

Conscience Rights and the Lessons of Nuremberg

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"I was only following orders." That was the pathetic plea of Nazi generals and accomplices of Hitler when they stood before judges during the famous Nuremberg trials in the aftermath of World War II. The world did not accept that attempt to legitimize their crimes. Neither should we.

In Canada today, and indeed, around the Western World, decisions are being made by judges and politicians that may one day call again for the judgments of Nuremberg. In their arrogant demands to force reluctant citizens approve of their decisions and even join in their evil deeds, some of our political operatives and their bureaucratic henchmen are willing to follow in the pattern of German officers who allowed "political correctness" to rule their behaviour and demanded the same from others.

In Nazi Germany, freedom of speech and freedom of the press were squelched and property rights and the right to life itself were extinguished—for those Hitler deemed unworthy of life. Officers were demoted, imprisoned or executed for failing to endorse and execute the dictates of the Fuehrer. The pall of silence which fell on the land and the forest of arms extended in the Nazi salute put anyone who refused to participate in the worship and service of Herr Hitler under suspicion. Obedience was demanded and the relative few who resisted—like Bonhoeffer—paid the price. Nevertheless, the victors in that war and the champions of democracy held those officers accountable who knew that what they were doing was wrong but did it anyway for fear of consequences.

Canadian citizens are being put to the test today. Will we stand up for the principles established at Nuremberg? Will we demand respect for conscience rights or will we compel our fellow citizens to participate in deeds that their consciences decree to be wrong? We are about to find out.

In Manitoba, Marriage Commissioner Kevin Kisilowsky is challenging the province's decision to strip him of his commissioner's licence for refusing to perform same-sex marriages after Parliament changed the legal definition of marriage in 2005. The promoters of same-sex marriage promised Canadians that freedom of religion would be respected but before the ink was dry, that promise was forgotten. Mr. Kisilowsky is standing up for the right of those who believe in the meaning and sanctity of natural marriage between one man and one woman to be free from coercion to violate their consciences in the performance of their duties.

Since 1988 there has been no law protecting the pre-born from the abortionist's knife—right up to the moment of birth. In June of this year, Parliament—bowing to the Supreme Court's will—approved the killing of the elderly, the disabled, and the depressed by medical practitioners. Naturally, there are physicians, nurses, and other care workers who want no part in this. This is not a whimsey or personal preference. This is a sign that they have active and healthy consciences. Even many who support the killing of the pre-born and the elderly understand and sympathize with those who cannot in good conscience participate.

Shockingly though, there are others who are not satisfied to have some doctors willing to kill. They want all doctors and nurses to knuckle under to the new practice of hastening death. In at least two jurisdictions, Saskatchewan and Ontario, the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons have declared that every doctor must participate, at least by referral. In the world of crime, such persons are called accomplices and are held accountable for their actions.

Mankind has been here before. The reason is simple: one seared conscience demands another. Those committing evil deeds hate to have their actions questioned. They want approval from their fellow citizens in a vain attempt to salve their own consciences. It doesn't work. Forcing others to participate in evil does not lift the guilt; it merely compounds it.

There are two lessons we should have learned from Nuremberg:

- Men and women ought to obey their God-directed consciences, even when those in positions of power do not agree with them.
- Those in positions of power ought not to compel others to violate their own sense of right and wrong. To do so is itself a violation.

We depend on an active conscience in our fellow citizens to protect our privacy, our property and our personal safety. Without a collective conscience there is no moral fabric to society, no safeguards, no laws, no boundaries. In an effort to protect basic morality in our nation, we all must speak up now in defence of conscience rights for every citizen. Real Women of Canada has launched a petition which will be presented to Parliament in the Fall Session. You can download it here (PDF)¹. Help raise awareness on this critical issue. Print it off and send signed copies to Real Women at the address shown on the document. Let's make sure our Parliamentarians know that conscience rights are important!

As the apostles Peter and John said: "We ought to obey God rather than men." Let's protect the right of all Canadians to obey God and keep their consciences clean.

Footnotes

¹ www.realwomenofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Final-Petition-re-freedom-of-religion-with-table-Aug-9-16.pdf