



## Flip Side

By William A. Borst, Ph.D.

The 1950s marked a vast increase in the popularity of recorded music. Teenagers and many adults flocked to their local record stores to purchase the latest *hit songs*. Each hit song was accompanied by a lesser known recording by the same artist on the back or *flip side*. Few people played the flip side but sometimes it contained a future hit that eventually came to the public's attention.

### TWIN KILLERS

Like the hit records of the 50s, the primary focus of the culture war has been on abortion. Few people have paid much attention to its deadly *flip side*, euthanasia. The *judicial execution* of Terri Schiavo in Florida has opened up the public eye to a foreboding future. Euthanasia is the logical derivative of a society that solves problems through the destruction of unborn children. Abortion and euthanasia are irrefutably linked in the putrid womb of the culture of death, like killer twins, intent on attacking God's most important creation, namely humans made in His image and likeness.

### A CLASH OF IDEAS

In March of 2005, John Leland wrote an article in the New York Times that linked Terri Schiavo to French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Leland believes the case *has re-enacted a clash of ideas that has run through the history of Western thought*. Descartes, like many Greek and Catholic philosophers before him, addressed the vital question of *the value of each human life*. He defined human life, not as biological life, which is an inviolable gift from God, but as *consciousness, about which people can make judgments*. Religions and secular humanists have battled over the meaning of Descartes' views ever since.

The late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries spawned powerful intellectual forces that undermined the traditional respect for life. Progressive philosophies, such as socialism, modernism, Social Darwinism, and liberalism, all condemned in Pope Pius X's encyclical *Doctrine of the Modernists* in 1907, darkened the horizons for the sanctity of human life. Modernists held that

God was no more than a backseat passenger on the journey of life.

Euthanasia derives from their progressive thinking that places the quality of life above the sanctity of life. The most egregious application of what is essentially a eugenics-based policy of euthanasia occurred in Germany after World War I. Euthanasia received its first great boost with the publication of the tract *Permission of the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life* by Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche in 1920. The authors enjoined Germans to replace their Christian traditions with those of the pagan Spartans and the Eskimo Inuit who killed their elderly parents and defective children.

By 1939 the Nazi government had established a full-fledged euthanasia program in relative secrecy. Under the direction of Philip Bouhler and Dr. Karl Brandt, the Nazis implemented the *T-4 Euthanasie Programme* or what can be called *disability cleansing*. Over 200,000 mentally ill adults and defective children were put to death under the rubric *lebensunwertes Leben* or *life unworthy of life*.

### FAMILY FEUD

While the Terri Schiavo case did not enjoy the T-4 Program's secrecy, the mainstream American press turned it into a media circus that distorted the facts to the extent that a pall of confusion and misunderstanding reigned without interference.

On February 25, 1990, the 26-year-old Schiavo collapsed in her St. Petersburg apartment. A victim of a *mysterious seizure*, her heart stopped beating long enough for her to suffer severe brain damage. She had left no written instructions or living will, fostering a conflict of emotions and interests that dramatized the deadly scenario. In 1991 Michael Schiavo sued the doctors who had been treating her and the courts awarded him \$700,000 for his wife's care and another \$300,000 for *loss of spousal companionship*. He was named her sole guardian, responsible for all her medical care and rehabilitation.

When Terri's family, the Schindlers, sensed what was happening, they heroically determined to keep Terri alive. It was an uphill battle, since the courts recognized Michael as her

sole guardian. In May of 1998, Michael filed a petition with the Florida Circuit Court to have her feeding tube removed, arguing that he had done everything possible to rehabilitate her.

Actually Michael had two serious conflicts of interest. At Terri's death he was scheduled to receive an additional \$700,000 and he had become involved with another woman. In April of 2001 after a trial and more legal maneuvers, Terri's feeding tube was removed. Two days later a federal judge decided that more time was needed to sort out the issues. The tube was re-inserted.

### TERRI'S PASSION

One of the witnesses Michael Schiavo's attorney, pro-euthanasia advocate George Felos recruited in 2002, was Dr. Ronald Cranford, a bioethicist and strong advocate for euthanasia. Cranford calls himself *Dr. Humane Death*, and his specialty is the *physician's role in killing and the intentional withdrawal of treatment*.

In November 2002 Judge George Greer ruled that Terri's feeding tube should be removed because there was no compelling evidence that she would recover and that according to her husband's testimony, she would not want to continue receiving nourishment and hydration through a surgically implanted tube. Florida Governor Jeb Bush and the state legislature enacted emergency legislation, *Terri's Law*, which kept her feeding tube in place. In 2005 a Florida court struck down the law as unconstitutional.

