

The “Lion of Munster” Rampant, or the Triumph of Classical Rhetoric: Bishop Clemens von Galen’s Sermon against Hitler’s “Euthanasia” Program

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ABSTRACT: On 3 August 1941 Bishop Clemens August Count von Galen of Munster, known as the “Lion of Munster” for his courage, preached a masterful sermon condemning the Nazi “euthanasia” program. The sermon was pertinent to its own time and remains so to ours. Its effectiveness was largely due to the use of classical rhetoric as formulated and practiced by Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian and others in ancient Greece and Rome. Relying heavily on both civil and divine law, the bishop exposed the wickedness of the initiative. As a result of the sermon’s public delivery and far-reaching dissemination, this Lion was in danger of being caged, if not slaughtered. In effect, Hitler threatened that the bishop would suffer once the Axis had won the war.

“HIS THREE SERMONS have afforded us solace and satisfaction, the like of which we have not felt for a long time,” wrote Pope Pius XII in a letter of 30 September 1941 to Konrad von Preysing, bishop of Berlin.¹ The three sermons, boldly criticizing the Nazi regime, were preached by the bishop of Munster during the summer of 1941.

¹ Ralph McNerny, *The Defamation of Pius XII* (South Bend IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2001), p. 62. Bishop von Galen was a distant cousin of Bishop von Preysing – see Justus George Lawler, “Hitler’s Hammer, the Church’s Anvil,” *First Things* (November 2005: 31-36. Von Preysing was also “an outspoken critic of the Nazi regime” – “The Roads to Rome,” *Time Magazine* (7 January 1946).

Since 1933 the bishop of this diocese of “nearly two million”² was Clemens August Count von Galen (1878-1946). A priest since 1904, he was created cardinal on 21 February 1946 and declared blessed on 9 October 2005. He was the eleventh of thirteen children in an old and devout aristocratic family of Westphalia. After having his original schooling at home, he was sent to the famous Jesuit *Kolleg Stella Matutina* in Feldkirch, Austria. Its alumni include the Jesuit priests Alfred Delp and Alois Grimm, both executed by the Nazis, and others like Cardinal Hans Urs von Balthasar. Von Galen completed his studies at Freiburg, Innsbruck and Munster. After two years as “vicar of the cathedral in Munster,” he was assigned to Berlin, where he was known as “the father of the Poor” and “Papa Galen.”³ Returning to Munster in 1929, he was appointed bishop there by Pius XI on 5 September 1933, the year in which Hitler became Chancellor of Germany.

“The soul of Catholic resistance to Nazism,”⁴ he was a critic of National Socialism even before Hitler was named president of the Nazi party in July 1921.⁵ In 1920, for example, he “declared that Nazism contained ideas ‘which no Catholic could accept without denying his faith upon cardinal points of belief.’”⁶ When the war began, he declared: “Bravely we will fight against the foreign foe. But against the enemy in our midst, who strikes and tortures us [i.e., the Gestapo *et al.*], we cannot fight with weapons – only our stubborn endurance.”⁷

On 3 August 1941 the “Lion of Munster,” as he was known for his courage, delivered the third of these sermons in “his old parish church”

² Clemens August, Graf von Galen, *The Bishop of Munster and the Nazis: The Documents in the Case*, translated and edited by Patrick Smith [London UK: Burns Oates, 1943], p. 36. Hereafter abbreviated as *Documents*.

³ Beth A. Griech-Poelle, *Bishop von Galen: German Catholicism and National Socialism* (New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1964), p. 17.

⁴ Massimo Introvigne qtd. in John L. Allen, “NCR Today,” April 17, 2010, available at: <http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/sociologist-compares-todays-crisis-nazi-smear-campaign>.

⁵ William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York NY: Simon & Schuster, 1960), p. 74.

⁶ Ronald J. Rychlak, *Hitler, the War and the Pope* (Huntington IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), p. 18.

