

The Face of Modern Eugenics

It is with honor, pleasure, and a no small amount of anxiety that this country surgeon shares a podium at this conference with so many eminent physicians and other professionals, and men and women who are leaders of The Church. Dr. Morrow, your kindness in asking me to speak is appreciated; your wisdom is yet in question.

(play video) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ju-q4OnBtNU>

O Genace (pronounced phonetically), two words in ancient Greek that literally translate to the English language as “well bred” or “well born”. But like many words and phrases translated from the ancient languages into English, the literal translation does not convey the full intended meaning of the words. In epic poetry, O Genace does not simply mean well bred like cattle or race horses, but carries the additional meaning as being born with nobility or honor. In recent times, O Genace, or eugenics clearly has lost any resemblance of a human being entering this world with honor.

Not all ancient cultures were as patrician as the writers of the epic poems. A newly born child in Sparta was brought to the city elders for inspection. If a male infant was felt unfit to live, he was tossed into a gorge known as the “place of rejection”. An unfit infant girl was left in a basket so there was a chance that a shepherd or a wonderer may take the child in.

If we now fast forward to a mere 131 years ago, the word eugenics, was first coined in 1883 by Francis Galton, a half cousin of Charles Darwin. Galton, interested in his half cousin’s theories of the development of plants and animals based on positive heritable traits, desired to apply them to humans. By the early 1900s eugenics had become an academic discipline at many colleges and universities. International conferences were held and the social movement reached its greatest popularity in the early decades of the 20th century. In the western, industrialized countries, eugenic policies were carried out in society through marriage restrictions, segregation,

forced abortions and pregnancies, and compulsory sterilization. In 1927, in the case *Buck v. Bell*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that forced sterilization of persons with intellectual disabilities was legal and did not violate a person's rights as written in the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The majority opinion was written by none other than Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes who declared, "three generations of imbeciles is enough". The single dissenting vote was from Justice Pierce Butler, a devout Catholic. For the record, this decision has never been overturned.

The social movement and pseudoscience of eugenics came to a crashing halt with the exposure of the horrors of Nazi Germany. It is rarely noted that the first victims of the holocaust were children with physical and intellectual disabilities. The Action T4 Program, established in September, 1939 and officially running through August, 1941 specifically targeted children with idiocy, Down syndrome, hydrocephalus, microcephaly, malformations of all kinds, and spastic conditions. Children were taken from their parents and told they would be given special treatment. These children were then sent to six psychiatric hospitals in Austria and Germany where they were exterminated, typically by lethal injection, and their parents subsequently notified of their death by diagnoses such as pneumonia or appendicitis. Over 70,000 children were killed in this way. Even though the program officially ended in 1941, it is estimated that another 200,000 persons with disabilities were exterminated by the unofficial continuation of the program. It is also notable that the order to implement and carry out Program Action T4 is the only extermination order Adolf Hitler actually signed.

The origins and development of what I call modern eugenics, or eugenics after the second world war are much more insidious and harder to pin down. There seem to be sentinel judicial decisions and greater than life characters but when one studies the public acceptance and development of

this phenomenon clear pathways are not discernible. I simply cannot find a cohesive trail that has brought us to the place where we are today.

What we do know is that functional eugenics has now permeated our culture to a level of acceptance never achieved before. Embryonic stem cell research, in vitro fertilization, designer babies, and selective abortions are openly advocated and supported by a majority of Americans. The means may not always be as overtly brutal but they are no less real than the practices of Sparta and the social scientists of the last century. These procedures are covered by private and government insurance programs and have been accepted by the general populace.

The culture of modern eugenics has successfully and deeply infiltrated our educational systems from elementary school through medical residency programs. The American Civil Liberties Union, which made its name defending the rights of the silent, weakest, and least among us against the overreach of society or government, supports selective abortions. Denmark has declared that it wishes to become Downs free by the year 2030. This, in a country that 70 years ago had to be liberated, at the cost of human lives and blood, from a tyrannical regime that espoused and practiced the same ideas. *Veni Spiritus Sanctus!*

In a word, we are losing this battle and we are losing it bad. Why? Well, maybe because we have 1) well funded private foundations pushing this agenda, 2) a major political party has made it an unchangeable part of their platform, 3) a liberal judiciary, and 4) a supportive media.