On March 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> the U. S. Congress acted to block the removal of her feeding tube. They subpoenaed both Terri and Michael Schiavo to appear before Congressional committees. Judge Greer blocked the subpoenas and ordered the feeding tube removed. Terri could have been spoon-fed but Judge Greer refused to allow it. On March 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Congress passed emergency legislation calling for a federal court to review the case. President George W. Bush immediately signed it into law.

On March 22<sup>nd</sup> Federal Circuit Judge Whittemore refused to order doctors to resume feeding on the grounds the family is unlikely to prevail in a new court case. The Schindlers continued their fight until they had exhausted all their life-saving options. Their daughter finally died of dehydration and starvation after thirteen long and horrible days on March 31<sup>st</sup> in a Pinellas Park, Florida hospice. After a legally mandated autopsy, her husband had her cremated.

Terri Schiavo was never in a PVS or *Persistent Vegetative State*. She was not terminally ill. She was not in a coma, nor was she on a respirator. She was not being kept alive by artificial means, any more than small children are kept alive when a parent feeds them. She was no burden to her parents who were willing to care for her the rest of her natural life. Terri died through the aggressive determination of her husband and the court that removed her feeding tube.

Terri Schiavo underwent a painful and long capital punishment for the crime of being brain damaged. Michael Schiavo and the courts found her life to be *unworthy of life*. The public was told that her *choice to die* was being honored, although there is no evidence but hearsay to support the execution of her sentence. The media falsely reported that they were *letting her die*. The cause of her death was *unnatural starvation*.

### SOMETHING OF VALUE

The Schiavo case became grist for the media mill that surrounded her death. In the minds of many, her brain damage had eliminated her from the human race. During a television debate, bioethicist Bill Allen said *human awareness is an essential criterion for personhood*. Fetuses, infants, and Alzheimer's patients are only minimally aware and would not meet Allen's standard for legal protection. Reliance on a personhood theory exposes most brain-damaged people to the whims of their caregivers. They are vulnerable to the unscrupulous because *death does not deprive them of something they can value*. On Chris Matthew's cable show, *Hardball*, noted prolife antagonist and author Christopher Hitchens, spoke of her as *nonlife*. Before her death he referred to her as *the late and long-dead Terri Schiavo*. Columnist John Leo notes *bioethics has hardened into an activist ideology that pervades the medical world, the schools, and government*.

The Schiavo case has had drastic consequences for the disabled, who have been virtually written out of the human race. The media seldom focused on disability groups, such as *Not Dead Yet*, who argued that Terri was being denied her rights under the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA). They repeatedly questioned why the law had not been raised in any of the court actions. They cited a federal regulation that says that the ADA does not give the guardian of a disabled person the right to refuse treatment. Several Congressmen alluded to ADA but failed to act.

The disabled correctly stress that the debate should never center on their ability to recover or even get better. Disabled people have intrinsic value, precisely because they are living human beings. This case has made it easier for some guardians, many with a financial or emotional conflict of interest, to kill them by withholding food and water. The disabled sense that the culture is turning against them. Last winter several disability groups protested the award-winning Clint Eastwood movie *Million Dollar Baby* over its ending that portrayed sympathetically the assisted suicide of a female boxer who had become disabled.

### DEATH ON DEMAND

The courts did not care about Terri Schiavo. The American court system has become a *Divine Tribunal* that is

recklessly out of step with the Founding Fathers. Activist judges have legislated several million abortions, homosexual marriage, and the right to die as part of the new American heritage. As in abortion, where the judiciary has consistently protected *abortion on demand*, they have discovered a corresponding duty to protect *death on demand*. The courts might base their opinions on national opinion polls, the policies of the American Medical Association or even the evolving standards of bioethics in Europe. Already two justices, Anthony Kennedy and Ruth Ginsburg are on record urging their colleagues to consider European rulings in cases before the Supreme Court.

In European hospitals, especially in Holland, euthanasia is drastically on the rise. It is not only the elderly who are at risk. Many Dutch doctors openly admit that they regularly commit eugenic infanticide on defective children. Their government's response is to urge them to create *guidelines* that will moderate any *excesses*. In line with this government apathy, the Groningen Medical Center, a pediatrics hospital, has published its own guidelines that list its standards for performing and reporting the euthanasia of newborns with *serious, incurable deformities*.

