

Life, Liberty and Law

Nancy Murphy

I have read the remarks of Dr. Victor G. Rosenblum, a Jewish professor of law and the social studies, president of Reed College in Portland, Oregon. "There is always the tendency," he wrote, "to convert the 'may' into a 'must.' We are now reaching the danger point where the welfare bureaucracy is impelled to make permitted birth control mandatory."

I found myself thinking, Oh come on now, Dr. Rosenblum. But a persistent sound of a vague memory interrupted. The phrase "committee of experts" stuck like a southern sand spur. I found the source in a report published by the March of Dimes in 1971, Intrauterine Diagnosis. As far as I can determine the remarks quoted below represent the positions taken by the individual researchers themselves and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the foundation.

Writing with regard to amniocentesis, a medical procedure used to make prenatal (prebirth) determination of the chromosomal constitution and/or the biochemical status of the unborn patient, one doctor from Howard School of Medicine in Washington, D.C., wrote:

"Parenthood is so important and so challenging that no one should undertake it without informed consent... the problem of consent might be dealt with by a committee of geneticists, obstetricians, and educational psychologists. They could draw up a series of consent forms for different circumstances in which amniocentesis might be indicated... The new forms would present three to six statements concerning the procedure, to be checked 'true' or 'false' by the respondent before

signing. Respondents who check the right answers may give consent; others will need further counseling."

In another section of the report, three doctors from the University of Washington in Seattle wrote of some long-term genetic implications of amniocentesis and selective abortions: "Once established as safe, intrauterine diagnosis is likely to be made available to all families after the birth of an affected child. The aim of such a program is the identification of subsequent affected children, and their selective abortion."

"Considering only the economic aspects, the saving to society by not having to bear the high costs of supporting patients with cystic fibrosis for the relatively large number of years which they can now survive, will probably be substantially greater than the continuing costs of the programs for premarital screening, for intrauterine diagnosis and for selective abortion, once the use of automated devices is introduced."

The three doctors' report continues, "When intrauterine diagnosis is impossible, births of affected children with other X-linked diseases could be prevented by prenatal sex determination if the mother were identified as a heterozygote. Abortion of all male fetuses, whether affected or not, would insure that only clinically normal daughters would be born. Some observers have suggested that in the not too distant future every pregnancy should be monitored by amniocentesis to ensure that the two children per family required to maintain constant population size will be as healthy as possible."

These are heady remarks. They underscore the ominous deviation, the perversion, of our medical sciences. For these are the observations of research experts using costs, convenience-equations, and the gossamer dreams of the ultimate in human breeding, as the basic and unquestioned justification for the systematic destruction of those considered unnecessary.

In his Discussion of the Symposium Papers, Dr. Orlando J. Miller of Columbia University wrote, "I was somewhat surprised by what was not said during the speakers' consideration of risks associated with prenatal diagnostic studies, i.e. the failure to mention potential long-term risks to children subjected as fetuses to amniocentesis. Let me make that point clearer by postulating that amniocentesis and removal of a large amount of amniotic fluid in the 14th to 16th week of pregnancy might produce an average drop in IQ of 25 points."

Further, Dr. Miller states, "My final point concerns the ultimate goals. The title of this symposium Intrauterine Diagnosis and Selective Abortion begs the question of what we are diagnosing and whom we shall abort. After all, we are all heterozygotes, and only by eliminating virtually everyone could our load of past mutations be eliminated, and this only temporarily, as new mutations are occurring all the time. The value of eliminating most mutant genes is questionable... genetic diversity may be crucial for our survival as a species."

And still there are those who will not acknowledge the spread of the anti-life philosophy, who do not recognize these first tragic steps away from the principle of the sacredness of human life. The corrosion of the American spirit has begun.

Is there no one to resist?



Seminar Talk

Sister Mary Rae Waller, [left], of the NETWORK staff, explained a point to Sisters Frances Sweeney, [center], and Eileen Conheady, two representatives of the Rochester diocese who attended a recent Washington, D.C. NETWORK Legislative Seminar. The seminar, which was set up to give participants knowledge of current issues and the legislative process, attracted 162 religious men and women representing 48 dioceses, 32 states and various religious communities. Begun in 1971, NETWORK aims to re-emphasize the role of Sisters as agents of social change through support of their active political involvement. Members organize at the district level and the Washington staff provides research and action guidelines.



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FATHER CONNOR

Seminary Group Elects Father Connor

Father Gerald T. Connor, spiritual director at Becker Hall, was elected president of the Eastern Regional Association of College Seminaries at its annual meeting at St. Mary's College in Baltimore.

The association, representing some 25 seminaries, was formed a year ago to include college seminaries of Northeast, Middle Atlantic and Southern accrediting agencies.

Father Connor was re-elected to the board of directors which elected him president to succeed Father John Tavares of Our Lady of Providence Seminary in Providence, R.I.

Principal topic at the meeting was the 5-year Program of Priestly Formations which still has two years to run.