⁷ Quoted in Derek J. Holmes, *The Papacy in the Modern World: 1914-1978* (New York NY: Crossroad, 1981), p. 150.

in Munster, Saint Lambert's.⁸ It was a sermon that "constituted the most comprehensive and damning indictment of Hitler's 'euthanasia' programme," wrote Michael Burleigh.⁹ In her decidedly critical, if not hostile *Bishop von Galen: German Catholicism and National Socialism*,¹⁰ Beth A. Grieche-Polelle wrote: "This sermon turned out to be the most important and the most outspoken one delivered by a member of the Catholic hierarchy during the Nazi era."¹¹ The authorities were aware of the bishop's preaching, but Hitler (possibly on the advice of Goebbels, who did not want to make a martyr of him¹²), decided to postpone a final reckoning and said privately: "I am quite sure that a man like the Bishop von Galen knows full well that after the war I shall extract retribution to the last farthing.... He may rest assured that in the balancing of our accounts, no T will remain uncrossed, no I undotted."¹³ In effect, the bishop was placed on Hitler's "to-do" list.¹⁴

The sermon was widely disseminated. After August 3, it "was...repeated in diocesan churches in the form of a pastoral letter"¹⁵ and secretly reprinted and distributed by German resistance groups.¹⁶ Excerpts from all three sermons were air-dropped by the R.A.F. over Germany.¹⁷ The Political Warfare Executive Office of the R.A.F. had English, Spanish, French, Czech, Polish, and Dutch translations of them

⁸ *Documents*, p. 37.

⁹ Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: "Euthanasia" in Germany c. 1900-1945* (New York NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), p. 177.

¹⁰ For a critique of Griech-Polelle's study, see Lawler, *passim*; see also Ronald J. Rychlak, *Righteous Gentiles: How Pius XII and the Catholic Church Saved Half a Million Jews from the Nazis* (Dallas TX: Spence, 2005), pp. 54-55 for answers to other critics of von Galen.

¹¹ Griech-Polelle, p. 93.

¹² Griech-Polelle, p. 88.

¹³ Quoted in Rychlak, *Righteous Gentiles*, p. 328.

¹⁴ Ironically, Hitler's threat recalls Christ's "Amen I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny" (Matt. 5:26, NAB).

¹⁵ Burleigh, p. 178.

¹⁶ Anne Nelson, *Red Orchestra [Rote Kapelle]: The Story of the Berlin Underground and the Circle of Friends Who Resisted Hitler* (New York NY: Random House, 2009), p. 216; Inge Scholl, *Students Against Tyranny* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan UP, [1952],1970), pp. 17-20.

¹⁷ Griech-Polelle, p. 85.

made and had excerpts from them transmitted by the BBC.¹⁸

On 24 August 1941, three weeks after the bishop had preached his euthanasia sermon, Hitler officially suspended the euthanasia program in large measure. It did not completely stop, however, but continued unofficially in various forms until the end of the war. By that time it had claimed “as many as 200,000 lives.”¹⁹ One of the factors contributing to the program’s suspension was the bishop’s sermons.²⁰ The sermons literally reached millions of people and thereby made them aware of the euthanasia program that had been kept secret from the public under the code-name “Aktion T-4.” The name “T-4” was short for “Tiergartenstrasse 4,” the address of its headquarters in Charlottenberg, a suburb of Berlin, after April 1941.²¹

A rhetorical masterpiece, the August 3rd sermon clearly incorporated many elements of a classical oration as called for by the likes of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and others.²² This sort of structure would have been taught in the course of the bishop’s secondary school education with the Jesuits as well as in his university training, and it is typical of many preaching manuals.²³ This paper examines the sermon’s rhetoric, its effectiveness in its historical context, and its pertinence to our times.

Introduction

The introduction of the classical oration was generally divided into five parts: *exordium*, *expositio*, *narratio*, *propositio*, and *divisio*. The introduction to this sermon, not surprisingly, is biblical and consists of an exegesis of the Gospel texts “And when Jesus drew near, seeing the city, he wept over it” (Luke 19: 41-44) and “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often would I have gathered thy children together, as

¹⁸ Griech-Polelle, p. 85.

