Book Reviews

The Linacre Quarterly
2018, Vol. 85(3) 299-306
© Catholic Medical Association 2018
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
journals.sagepub.com/home/lqr

An Image of God: The Catholic Struggle with Eugenics. By Sharon M. Leon. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013. 240 pp. \$48.00. ISBN 13:978-0-226-03898-8.

Reviewed by: Rebecca R. Messall, Denver, CO, USA
DOI: 10.1177/0024363918777508

In *An Image of God: The Catholic Struggle against Eugenics*, researcher Sharon M. Leon examines a forty-year period in which Catholic laity, church hierarchy, and popes resisted a relentless advance of laws authorizing forcible sterilization in the United States. Focusing on the years between 1910 and 1950, the author identifies key leadership in the early eugenics movement such as Harry H. Laughlin, Lothrop Stoddard, and Madison Grant and key opponents within the Catholic community such as Fr. John A. Ryan, Fr. John Montgomery Cooper, and Pope Pius XI.

The author gives some detailed examples of clashes in legislative and court battles between Catholics and eugenicists, focusing especially on Ohio, Alabama, and California. For readers who follow historical research on the eugenics movement and, particularly, its Catholic opposition, Leon's details may provide some new information. The author concludes, as did the eugenicists themselves and later historians, that dogged and sustained activism made Catholics the primary source of opposition to eugenic sterilization even in locales where Catholics were a minority of the voting base.

Unfortunately, readers should examine *An Image of God* with a careful eye. The author describes Margaret Sanger as a figure who wanted to alleviate "economic hardship" through contraception. In a book covering the history of eugenics, this benign characterization of Sanger is alarming. It may have been true of her early motivations, but certainly after she spent some time with eugenicists in England, she became deeply committed to their idea that some people were intellectually or otherwise substandard—and should not be allowed to have children at all.

Sanger's 1922 book *The Pivot of Civilization* (Elmsford, NY: Maxwell Reprint Company, 1950 Sanger 1950) is well known as a eugenic screed against the "feeble-minded" and "the emergency problem of segregation and sterilization" (Sanger 1950, 101). Sanger (1950) proposed a "policy of immediate sterilization, or making sure that parenthood is absolutely prohibited to the feeble-minded" (p. 102). She condemned "organized charity" as being "not merely ineffectual" but "positively injurious to the community and the future of the race" (Sanger 1950, 113). Sanger (1950) raged at "maternity centers" as being associated with "irresponsibility, mental defect, feeble mindedness, and other transmissible taints" and as supporting "the most dysgenic tendency" (p. 115).

Sanger's pro-eugenics rhetoric was thoroughly documented decades ago. For example, Robert G. Marshall and Charles A. Donovan (1988) published *Blessed Are the Barren*, citing extensive examples of Sanger's eugenics advocacy. In addition, Sanger self-published her eugenic views in her own journal, the *Birth Control Review*. In March, 1928, Sanger's journal promoted eugenicist Harry Laughlin in an article he penned applauding the US Supreme Court's 1927 decision upholding Virginia's forced sterilization statute. The case was *Buck v. Bell*, which Laughlin had successfully led through the courts. But, as Marshall and Donovan exposed, *Birth Control Review* promoted eugenics with many other articles, including but not limited to: Robert H. Kennedy, "The Eugenic Conscience" (February 1921); John C. Duvall, "The Purpose of Eugenics" (December 1924); F. B. Sumner, "Birth Control and Positive Eugenics" (July 1925); and "Birth Control: The True Eugenics" (August 1928).

An Image of God briefly states, without explanation, that eugenics was imbedded with "reproductive and individual rights." In truth, these are the modern buzz words to mask eugenic strategies devised in the twentieth century. Sanger herself belonged to the American Eugenics Society. Notably, two successor Planned Parenthood presidents were also members of the eugenics society, William Vogt, author of *The*

Road to Survival, and Alan Guttmacher, a key advocate of abortion, and namesake of today's Guttmacher Institute. Notably, both Planned Parenthood and the Guttmacher Institute are part of a global, tax-supported infrastructure of current population control, as extensively documented by Betsy Hartmann (1995) in *Reproductive Rights & Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control*.