I think it's worth looking back 150 years to another great social, ethical, and moral crisis which was the focus of its time, slavery. It took outstanding leaders like Abraham Lincoln and William Wilberforce many years through great trials, personal risk, and social upheaval to rid us of the horror of slavery once and for all, but is that really true? It is said that with the current global catastrophe of human trafficking that there are probably more persons in slavery and bondage now than any time in human history. These individuals, many children, live in the most deplorable conditions

receiving the most inhumane treatment. So how are we losing that one, too? Are there private foundations promoting human trafficking? a political party that promotes it? a judiciary that condones it? maybe a media that supports it? Clearly, the answer to all of those questions is no.

There must be a deeper force that fuels such practices as eugenics and human trafficking. I would contend to you that this more fundamental force exists and has two components. Whether you're engaging in eugenic practices or human trafficking two things are clear: first, one can make a lot of money doing it, and second, if you try to take away that funding stream they will try to hurt you and hurt you bad.

This is nothing new. Let me share with you two stories from the Acts of the Apostles. First from chapter 16 when St. Paul was in Philippi.

“As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us crying, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.’ And she did this for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said in the spirit, “I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And it came out that very hour. But when the owners saw their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, ‘These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice.’ The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows on them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”

The story ends with St. Paul and Silas beaten and thrown into prison. A close examination of the text reveals that when the slave owners brought St. Paul and Silas before the magistrates they gave a social argument to

incense the crowd and turn the legal authorities of the day against them. Never do the slave owners mention the true economic reason that they were mad at the apostles. Sound familiar?

Or later in Acts 19 when riots broke out in Ephesus after St. Paul and the others preached there. However, the social unrest did not come from the preaching of the The Way. No one was enraged because they were preaching the resurrection of Jesus. The unrest was instigated and fueled by the silversmiths in town who were losing business because people were not buying their shiny images of the God, Artemis. Again, economics was at the core.

So hypothetically consider this. You want to get rid of abortion? Then make it free. I don't just mean free to the patient but make it so that a provider or doctor cannot charge or get paid at all for performing the procedure. Make it that there is no facility fee. No fee for the assistants. No exchange of dollars at all. I'll bet that would get rid of 95% of abortions in this country. You'd find out the real depth of the social justice argument and commitment to the issue is far weaker than promulgated today. Or does anyone think the IVF industry would exist if you couldn't turn a buck doing it? Try taking away the economic incentive for either and you will feel the big sting.

But interestingly, it also works both ways. In 2012 two scientists won the Nobel Prize in Medicine for developing a process to transform normal adult skin cells into cells that, like embryonic stem cells, are pluripotent, capable of becoming any tissue cell in the human body. Suddenly, there was no need for the developing, banking, and sale of embryonic stem cell lines. Thus, has initiated the demise of the embryonic stem cell industry.

All of this sheds light of the fundamental difference between modern eugenics and the eugenics practiced at the early part of the twentieth century. In the early 1900s eugenics was driven by politics, social elitism, and pseudoscience. In our time, eugenics is driven by economics. The critical point is, any time a human life is viewed as a commodity, the door is

open for practices such as eugenics that ignore or deny the dignity of human life.

We have discussed large and glaring examples of this in current medical practice that immediately conjure a sense of revulsion in everyone in this room. But there are also insidious examples which are just as real and damaging to our cause.

Last week I received a consultation request to examine a healthy toddler for in toeing. The consult was four pages long, single spaced, and in a small font. The note included an extensive review of systems and many bullet points across a comprehensive history and physical. Does that makes sense for something like in toeing which is normal human development in a toddler? Might it be that the referring doctor generated all that documentation in order to submit a level 4 or 5 E&M code?

Raise your hand if you know what an E&M code is. Hmm, so what's an E&M code? An E&M code is how we doctors get paid. It stands for Evaluation and Management. At the end of every visit we submit an E&M code that will determine how much we get paid for the visit. E&M codes go from one to five with one being a simple problem that can be managed easily in a short period of time. A five is a very complex problem that requires an extensive evaluation and spending a long time with the patient.