¹⁹ Burleigh, pp. i, 180; Griech-Polelle, p. 92.

²⁰ Griech-Polelle, p. 93.

²¹ Burleigh, pp. 122-23.

²² Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III, xii, 13; Cicero, *De Inventione II*, 14; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratorica* III, 4.

²³ Harry Caplan, “Classical Rhetoric and the Mediaeval Theory of Preaching” in *Historical Studies of Rhetoric and Rhetoricians*, ed. Raymond F. Howes (Ithaca NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 74-75.

a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not” (Luke 13: 34). The exordium begins poignantly: “The Gospel of to-day records a deeply moving event: Jesus weeps. The Son of God weeps.”²⁴ For devout Christians, of course, such an opening makes a strong appeal to feeling, or (*pathos*) as Aristotle put it,²⁵ and in this passage, more specifically, an appeal to pity (*eleos*).²⁶ Ironically, in the widely used 1933 Nazi speakers’ guide, the *Redner-Fibel* (“Speaker’s Primer”) by Hans Krebs,²⁷ the reader is told that his speech “must reach beyond understanding to the feelings of the listeners.”²⁸

The *expositio* or clarification of the issue (here, a series of rhetorical questions asking why Jesus wept) ends by affirming: “It is a terrible thing, it is incredible injustice and corruption when man sets his will against the will of God.”²⁹ In the *narratio*, which recounts some of the history of the issue, the bishop quotes from a 26 June 1941 pastoral letter of the German bishops read in all German churches on 6 July (significantly, the date in 1535 on which St. Thomas More had been executed). The letter reads in part: “...There are sacred duties of conscience from which no one can release us and which we must fulfill even at the cost of our lives. Never and under no circumstances may a man except in the case of war and legitimate defense, kill an innocent man.”³⁰

Then in what amounts to an argumentative proposition (*protasis, propositio*), he recalls that on the sixth of July he had added to the bishops’ pastoral letter his own “elucidation” in which he described the “Euthanasia Programme” and informed his listeners that “numerous unexpected deaths of the mentally ill”³¹ are the result of the doctrine

²⁴ *Documents*, p. 39.

²⁵ Aristotle, I.ii.5.

²⁶ Aristotle II.i.8.

²⁷ Ross Scanlan, “The Nazi Rhetorician” in Howes, pp. 352-65, here at pp. 358, 362.

²⁸ Scanlon, p. 362.

²⁹ *Documents*, p. 40.

³⁰ *Documents*, p. 40.

³¹ References listed as GPA come from the anonymous English translation of von Galen’s sermon of 3 August 1941 in the Appendix to Griech-Polelle, pp. 186-196. Here, GPA 189.

(*Lehre*)³² that it is justified to suppress...so called ‘life which is unworthy of being lived’ (*lebensunwertes Leben*)³³. This is a phrase that loudly echoes, intentionally or not, the title of Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche’s 1920 tract justifying euthanasia, *Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life (Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens)*. Unlike the pastoral letter of June 26th, this “doctrine,” teaches that it is justifiable to kill innocent men when their lives are thought no longer useful³⁴ for our people (*für Volk*) and our country (*Staat*).³⁵ A variation on this utilitarian “doctrine” would, of course, be the quality of life arguments heard from today’s assisted suicide and euthanasia advocates.³⁶

The sermon’s proposition, essentially a critique of the regime’s unworthy life “doctrine,” ends with a brief but powerful catalogue: “This horrible doctrine seeks to justify the murder of innocent men and gives legal sanction to the forcible killing of invalids, of the maimed, the incurable and the enfeebled.”³⁷ The words, “innocent” and “legal sanction” in this sentence provide considerable coherence, since “innocent” echoes the pastoral letter of June 26th in condemning the taking of innocent life, while the reference to “legal sanction” announces a principal argument in the body of his sermon, an argument from law. The sermon is concerned, therefore, with justice and in classical terms, can be described, in part, as “judicial rhetoric,” one of “the three types of rhetoric” along with “deliberative” and “demonstrative,” that Aristotle speaks of in his *Rhetoric*.³⁸ It can also be described in part, as

³² All quotations from the German text of the sermons are from Heinrich Portmann, *Bischof Graf von Galen spricht! Ein apostolischer Kampf und sein Widerhall* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1946), hereafter abbreviated HP. Here, HP 69.