Also, as reported by Marshall and Donovan, Sanger's group, the American Birth Control League (ABCL), enlisted leaders whose roles interlocked with their roles as leaders of the American Eugenics Society. For example, according to the Marshall and Donovan, eugenic leader Lothrop Stoddard was a member of Sanger's ABCL. They write that Stoddard's 1940 book, after his trip to Nazi Germany, pronounced that the German sterilization laws were "weeding out the worst strains in Germanic stock in a scientific and truly humanitarian way" (Marshall and Donovan 1988, 278). Also, according to Marshall and Donovan (1988), the notorious eugenicist, Harry Laughlin, is "listed in the April 1938 *Birth Control Review* as a member of the Citizens' Advisory Committee for Planned Parenthood" (p. 277). Marshall and Donovan, in addition, wrote that Sanger's ABCL, now known as Planned Parenthood, listed six other advisory members in 1931 who were also advisors to the American Eugenics Society.

According to Marshall and Donovan (1988), Sanger herself lobbied then President Calvin Coolidge to create a special federal commission to have "free access to all facts and statistics as to customs and conditions now menacing the racial health of our country" (p. 1). And they also wrote that "At a March 1925 international birth control gathering held in New York City, a speaker warned of the menace posed by the 'black' and 'yellow' peril . . . The speaker was Dr. S. Adolphus Knopf, a member of Margaret Sanger's American Birth Control League" (Marshall and Donovan 1988, 1). Another speaker lamented that medicine was saving the lives of "worthless unfits" (Marshall and Donovan 1988, 1).

An Image of God incorrectly suggests that, by 1935, the leader of the American eugenics movement, Frederick Osborn, had reformed eugenics into a "pro-natalist" movement advocating for housing, recreation, education, and public health nursing and that eugenicists viewed the post-WWII baby boom as a fulfillment of decades of eugenicists' work. However, the truth is that in 1936, the journal *Eugenical News*, *Current Record of Race Hygiene*, listed Osborn as a eugenics society advisory member along with some of Germany's most notorious Nazi eugenicists, including Dr. Ernst Rudin, leader in

Germany's forced sterilizations. In 1937, Osborn "praised the Nazi sterilization program as 'the most important program that has ever been tried'" (Kuhl 1994, 75). In 1938, Osborn lamented the fact that the public opposed "the excellent sterilization program in Germany because of its Nazi origin" (Kuhl 1994, 76). In 1940, *Time Magazine* promoted Osborn's tweaked version of eugenics which touted "environmental eugenics" but which still sought hereditary purity. Osborn advocated "an environment equalized at a higher level [which] would show up a superior heredity in great numbers of persons now at a lower level of development" (*Eugenics for Democracy* 1940, 34). According to *Time*, Osborn's "Eugenics for Democracy," as the article was titled, would still involve involuntary sterilization of the "unfit" and "freedom not to have children," the latter becoming the "pro-choice" slogan for abortion. In 1964, Osborn was listed as chairman of the executive committee for the Population Council and Alan Guttmacher was listed as a medical adviser. In 1968, Osborn published *The Future of Human Heredity: An Introduction to Eugenics in Modern Society*. The foreword by leading evolutionist Theodosius Dobzhansky (1968) contended that eugenics had a "sound core," though it had been hampered by "overzealous proponents," and failed to denounce the murderous role eugenics played in Nazi Germany (p. vi).

In *An Image of God*, the author incorrectly states that political "progressives" were not the same as "eugenicists." Today, however, politicians and groups who defend abortion and population control openly describe themselves as progressives, among other descriptions. Present-day columnist George Will, writing for the journal *National Review*, recently noted the hypocrisy by people who describe themselves as progressives, when it was self-described progressives who advocated for eugenic initiatives (Will 2017).

In limiting her research to a forty-year period ending with 1950, the author of *An Image of God* implies that the eugenics movement ended after World War II. Nothing could be more mistaken. Economist and author Jacqueline Kasun, in her 1988 book, *The War against Population: The Economics and Ideology of Population Control* (Kasun 1988), gave detailed links between eugenics and current birth control programs. In 1998, researcher Katharine O'Keefe (1998) gathered together nearly four thousand names of members of eugenic societies, past and present, their positions and influence in spreading eugenic laws and education/propaganda (p. 4). Also publishing in 1998, Mary Meehan,

researcher and award-winning investigative journalist, copiously documented, in a two part article, that it was the eugenics movement that led to today's policies of legalized abortion and population control (see <http://www.Meehanreports.com> and Meehan 1998, 1999). Similarly, author Angela Franks, in her 2005 book, *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy, the Control of Female Fertility* (Franks 2005), documented the extensive interlocking relationship between Sanger's birth control movement and the eugenics movement.

