

Comment on the German Medical Association Declaration

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A recent declaration issued by the German Medical Association (ironically from Nuremberg) acknowledges the crimes perpetrated by their predecessors during the Second World War.

Part of it is quoted here: “The resolution, unanimously adopted by the delegates of the Physicians’ Congress, said that contrary to the belief, doctors were not forced by politicians to kill and experiment on prisoners, but became enthusiastic Nazi supporters.”

Reading the original text, it seems that a full apology is issued to “the victims of sterilisation, euthanasia of 200,000 psychiatric and disabled people, non-consented human experiments, as well as 360,000 forced sterilisations.”

This resolution is a half-measure only. There is no mention of some of the victims. No mention of the thousands of German children diagnosed by physicians with treatable physical deformities who were euthanized in six children’s “hospitals”; no mention of the thousands of Roma/Sinti victims of studies on facial gangrene (noma) and then gassed; of the thousands of Polish, Russian and British prisoners exposed to crimes against humanity. Finally, there was no mention of any crime against the Jewish people.

The apology notes that “outstanding representatives of renowned academic medical and research institutions were involved in organising and carrying out mass extermination of millions.” Indeed, it must be remembered that Germany during the first four decades of the twentieth century was leading the world in medicine, just as it was in other branches of science. The Academy of Sciences in Berlin was headed by Nobel laureates such as Albert Einstein in physics (who escaped to the USA), Fritz Haber in Chemistry (who escaped to the UK), and Otto Warburg in Medicine (who despite his Jewish grandparents remained unmolested in Berlin until the end of war and beyond, while awaiting his third Nobel Prize).

It must also be remembered that in 1932, it was Dr. Julius Moses, a parliamentarian-physician, who introduced to the Reichstag the law of protection against experimentation with vaccines, this in view of a catastrophic experiment in Luebeck with the tuberculosis vaccine. The law was introduced but not enacted because in January 1933 the Nazis took power. What followed was the darkest page in the history of medicine, 1933–45, during which the Nazis implemented the E-program, namely elimination of the “unfit.”

For the justification and implementation of this quadrupled E-program (Eugenics, Euthanasia, Experimentation and Extermination) the Nazis needed a scientific explanation. It was provided by the Fuehrer: “Doctors, I cannot live without you for one day, not for one minute.” An enthusiastic response from the medical profession was immediate: forty percent of the profession joined the Nazi Party and seven percent volunteered in the SS services. There was not a single case of punishment or demotion for anyone who refused to take part in the atrocities. Hitler had the needed scientific support for the politicization of medicine and the medicalization of killings.

The present dissociation from the Nazi physicians by the medical community, belated as it is, is nonetheless commendable. The resolution stated that Nazi doctors were “guilty, contrary to their mission to heal, of scores of human rights violations and we ask for forgiveness of their victims, living or deceased and of their descendants.”

It is for the twin sisters living in Melbourne, aged 87, experimented on by Dr. Mengele in Auschwitz, whose “scientific” work was interrupted by the approaching Red Army, to offer any forgiveness. As for myself – the son of a survivor and a medical practitioner – I have a double entitlement to reply. The present medical generation is guiltless, but in no circumstances should any forgiveness be accorded to their predecessors.

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We first described billiard balls in terms of atoms and then described atoms in terms of billiard balls, a description that brought us no nearer to a true understanding of the ultimate nature of either billiard balls or atoms

Kenneth Walker (1882-1966), British author and urologist. Among many other books, he wrote *Meaning and Purpose* – an analysis of the main scientific theories of the last hundred years and their impact upon religious thought and belief