

Margaret Sanger's Century

by Walter Schu LC

Nearly lost amid the media buzz created by the major newsweeklies namely naming their various choices for "person of the century" was the fact that 1900s saw as much infamy as progress. To be sure, *Time*, *Newseek* and *U.S. News & World Report* did not fail to note the rise and fall of the century's most conspicuous villains – Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot. But all characterized these, in general, as unfathomable anomalies of history rather than logical products of their times and places.

Who has launched the most thriving crusade against humankind? None other than the founder of Planned Parenthood, a woman who is frequently defended as a shining example of selfless sacrifice for the good of humanity. Certainly Margaret Sanger, who died in her 80s in 1966, knew what it meant to be poor. One of 11 children born to poverty-stricken Irish-immigrant parents in Corning, N.Y., she rose to affluence when she dropped out of nursing school after only three months to marry a wealthy architect. She eventually settled in New York's Greenwich Village. There Sanger became closely associated with leading figures in the eugenics movement, many of whom played a prominent role in the foundation of Planned Parenthood.

The eugenics circle held that some races and individual members of the human species were genetically superior to others. These superior members should be encouraged to reproduce, while the births of inferior members such as the poor or minorities were to be regulated. Their ultimate solution to the problem of poverty was simple: Eliminate the poor. In the May 1919 edition of *Birth Control Review* Sanger wrote, "More children from the fit, less from unfit – that is the chief aim of birth control." The November 1921 edition declared, "Birth control: to create a race of thoroughbreds."

Sanger outlined her new philosophy in her 1922 book *Pivot of Civilization*. In it she sharply criticized philanthropists who provided free maternity care to poor mothers. According to Sanger, these acts of generosity "encourage the healthier and more normal sections of the world to shoulder the burden of unthinking and indiscriminate fecundity of others; which brings with it, as I think the reader must agree, a menacing degree dominant." These are the words of a model liberal humanist?

The founder of Planned Parenthood saw contraception sterilization and eventually abortion as the panacea for eliminating all human suffering. In *Margaret Sanger: Father of Modern Society*, author Elasa Drogin observed: "Through the 284 pages of *Pivot of Civilization*, there is not one word written about fair labor laws, fair housing requirements, a more equitable distribution of wealth, or even the simple responsibility of caring for one's neighbor." Sanger's disdain for certain members of society was not confined to the poor, whom she often referred to as "human weeds." It targeted minorities such as blacks. In a private letter to Clarence Gamble dated Oct. 19, 1939, she revealed her ultimate goal toward blacks and how it could best be attained. "The most successful educational approach to the Negro is through a religious appeal," she wrote. "we do not want word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population, and the minister is the man who can straighten out that idea if it ever occurs to any of their more rebellious members."

The following lines from *Pivot of Civilization* allow a particularly telling glimpse of Sanger's "compassion" and her motives. "Remember our motto: if we must have welfare, give it to the rich, not to the poor... We are paying for and even submitting to the dictates of an ever-increasing, unceasingly spawning class of human beings who never should have been born at all." Sanger's views naturally led her to strike out against the institution of marriage and family. "The marriage bed," she wrote, "is the most degenerating influence in the social order." Sanger advocated instead a "voluntary association" between sexual partners. She thus sought to supplant the family as the most fundamental unit of society with relationships directed toward the sexual gratification of cooperating individuals.

How successful has been the campaign to reconstruct society launched by Margaret Sanger and Planned Parenthood, her life cause? A few facts reveal the pervasive influence of Sanger's movement of humanity's course in the 20th century. As a 1996 U.N. study predicted, by this year the United States, Canada, China, Japan and every country in Europe will have fallen below zero population growth. (Immigration helps boost the numbers in America.) Worldwide, at least 61 countries are failing to replace their populations.

Since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* abortion decision, an average of 1.5 million unborn babies have been aborted each year in the United States. Twenty-five percent of white women's pregnancies have ended in abortion, while 40% of

minority pregnancies have been aborted. In 1990 more than 70% of the married women in the United States were using contraceptives. Without exception all the sad consequences of birth control that Pope Paul IV foresaw in his 1968 encyclical *Humane Vitae* (Of Human Life) have come to pass.

Pope John Paul II is well aware of his predecessor's prophetic foresight when he calls the 20th century "a century of tears." Can the 21st truly become a century of healing and wiping away tears? Tens of thousands of Americans who marched for life in Washington D.C., this past Jan. 24 think that it can. SO do countless mothers and fathers who still believe that a child is God's most precious gift. And since human history has become the history of salvation with Christ's birth, death and resurrection, there are certainly grounds for hope.

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