³³ HP 68.

³⁴ Or, in another translation, “of no further value” (GPA 189).

³⁵ HP 68.

³⁶ Jim Towey notes that a recent Veterans Affairs “end-of-life planning document [called] ‘Your Life, Your Choices’” has a worksheet on page 21 that “lists various scenarios and asks users to then decide whether their own life would be ‘not worth living’.” See Jim Towey, “The Death Book for Veterans,” *The Wall Street Journal* (18 August, 2009).

³⁷ *Documents*, p. 41.

³⁸ Dixon, p. 22; Aristotle I.iii.3

“demonstrative” rhetoric, which as Aristotle says, either “praises” or “blames” its subject.³⁹ Again and again it blames the regime for its euthanasia program. Since the sermon is biblical and theological, it can also be said to exhibit a fourth type of rhetoric, viz., “sacred rhetoric.”⁴⁰

Before Bishop von Galen presents his argument from law, he brings the issue home. In his “elucidation” he had spoken of the euthanasia program on a national scale. Here, he tells his listeners that the program is being implemented in Westphalia, the province in which Munster is located. Lists of patients in mental clinics deemed to be “unproductive citizens” (*unproduktive Volksgenossen*⁴¹) are drawn up, transferred elsewhere “and shortly thereafter killed.”⁴² The word “unproductive,” he uses thirteen times throughout the sermon. He is not afraid of driving home his point.⁴³

He then brings his message even closer to home when announcing that “the first party of patients left the mental hospital at Marienthal, near Munster, in the course of this week.”⁴⁴ In this instance, his appeal to feeling, is to fear (*phobos*).⁴⁵ The euthanasia program was in his flock’s fold and the shepherd was “alerting them to the possibility that they could all...become vulnerable.”⁴⁶

Confirmation of Proofs

He begins what would correspond to the second major part of a classical oration, the confirmation (*confirmatio*), the presentation of arguments⁴⁷ with a seemingly perfunctory apostrophe: “German men

³⁹ Aristotle, I.iii.3.

⁴⁰ Howes, p. 81.

⁴¹ HP 69.

⁴² Griech-Polelle, p. 189.

⁴³ Pope John Paul II writing about euthanasia in his 1995 encyclical *Gospel of Life* (Section 64) speaks specifically of “elderly and disabled people” as being “very often isolated by their families and by society, which are organized on the basis of *productive* efficiency, according to which a *hopelessly impaired life no longer has any value*” (italics added).

⁴⁴ GPA 189.

⁴⁵ Aristotle II.v.1.

⁴⁶ Griech-Polelle, p. 59.

⁴⁷ Dixon, p. 129.

and women! ” This is one of eighteen reminders of national identity throughout the sermon. They function as a kind of indirect argument from patriotism and they lay “stress on the audience as the chief informing principle in persuasive discourse.”⁴⁸ Such repeated reference to “fellow-Germans, fellow-countrymen, fellow-citizens, German people” perhaps provided some cover against accusations of disloyalty as well.⁴⁹ There is also a certain irony here since “German Men and Women” is one of the recommended salutations in Krebs’s Nazi speaker’s manual. Krebs, however, was more politically correct than the bishop in that he places “*Deutsche Frauen*” before “*Manner*.”⁵⁰

