness with God.

Human life, therefore, in its beginning, in its development and end belongs exclusively to God. It is to be lived in all its deliberate and free choices in subordination to the divine plan of human living, natural and supernatural law, the rule of reason and the rule of grace.

The rule of reason forbids the destruction of human life as an invasion of God’s exclusive dominion. The rule of grace extends to euthanasia the precept, “Thou shalt not kill.”
The end does not justify the means. Alleviation of suffering cannot justify the destruction of human life which belongs to God.

There are just three exceptions to all this, all three based on the same principle, self-defense. The individual may defend his life by killing its unjust assailant. The State may defend from criminals, by imposition of the death sentence, the purposes for which the State exists. And soldiers may inflict death in a just war, namely, one in the defense of the violated rights of their country.

Violation of Law

Moreover, reason teaches that euthanasia is a violation of a most fundamental law of nature. Every appetite set up by nature is directed to the fuller life of that appetite and the individual to whom it belongs.

No being by its nature aims at self-destruction. Human bodies begin to decay, but do not aim at decay; decay comes by interference with their proper functioning.

Euthanasia is a willful tendency, contrary to the tendency of one’s whole nature. There could be no more unequivocal violation of nature than this.

Euthanasia or homicide, whether self-inflicted or inflicted by others, is unnatural as homosexuality is unnatural. The one tends to the nullification of sex, the other tends to nullification of man himself.
Some may say that they recognize no obligation to observe the natural order of things.

This doctrine, put into practice, has disastrous results. An outstanding law of the universe is that human progress depends on man's ability to rise superior to pain, suffering, toil and labor. Every great work of art, every worth while human success or achievement illustrates this law.

Euthanasia is founded on the principle that destruction of life is preferable to pain and suffering. Inculcate that principle and you engender a destructive fear of pain and suffering. Students and scholars will shrink from the pain of work; women will dread the anxiety of childbearing. "Why should life all labor be!" Fear and dread of pain are often worse than the actuality. Why not end life at the first appearance of fear?

Can't Be Limited

Since death is the end of life, why not end life at its very beginning by death? Once we admit that it is morally right for any individual to end his life in the presence of pain and suffering we are face to face with a concession that we cannot limit.

Think through the problem of euthanasia, you will find its advocacy is rooted in an absolute pagan attitude toward life. That attitude is supposedly based on the joy of living.

As a matter of fact, pagan philosophy casts an un-
escapable shadow of sadness over humanity, reflected in the pagan classic authors, for it sentences human kind to essential futility. Here is a paradox.

Catholicism with its emphasis on asceticism, on the soul, on the supernatural and on eternity, is, in the minds of many, opposed to the joy of living and the expression of man’s vitality.

In truth, Catholicism stands out today as the only organized international influence, which is the protector and conserver of the stream of human vital forces, by its moral doctrine on the right use of the procreative faculty, on the rights of unborn life, on the rights of mature life and its right to the material means necessary for its fuller development, and finally on the limitations of civil power with regard to human life.
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