



When Ideology Corrupts Science and Medicine

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Recently I came across some published remarks by Professor Richard Sloan of Columbia University dealing with the relationship between medicine and religion. He notes that even though abortion is a “perfectly legal procedure,” some physicians withhold information about the practice from their patients, claiming their decision is justified by their religious beliefs. He goes on to express his displeasure about “such religiously motivated malpractice.” He even states that in some parts of the country, patients have “no alternative to physicians who think that their primary obligation is to honor their religious convictions rather than act in the best interests of their patients.”

His remarks expose a real tension between those who believe healthcare must be guided by the values of an ethically informed conscience, and those who believe that it should be driven by various ideologies. One ideology widely encountered in the field of medicine today promotes the direct taking of human life through abortion, euthanasia, and embryo research, and neglects longstanding codes of medical ethics that insist the first duty of the physician and the researcher is to “do no harm.”

When a physician directly takes the life of another human be-

ing, he is, in fact, committing medical malpractice, and repudiating his central healing mission and identity as a doctor. Abortion, by its very nature, is always at odds with the best interests of prenatal patients and their mothers. As a component of a broader anti-life ideology, it represents a corrosive force in hospital clinics, research laboratories and other institutions of higher learning.

I remember a story my father once told about the corrosive power of ideology, something he had witnessed first-hand living under communism, and working as a physics professor at the University of Warsaw. To enter the university and study physics, all applicants were required to pass three oral exams, one in physics, one in mathematics and the third in something called “Politics and Marxism.” All the exams were held in a single room with different tables for each subject.

One day as my father and another faculty member were interviewing a particularly intelligent and gifted young man for the physics program, they were dismayed to learn that he had been unable to gain admission to the university for the past two years, because — even though he did brilliantly on the physics and

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mathematics exams — he couldn't seem to pass the Politics and Marxism exam.

My father and his colleague had seen this before. The communist party members who conducted these interviews would target applicants who might be religious in their outlook, asking them pointed and discriminatory questions they could not answer in good conscience, and then fail them on the exam. Fortunately for the young man, there was a policy that any faculty member was free to move among tables and ask questions during any other department's entrance examination. So when the hopeful student approached the Politics and Marxism table, my father and his friend went over and sat down, one on each side of the communist party member running the interview.

The first question was: "Please explain how the Church is backwards and oppresses people." The fellow remained silent, since he was a Catholic himself. My father and his colleague stepped in after a moment, and said, "Well, it's clear that he didn't quite grasp the question. Allow me to repeat it for him: *What does Marxism teach* about how the Catholic Church is backwards and oppresses people?"

The fellow was then able to jump in and provide a correct answer, by affirming that the ideology of Marxism did teach thus-and-so. The questions and their refinement by my father and his colleague continued, and the communist party official became visibly agitated. The fellow ended up passing the Politics and Marxism exam, and was admitted to the university. Although the story had a happy ending, the brilliant young man had lost two years of a successful career because of the closed-minded, anti-religious ideologies prevalent in the academic environment of the university under communism.

In academic settings today, we still encounter closed-minded, anti-religious ideologies, as Professor Sloan's comments remind us, and they can result in even more damaging consequences than merely delaying admission to the university. They result in untold loss of human life through abortion, euthanasia, *in vitro* fertilization and embryo-destructive research.

As health care workers and researchers acquiesce to entrenched anti-life and anti-religious ideologies, modern medicine faces the danger of becoming warped and eventually cor-

rupted once again. Instances of such corruption have happened only too often in the past. Codes of medical ethics like the Hippocratic Oath, the Nuremberg Code, and the Declaration of Helsinki came into existence after various misguided ideologies gained a foothold, or after the medical establishment suffered a core meltdown, allowing doctors and researchers to participate in crimes against humanity. History reminds us how quickly our human conscience, when deprived of its divine and religious dimensions, can become untethered in a tumultuous sea of ideological temptations, and end up on the glide path towards crime and atrocity.

On the other hand, those who courageously resist the practice of ending human lives in clinical and research settings provide a powerful witness and counterbalance to pernicious ideologies operative in academia and health care today.

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