Another misimpression left by reading *An Image of God* is that the mainstream scientific community in industry and academia rallied to denounce the pretense of "science" behind building a race of human purebreds. In fact, Mary Meehan in her article titled, "What's Wrong with the Science Establishment?" exposed the fact that science's mainstream umbrella group, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), elevated at least fourteen members of the American Eugenics Society to be president of the AAAS, and appointed other eugenicists to the AAAS board of directors, various panels and committees, and permitted the renamed eugenics society, The Society for the Study of Social Biology, to become an official AAAS affiliate (see <http://www.Meehanreport.com> and Meehan 2000).

In addition, and without supporting facts, *An Image of God* repeats a decidedly debunked argument that the "institutional church did little in the way of opposition to Nazi policies during the Third Reich," while accusing the Church of a "glaring moral failure" and stating that the Church only objected to German eugenics when it "challenged the Church's jurisdiction over marriage and family" (p. 104). In a footnote, the book does concede that this condemnation is subject to "vast and contradictory literature" (190n34), but the book's narrative only asserts one side of the argument without referring to factual support. In fact, Catholics and others eviscerated this black legend in books too numerous to list, but which include, Professor Margherita Marchione's (2000) *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace*, Professor Ronald J. Rychlak's (2000) book, *Hitler, the War and the Pope*, Professor Ralph McNerny's (2001) book, *The Defamation of Pius XIII*, and Joseph Bottum's and Rabbi David G. Dalin's collection of research articles (2004) in *The Pius War: Responses to the Critics of Pius XII*. For people without the time to research yet another denigration of the Catholic Church, they might be inspired to research anyway why Rabbi Dalin wrote the following in a chapter of his book with Joseph Bottum:

"For Jewish leaders of a previous generation, the campaign against Pius XII would have been a source of shock. During and after the war, many well-known Jews—Albert Einstein, Golda Meir, Moshe Sharett, Rabbi Isaac Herzog, and innumerable others—publicly expressed their gratitude to Pius" (Dalin 2004, 14). Dalin (2004), quoting from diplomat Pinchas Lapide, also wrote that the Church under Pius XII "was instrumental in saving at least 700,000, but probably as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands" (p. 14).

In conclusion, *An Image of God* should be read only by persons who have a grasp on Catholic Church teaching about marriage and family, the history of eugenics, birth control, abortion and population control, and the volumes of works exonerating Pope Pius XII from the many calumnies hurled at him because, otherwise, an innocent reader could be easily misinformed by some aspects of the book.

References

- Angela, Franks. 2005. *Margaret Sanger's Eugenic Legacy, The Control of Female Fertility*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.
- Betsy, Hartmann. 1995. *Reproductive Rights & Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control*. Boston, MA: South End Press.
- Dalin, David G. 2004. "Pius XII and the Jews." In *The Pius War: Responses to the Critics of Pius XII*, edited by Bottum s Joseph, and Rabbi David G Dalin. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 13–24.
- Dobzhansky, Theodosius. 1968. Foreword to *The Future of Human Heredity: An Introduction to Eugenics in Modern Society by Frederick Osborn*. New York: Weybright and Talley, v–vii.
- "Eugenics for Democracy." 1940. *Time Magazine*, 36 (September 9): 34.
- Jacqueline, Kasun. 1988. *The War Against Population: The Economics and Ideology of Population Control*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Kuhl, Stephan. 1994. *The Nazi Connection*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Margaret, Sanger. 1950. *The Pivot of Civilization*. Elmsford, NY: Maxwell Reprint Company.
- Margherita, Marchione. 2000. *Pope Pius XII: Architect for Peace*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Marshall, Robert G., and Charles A. Donovan. 1988. *Blessed Are the Barren: The Social Policy of Planned Parenthood*. San Francisco, NC: Ignatius Press.
- Meehan, Mary. 1998. "The Road to Abortion (I): How Eugenics Birthed Population Control." *Human Life Review* 24 (4, Fall): 76–89.
- Meehan, Mary. 1999. "The Road to Abortion (II): How Eugenics Birthed Population Control." *Human Life Review* 25 (1, Winter): 68–82.