Polls in the United Kingdom and France show that 80% of the people support legal changes that would allow patients who endure extreme suffering from terminal illness to request medical assistance in ending their lives. In Europe the debate has progressed from not whether euthanasia is right or wrong but how to regulate it.

### DEATH CHOICES

The *Right to Die* movement has been busy changing the public's perception of death. It has caused state and federal lawmakers to dismiss the rights to life and recovery for many disabled and handicapped people. Since 1980 the *Hemlock Society* has promoted itself as an organization devoted to the concept of *death with dignity*. Now known as the *End-of-Life Choices*, they employ the same rhetoric that has worked so well for abortion. *Choices* has conditioned the American people through its well-chosen language of death and dying so that elderly fear being a burden to their children and do not want to linger in an unfulfilling state of vegetation and distress. They wish to *provide civil and criminal immunity to physicians, pharmacists, and people who are present to assist the patient (in committing suicide)*. The medical community, which is sinking under the weight of exorbitantly rising prices, government regulations and the pressure to ration care, might eventually see euthanasia as a means of escaping the implosion of their bureaucratic infrastructure.

### LIFE PRESERVERS

The Catholic Church has always consistently opposed euthanasia in all of its forms. In 1995 Pope John Paul II wrote the encyclical The Gospel of Life, which deemed

euthanasia a *crime that no human law can claim to legitimize*. The Pope taught that there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose laws for euthanasia by *conscientious objection*.

At the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations conference, held in Rome in March of 2004, the Pope made a profound statement on PVS. It is a patient ethical document stating that removing the feeding tube from persons in a Persistent Vegetative State was immoral and no quality of life could justify *euthanasia by removal*. He reaffirmed the moral imperative of care and rehabilitation for these patients. The Pope added that the terminally ill who exhibit *no evident sign of self-awareness or of awareness of the environment and seem unable to interact with others or react to specific stimuli, still retain their human dignity in all its fullness*.

The Catholic Church teaches that feeding tubes are *ordinary treatment* and not subject to the limitations placed on *extraordinary means*. The Conference of Catholic Bishops said food and water are always required while extraordinary means are not.

This contrasts with the culture of death, which promotes the idea of advanced directives in the form of a *living will*. Living wills can mislead persons into forfeiting their basic obligation to preserve their own lives. A person who leaves instructions which do not provide for food and water is signing a suicide warrant that is against the moral law.

### SHADOWS OF LIFE

Terri Schiavo was just one tree in the forest of life. As John Donne's poem *No Man is An Island* underscores, her court-sanctioned execution diminishes all human life. Her case matters as *symbol and substance*, writes Cal Thomas. It is only the latest in a long series that forces people to choose between two philosophies of life. According to Thomas they are the Christian respect for life and the Darwinian philosophy that regards man as matter and energy, shaped by pure chance in a random universe, evolving from slime with no Author of Life, no purpose for living beyond pleasure and with no future but the grave.

Many agree that the moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, those in the twilight of life, and those who are in the shadows of life. The country seems to be failing this test.

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*"May our Lord Himself inspire your hearts with courage. And may He confirm your hearts in holiness."*

## Cardinal Mindszenty

### TRIPLE JUBILEE



A recent article from a Hungarian Catholic weekly reported that this year Cardinal Mindszenty has a triple jubilee: the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death on May 6; the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary on June 12 of his priestly ordination, and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary on September 16 of his appointment as Archbishop of Esztergom and primate of Hungary.

In connection with these anniversaries, there are celebrations in Hungary, in particular at the city of Szombathely in the Cathedral where he was ordained a priest and the diocese he served until he was ordained bishop.

On April 2, 2005 a Mass was celebrated there in his honor by the local bishop. Following the Mass, the square in front of the Cathedral was solemnly renamed "Joseph Mindszenty Square" and a memorial bronze plaque on the wall of the seminary was unveiled. At this dedication ceremony Prince Michael Hapsburg, a member of the imperial family and president of the European "Mindszenty Foundation", gave a speech in which he expressed his hope that the Cardinal will soon be beatified.

In 1991, during his first pilgrimage to Hungary, Pope John Paul II celebrated a Mass in the city of Szombathely and the Pope said the following about Cardinal Mindszenty: "The unshakable Cardinal Archbishop of Esztergom gave the example of magnificent virtues to the Catholic world. He was carrying the crown of thorns placed on his head with the dignity of a great shepherd of souls. He left for us the memory of a towering Church leader who was able to pray and suffer for his people for many long years."

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