Much more direct is what follows immediately. It might be heard in a court of law: “Article 211 of the Code of Penal Law (*das Reichsstrafgesetzbuches*)⁵¹ is still in force.”⁵² This article called for the death penalty in the case of premeditated murder. The murderers were the medical death doctors⁵³ who killed the “useless eaters.” By employing this argument from the regime’s own law the bishop, as it were, hoists the regime by its own petard. Still another irony here is that the Nazi speaker’s manual gives the advice to do precisely this: “When attacking the enemies of National Socialism, one should always try to turn their own statements against them.”⁵⁴

The bishop then explains that to skirt the law, to immunize the death doctors from Article 211’s prescribed penalty, patient-victims were secretly transported from their clinics to “some distant”

⁴⁸ Edward P. J. Corbett, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (New York NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 599.

⁴⁹ Griech-Poelle interprets von Galen’s use of such national reference generally as “mere patriotic sentiment” (p. 106). She also links it to her view that von Galen practiced “selective resistance” and that he sent a mixed message to Catholics about the regime (p. 106).

⁵⁰ Quoted in Scanlan, p. 362.

⁵¹ HP 69.

⁵² GPA 189.

⁵³ It should be noted that a 2008 *Der Spiegel* survey showed that 40% of German doctors would “consider participating in [i.e., facilitating] assisted suicide; 16% said that they would take the lead in ending a patient’s life (Life News, 12.16.08).

⁵⁴ Scanlan, p. 363.

institution.⁵⁵ Some, were transported in vehicles marked “The Charitable Transport Company for the Sick”⁵⁶ – a designation perhaps only slightly less outrageous than that the one used by Solzhenitsyn in his novel *First Circle* when describing the Soviet vehicle transporting Gulag-bound prisoners that was marked “*Myaso, Viande, Fleisch, Meat.*”⁵⁷ Using a dismissive indefinite, the bishop adds that “some disease or other” (*irgendeine Krankheit*)⁵⁸ is then given as the cause of death, a deceptiveness that parallels the 2009 assisted suicide law of Washington State that requires doctors to “falsify” death certificates by “list[ing] the terminal disease rather than the lethal dose of barbiturates” as the cause of death.⁵⁹

The bishop’s argument from law also draws on Article 139 of the Penal Code, which required “that anyone who knows from a reliable source any plot against the life of a man” must notify “the authorities or the intended victim.”⁶⁰ Accordingly, the bishop tells his listeners that he had done just that with letters “to the Public Prosecutor, the Tribunal of Munster, and . . .the Head of the Munster Police.”⁶¹ He then reads the letter in which he “demand[s] immediate protection for [his] fellow countrymen” who are, in effect, under threat of euthanasia. He closes his letter saying “and I demand to be told of your decision.”⁶² But, he continues, he has received “no news . . .of any steps taken by the Tribunal or by the police. He adds that that he had also sent a protest to the administrators of the asylums in Westphalia but to no avail, since more than eight hundred “innocent” patients “under sentence of death had “already been taken away.” Making another appeal to pity, he concludes

⁵⁵ *Documents*, p. 41.

⁵⁶ Nat Hentoff, “The Death Doctors,” *The Village Voice* (8 September 1987) in *Euthanasia: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Neal Bernard (San Diego CA: Greenhaven, 1989), pp. 96-101 at p. 98.

⁵⁷ Alexander I. Solzhenitsyn, *The First Circle*, translated by Thomas P. Whitney (New York NY: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 580.

⁵⁸ HP 69.

⁵⁹ Michael Cook, “Is Death Better Than Disability” available at www.mercatornet.com/articles/view/_death_better_than_disab.

⁶⁰ *Documents*, p. 42.

⁶¹ *Documents*, p. 42.