Meehan, Mary. 2000. "What's Wrong with the Science Establishment?" *Human Life Review* 26 (Fall): 63–85.

O'Keefe, Katharine. 1998. "Social History and the Eugenics Societies." *Social Justice Review*, (January/February). 1998. Vol. 89 (1–2): 4–7.

Ralph, McInerney. 2001. *The Defamation of Pius XIII*. Southbend, IN: St. Augustine's Press.

Ronald, J. Rychlak. 2000. *Hitler, the War and the Pope*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor.

Will, George. 2017. "Eugenics Was a Progressive Cause." *National Review*, March 8. <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/445615/progressive-eugenics-charles-murray-middlebury-students-nordic-stock-woodrow-wilson>.

Aquinas and the Human Person: Essays in Thomistic Anthropology. By Craig Payne. Ottumwa, IA: Vision Publishing, 2016. 230 pp. ISBN: 12-978-1530951727.

Reviewed by: Joseph W. Koterski, SJ, *Fordham University, Bronx, NY, USA*
DOI: 10.1177/0024363918783686

There are various ways to meet the challenge of those who claim that there is an irreconcilable split between religious belief and science. One important pathway is by promoting a careful understanding of the traditional understanding of the four senses of scripture, so as not to fall into the trap of misinterpreting the meaning of biblical texts.

One of the great dangers here comes with reducing the spiritual levels of meaning (the typological, the moral, and the anagogical—see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 100–130) to the literal level and then misunderstanding the Church's understanding of the literal level. Properly understood, the literal level does not refer to the "plain sense" and need not be historical. Rather, it designates whatever meaning is intended by a human author under divine inspiration (including the historical, but also including stories and figures of speech). With this age-old hermeneutics in place, the conflicts between scripture and science generally disappear, for one who properly employs the fourfold senses of scripture can resolve the alleged discrepancies between science and religion by removing misunderstandings of the meanings of biblical texts.

Another crucial pathway for meeting these challenges requires the use of philosophy, namely, a methodologically rigorous philosophy that is open to religion and not foreclosed to the very possibility of transcendence. Like Gerard Verschuuren's (2016) *Aquinas and the Sciences*, Craig Payne's new volume shows the perennial value of Aquinas's philosophical principles for understanding the human person in light of the best scientific work being done today. In his previous book, Payne (2014) considered questions of bioethics in light of Aquinas and contemporary science: *Aquinas and Bioethics*:

Contemporary Issues in the Light of Medieval Thought. The current volume undertakes a similar task for philosophical anthropology and natural law ethics.

At the core of Payne's argument is the Thomistic insight that personhood involves possession of a rational nature. By contrast, in many current schools of philosophy, personhood is thought to be attributed to an individual only when certain functional abilities can be detected to be operating. For Aquinas, the relevant functions (e.g., meaningful language use) are only possible because of the powers of one's nature (e.g., the abilities that make possible such language use), but an individual whose powers are only at a nascent level of development (or even blocked from development because of a biological impairment) is still a member of the species of human persons. This distinction—sadly so often ignored in debates over abortion or human cloning—makes all the difference.

For Aquinas, it is readily possible to distinguish one species from another by identifying the functional abilities typical of the mature, healthy individuals in one species and those typical of the mature, healthy individuals of another species. But the criterion of functional abilities that distinguish one species from another fails when one attempts to use it for determining the exact contours of species membership, precisely because it would be arbitrary to rule an individual within or outside a given species merely on the basis of some arbitrary choice about the needed degree of development of one's abilities in order to count that individual a member of a given species and thus to accord it the protections and respect due to the members of that species.

For purposes of resolving questions of species membership, Payne thus puts great focus on the use of modern DNA analysis and on genetic descriptions of humanness. This practice allows him to attend to the contributions of contemporary science. At the same time, he is mindful of the ongoing need to speak of the rational soul as what unifies the ever-changing material that constitutes our human bodies