Sounds straightforward enough. But how does the payer know how complex the problem was or how difficult developing the treatment? They rely on documentation. And there's the rub. There are very specific rules on how much documentation denotes a level one, two, three visit and so on. So in the end, we get paid for how much we document; not really on the complexity of the problem, the solution, or the time needed to address it. The opportunity for gamesmanship is obvious and made incredibly easy by computers and the electronic medical record. Templates have been developed which enable a doctor to click off a few boxes and voila! a child's normal in toeing becomes a level 4 or 5 problem. Except it really isn't a

level 4 or 5 problem, and the electronic medical record is becoming so cookie cutter, meaning they look nearly identical for each patient, that sometimes one has to struggle to find what small part of the record is actually unique to the patient and their problem. And you know all that information was not really obtained from the patient. Are you seriously going to tell me that an orthopaedic surgeon questions a patient about their bowel habits when addressing their carpal tunnel? But it's all there, in single spaced micro font over four pages. Believe me.

Is the patient being treated as any less of a commodity in this instance? Unfortunately, this is only one of many examples where I could demonstrate how treating the patient as a commodity has supplemented the medical care of human beings who come scared and anxious seeking our knowledge and skill to treat their illnesses and injuries. It's that deeply ingrained in our current medical culture.

In 1910 The Times of London posed the following question to some of the greatest thinkers and writers of the time, "What's Wrong with the World?" They received numerous eloquent extensive essays espousing on various issues of the day. G. K. Chesterton, the famous Catholic theologian, author, and philosopher's essay said simply, "I am."

So what is the face of modern eugenics? It's that face behind the podium. I am. I am when ever I add unnecessary things to my clinic notes so I can charge a higher E&M code. I am when I worry more about how many patients I have to see in a day instead of focusing on the one human being in need in front of me. I am when I take a deep breath before entering a difficult patient's room instead of realizing that I may just about to have an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And that, my colleagues, is why we need The Church. Because there never has been, or will ever be a medical society given the promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. But this means that The Church, too, must get its act together.

The sexual abuse scandal has self inflicted a grave wound that will take a long time to heal. Fortunately, great efforts and intelligent decisions have been made to protect our children from those who would abuse them in The Church. However, through this process, there has been an obsession on the sexual aspect of the problem and not enough attention paid to the issue of abuse. In too many of our parishes there continues to be emotional, financial, and liturgical abuse which when brought to the attention of responsible parties are met with indifference, disdain, and clumsy coverups that we have seen before. The result is a laity that is dispirited, discouraged, and disengaged who then passively acquiesce to elements of the culture of death. I feel it is also one of the main reasons for the crisis in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Whether it's medicine or a religious vocation, young people are attracted to integrity and authenticity and only accept mediocrity when it is all that they are offered.

Well, given the fact that I have now offended or alienated nearly every one in this room, in an desperate attempt to rescue this talk, I would like to shift to a topic that is always a focus at medical meetings, golf. Fortunately, there's an excellent theological metaphor to help me out of this mess which I guarantee you is occurs on every golf course in America this and every day. God gives Mulligans.

Raise your hand if you know what a Mulligan is. Hmmm, same people who knew what an E&M code is.

Let me explain. Some days when you're out playing golf (which incidentally Mark Twain allegedly referred to as "a good walk spoiled") you just seem to have it all working. Your drives are straight, your irons are true, your putting is sound, and most importantly, your score is really good. So you confidently line up that next shot, swing and there it goes, plunk!, right into the pond, and there with it goes your score. God is like that guy standing next to you who says, "Drop another ball. We won't count that one." That's a Mulligan.

Our God forgives. Our God redeems. Our God gives Mulligans. We must be humble and gracious and take them. However, to take a Mulligan requires two things: first, that you recognize that you made a bad shot, and second you must be willing to change your swing or you can expect the next ball to land in the same pond. Always in prayer, we ask our God to transform us. And that is the first step in healing our profession and standing up to the modern world of eugenics.

A recent article in The Wall Street Journal bemoaned that the golden age of medicine was over as patients no longer respected us as they did in previous generations. I would contend that patients continue to respect us and want to respect us, and what we truly feel is a lack of self respect that we then project on our patients. A patient's respect for their doctor can not compensate for a doctor's lack of self respect.

This age where patients are treated as commodities not only affects the patient but takes it toll on our professional souls as well. For when a patient is treated as a commodity the individual is denied their inherent dignity and our profession is stripped of its honor. Ladies and gentlemen, and especially you young people present, ours is an honorable profession.

The second thing we must do to address the culture of modern eugenics is to harness the power of the laity. Every person in the pew has been baptized and thus infused with the Holy Spirit. When this Paraclete is freed from its cage a power is unleashed that is unequalled by any force on this earth or anywhere in the cosmos. I told you that the Action T4 Program was officially discontinued in Nazi Germany in 1941. It was terminated, not because the government had a change of heart, but because of a popular uprising of the people. Yes, in Nazi Germany in its time of greatest power. It was the only time Hitler was booed at a public gathering.