⁶² *Documents*, p. 42.

that we “must therefore expect that these poor defenseless patients will sooner or later be killed.”⁶³

Using what appears to be one of his preferred figures, the *rogatio*, a figure that allows the questioner to answer his own question, he then asks “Why? Not because they have committed any crime..., not because they have attacked [clinic personnel].... No..., it is simply because in the opinion of some doctor...of some committee (*einer kommission*)⁶⁴... they are classed as ‘unproductive members of the national community’ (*unproduktiven Volksgenossen*).”⁶⁵ The phrase “some committee,” of course, suggests to us the recent reference to “death panels”⁶⁶ that has occurred in discussions about healthcare reforms in our own days. The answer that he gives to his own *rogatio* has embedded within it a trio of very effective similes. Such arrangement in threes illustrates the tricolon, famously exemplified by Julius Caesar’s *veni, vidi, vici*.⁶⁷

The bishop’s answer reads: “It is judged...that [the ‘unproductive’] are like (*sie sind wie*)⁶⁸ [an] old [machine that] no longer works, [that they are] like an old horse...incurably lame, [that they are] like an old cow [that no longer gives milk]” (my translation within brackets). Immediately following this *rogatio* are two others: “What does one do with such an old machine?”⁶⁹ [It will be scrapped. What does one do with

⁶³ *Documents*, p. 43.

⁶⁴ HP 70.

⁶⁵ *Documents*, p. 43.

⁶⁶ “The catalyst for the label ‘death panels’ was Sec. 1233 of ...HR 3200 ...which would have paid [medical] practitioners...who provided ‘advance care planning consultation’ to Medicare patients.... ‘If such... ‘consultations’ were to be paid for, a compulsory discussion about the ‘continuum’ of [all] end of life services’ was to be included...the offending words found in that section,” however, were not included “in the new law.” Rita L. Marker, “Health Care Law: New words, Same Meaning,” *Update, International Task Force on Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide* 24/2 (2010): 1.

⁶⁷ As Jerry Weissman has noted, this device is often used by President Obama and many other politicians. See Jerry Weissman, “Obama, Aristotle and Fred Astaire,” *The Huffington Report* (27 January 2009), available at www.huffingtonpost.com/jerry-weissman/obama-aristotle-andfred-astaire, pp. 1-3.

⁶⁸ HP 70.

⁶⁹ *Documents*, p. 43.

such a lame horse, with such] an unproductive cow.”⁷⁰

The bishop’s answer reveals that he is quite conscious of his own rhetoric, since he says he will not continue his comparison any further, “so fearful is its appropriateness and the light it throws on the situation.”⁷¹ This is not a matter of dysfunctional machines or animals; it is a matter “of human beings, of our neighbors, our brothers and sisters, poor people and invalids..., unproductive ...perhaps!”⁷² In the German text these last phrases are more emphatic: *Arme Menschen, kranke Menschen, unproduktive Menschen meinet wegen*.⁷³ If read literally, this tricolon would be rendered: “Poor people, sick people, unproductive people, if you like.” The greater emphasis that results from having *Menschen* at the end of the three successive phrases illustrates still another figure of repetition, epistrophe.⁷⁴ In the tradition more familiar to us, a text-book example would be: “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” The bishop then continues: “But have they therefore lost the right to live.”⁷⁵ With yet another rhetorical question he asks: “Have you, have I, the right to live only so long as we are productive, so long as we are recognized by others as productive?”⁷⁶ The rapid pace of this question derives from another classical figure, asyndeton, “the deliberate omission of conjunctions between” sentence-elements. Aristotle used it to close his *Rhetoric*: “I have done. You have heard. The facts are before you. I ask for your judgment.”⁷⁷ The bishop

⁷⁰ GPA 190 (my translation within brackets). The point of the bishop’s three similes was echoed some thirty years later by Romano Guardini when he wrote: “We treat a thing like a thing when we possess it, use it, and finally destroy it—or, if we are speaking of human beings, kill it. The prohibition against taking human life expresses in the most acute form the prohibition of treating a man as if he were a thing.” Romano Guardini, “I diritti del nascituro,” *Studi cattolici* (May/June 1974), quoted in Pope Benedict XVI, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* (Ignatius Press, 2006), p. 69.

⁷¹ *Documents*, p. 44.

⁷² *Documents*, p. 44; Ronald Sedgwick’s translation of the sermons into English is found in Portmann, p. 4.

⁷³ HP 71.

⁷⁴ Corbett, p. 473.

⁷⁵ *Documents*, p. 44; Sedgwick, p. 4.

⁷⁶ GPA 191.

⁷⁷ Corbett, pp. 469-70.

uses it to close this section of his confirmation.

He begins the next section with different arguments, arguments, which can be described in terms of the classical concept of the “common topics,” where arguments may be invented (in the root sense of “invent,” viz., to find. His argument from law is found under the topic “testimony” and the subtopic “law.” (The topic “testimony” would also include such subtopics as statistics and authority.) His new arguments are found under the topic “relationship” as the subtopic “antecedent and consequence.” (The topic “relationship” would also include such subtopics as “cause and effect” and “contraries.”)⁷⁸

This section begins thus: “If the principle (*Grundsatz*⁷⁹) that man is entitled to kill his unproductive fellow man is established and applied, then woe betide (*dann wehe*⁸⁰) all of us when we become aged and infirm!”⁸¹ This warning indirectly suggests the idea held by some today that the aged have “a duty to die.”⁸²

This is the first in a series of “antecedent and consequence” arguments. The consequence for the next one, also introduced by the phrase “woe betide,” applies to the disabled who have become unproductive in the “productive process” (*Produktionsprozess*⁸³), i.e., by “sacrific[ing] their health or their limbs”⁸⁴ to that process. This playing on words with the same root illustrates “polyptoton,”⁸⁵ a device that creates, in this instance, an ironic emphasis on the injustice of their plight. Then “woe betide our brave soldiers” returning home “wounded and maimed and sick” is the third consequence, all introduced again by the phrase “woe betide.” This repetition is an “anaphora,” i.e., the

⁷⁸ Corbett, p. vi.

⁷⁹ HP 71.

⁸⁰ HP 71.

⁸¹ GPA 191.

⁸² See John Hardwig, “Is there a Duty to Die,” *Hastings Center Report* 27/2 (1997):34-42. See also “Is there a Duty for the Elderly to Die,” *Bioethics Discussion Pages* moderated by Maurice Bernstein, M.D. (15 March 2004) at: <http://www.hsc.usc.edu/~mbernste/ethics.dutytodie.html>.

⁸³ HP 71.

⁸⁴ GPA 191.

⁸⁵ Corbett, p. 478.

repetition of the same phrase in successive sentence elements.⁸⁶ That such a consequence became well known is seen in a passage from John Steinbeck's 1942 novel *The Moon is Down* where German soldiers occupying an unnamed country "might have gone insane if they had not heard that mercy deaths awaited the insane at home, and a mercy death is a terrible thing to think of."⁸⁷ The bishop then elaborates (repetitively) on the consequences of being unproductive by asking rhetorically a question not unasked today: "who could then have any confidence in a doctor?"⁸⁸

At this point, Bishop von Galen abandons civil law and invokes divine law in his final and culminating "antecedent and consequence" argument, which he places at the end of this section: "Woe betide mankind, woe betide our German people, if the divine commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill,' which the Lord proclaimed on Sinai [and] wrote into man's conscience from the beginning..., is not merely violated but...tolerated and remains unpunished."⁸⁹

In the next section he uses what Aristotle considered the "rhetorical equivalent" of logical induction, an argument from example (*paradeigma*⁹⁰). It consists here, of a true story that appeals to pity: a local farmer who has been hospitalized with a "mental disturbance"⁹¹ has been placed "on the list of the unproductive" and been "transferred "elsewhere."⁹² His family, including a loving son at the front, have been kept uninformed but eventually will be informed that "he has died" and that his "ashes will be handed over on payment of a fee."⁹³ The story is representative of the sort of thing that did happen. It closes with another polyptoton within the ironic lament that the soldier "risking his life...for his fellow-countrymen (*die deutschen Volksgenossen*⁹⁴) will not see his

⁸⁶ Corbett, p. 472.