In our churches and in our health centers, the greatest thing we can do today to harness the power of the laity, is to protect, uplift, promote, and support the family. This is not an option. This is priority one. It is especially true for families with a child or an adult with a childhood onset

disability. If we are to bring children with special needs into this world we must also insure that they receive appropriate healthcare, education, and specifically adapted religious catechesis. Look. Look! There is no separate cross for cerebral palsy. There is no separate cross for Down syndrome, and there is no separate cross for muscular dystrophy. The ground is never more level than at the foot of the cross.

Love is planted, cultivated and grows in strong families. And love is the force that unleashes the Holy Spirit in our world. The family is the Domus, or home, church and it is also the smallest health center. I have learned in 30 years of caring for persons with disabilities of all ages that I can not take care of the patient without taking care of their family and their community. The most striking impression I have had about my first meeting of the Catholic Medical Association, and this being from my plane ride to this podium, is the absolute joy of seeing so many families here. Thank you for bringing your children to this meeting. They have added a wonderful dimension that no other group could have done. My wife, Karen, and I consider our greatest accomplishment to have raised three adult daughters who are strong women in the Catholic faith, one of whom, I might add, is scheduled to give birth to our third grandchild in two weeks.

Third, we as Catholic physicians and The Church must promote and support research. Yes, I said research. True science is on our side; pseudoscience and scientism are the enemies. May I remind you that it was a scientific discovery that rendered the embryonic stem cell factories obsolete. Modern genetics is not modern eugenics. Ask any 30 year old with cystic fibrosis. In fact, modern genetics may just be the antidote for modern eugenics. I will never cure cerebral palsy or Down syndrome with my scalpel but they will be cured in the laboratory by scientists who are willing to combine their faith and reason to engage the seemingly impossible problems of today in the same way previous generations tackled leprosy or tuberculosis. Catholic physicians and The Church must once again be active players and leaders in the support of basic science

research performed by those who respect the dignity of life. Only then can we expect that the translation of that research into clinical practice will be for the patients' welfare and not profit driven.

If we are willing to take these steps I see a future I barely dare to believe is possible but I know with certainty is coming. I see a future where the Catholic healthcare network in this country will be rebuilt with new Catholic Medical Centers next to or on the same property as seminaries or houses of religious orders. Where the great mystery of life, from conception to natural death, will be honored and uplifted with treatments and research that encompass and embrace the totality of the human mind, body, and spirit. It may be a different model, but that's all right, too, because our God is also a God of creativity. Pipe dream? Hardly. May I remind you that the largest and most comprehensive healthcare network in the world is the Roman Catholic Church.

I see medical and nursing schools and residency training programs that allow young health professions to learn and mature in our craft in a nurturing environment. Facing the stress of daily confronting very real struggles of life, sickness, suffering, and death where they did not have to feel alone being the only one with Catholic foundational beliefs.

Most importantly, I see a future where patients will have an alternative to a system that treats them like the tiniest sliver of a piece of pie that makes up 16% of the gross national product. Where instead they are welcomed and cared for as an invaluable child of the Living God and who's part of a family and an extended community.

Today our culture is currently on a path that has a predictable and historic ending. Let me quote Servant of God, Dr. Jerome Lejeune, the father of modern genetics, and the first to discover that Down Syndrome was Trisomy 21. A physician who spent his life advocating for and defending the rights of individuals with genetic intellectual disabilities, who took a strong pro-life stance which cost him dearly in his professional career. I quote:

“Sparta was the only Greek city to practice this kind of eugenics, this systematic elimination. And nothing remains of it: it has left us not a single poet, not a single musician, not even a ruin! Sparta is the only Greek city that contributed nothing to humanity! Is that a coincidence or is there a direct connection? Geneticists wonder, ‘Did they turn stupid because they killed their future thinkers and artists when they killed their less-than-beautiful children?’”

I am convinced our culture’s future lies elsewhere. You know, I don’t frankly care if we have our backs up against the wall right now because you never get to Easter without going through Good Friday. And let me share something with you, Easter’s a done deal! So take hope, do it right, believe in the power of the resurrection and be a part of the coming day when every mother-to-be will be confident that her baby will be assured an honorable birth.

Sia Lodato Gesu Christo!

Thank you.

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