⁸⁷ John Steinbeck, *The Moon is Down* (New York: Bantam, 1970 [1942]), p. 49.

⁸⁸ GPA 191.

⁸⁹ GPA 191.

⁹⁰ Aristotle, II.xx.1; Corbett, pp. 144-45.

⁹¹ GPA 191.

⁹² GPA 192.

⁹³ GPA 192.

⁹⁴ HP 72.

father again on earth, because his fellow-countrymen (*deutsche Volksgenossen*⁹⁵) at home have killed him.”⁹⁶

The rest of the sermon seems to be an unrelated digression on the Ten Commandments and the natural law, but in fact everything here is profoundly related to the Gospel and the situation of the day, to his criticism of the regime, and to his “battle to expose the Nazi euthanasia campaign.”⁹⁷ Jesus weeps over 1941 Germany⁹⁸ as he had over Jerusalem. “Can anyone,” the bishop asks, “believe that...respect and conscientious obedience” to this regime “can be maintained” when it “violate[s] the commandments” and even fights and tries “to stamp out faith in...God” and when it tries “to make” its representatives “lords over the life and death of their fellow-men?”⁹⁹

The last major part of a classical oration, the peroration, is found in the August 3rd sermon as a prayerful section that is addressed not to “German men and women” nor to “Christians of Munster” but to God and the “most sacred heart of Jesus.”¹⁰⁰ In Munster, prayer to the Sacred Heart was particularly meaningful. After Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf* the bishop of Munster, Johann Bernard Brinkmann, upon returning from exile in Holland in 1884, dedicated the city to the Sacred Heart.¹⁰¹ The dedication was celebrated annually. As bishop, von Galen had revived the processions that had been part of the celebration.¹⁰² “O God,” the bishop prays, in a prayer as relevant in 2010 as it was in 1941, “make us all know, in this our day, before it is too late, the things which belong to our peace.”¹⁰³ After visiting the bishop’s tomb, Pope John Paul II warned: “We should not be so sure of our immunity to committing similar horrors.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁵ HP 72.

⁹⁶ GPA 192.

⁹⁷ HP 62.

⁹⁸ GP 191.

⁹⁹ GP 194.

¹⁰⁰ GP 195-96.

¹⁰¹ GP 25.

¹⁰² GP 36.

¹⁰³ GP 195.

¹⁰⁴ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of John Paul II* (New York NY: Cliff Street Books, 1999), p. 542. On 9 October 2006 *The*

In closing, I would suggest that the “Lion of Munster” provides a powerful example for all pro-life preachers. Blessed Clemens would be a fine patron saint for opponents of euthanasia and assisted suicide. He also illustrates the elder Cato’s definition of the orator as “a good man skilled in speaking” (*vir bonus dicendi peritus*) and one who has “ethical appeal.” In the war-filled twentieth century, the bishop spoke truth to power at great risk, much like St. John the Baptist, St. Stanislas of Cracow, St. Thomas Becket of Canterbury, and St. Thomas More. He could have confidently recited the Entrance Song for the memorial mass of St. Justin Martyr: “The wicked tempted me with their fables against your law, but I proclaimed your decrees before kings without fear or shame.”¹⁰⁵ “I have done. You have heard. The facts are before you. I ask for your judgment.”

Washington Post (p. A17) reported a recent example of what John Paul II warned his listeners about: “With the approval of the Iraqi Health Ministry, hospitals in Baghdad and Karbala run by supporters of radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadir [according to a CBS News reporter] are systematically killing Sunni patients and then dumping their bodies in mass graves.”

¹⁰⁵ Adapted from Ps. 119: 85, 46 (NAB). We note that the bishop’s Episcopal motto was “*Nec Laudibus, Nec timore* (Neither praise, nor fear [will distance me from God]).