

“Operation that suppressed the growth and sexual maturation of a handicapped girl”

Bioethicist Assails Treatment of Handicapped Girl

Operation Stunted Her Physical Maturity

ROME, JAN. 10, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- An operation that suppressed the growth and sexual maturation of a handicapped girl runs contrary to ethical medical practice, says the president of a bioethics commission.

Francesco D'Agostino, honorary president of the Italian National Bioethics Commission and president of the Union of Italian Catholic Jurists, commented on Vatican Radio about the case of Ashley, a 9-year-old girl from the United States who suffers from static encephalopathy.

The girl cannot walk or talk and her cerebral development is that of a 3-month-old child. Since she cannot swallow, she is fed through a tube.

In 2004, her parents, in agreement with the ethics committee of the Seattle hospital where Ashley was being treated, decided to halt her physical development by removing her uterus and mammary glands, and subjecting her to hormonal therapy.

"I believe we are faced with a situation that, in itself, is extremely tragic, but which ethically truly arouses a feeling of horror," D'Agostino said.

The objective of the operation was to reduce her growth and suppress her sexual maturation to avoid possible eventual complications, and because it is easier to care for a smaller, lighter patient.

Invasive practices

"Even if Ashley's parents' intentions were truly good, the fact remains that these good intentions have been concretized through enormously invasive, mutilating practices, in detriment to the girl's body that, moreover, has made her suffer the risks of a medical-biological nature which might also be comparable to the risks they wished to avoid with these interventions," D'Agostino added.

"I fear we are faced once again with the illusion that medicine can intervene freely in a manipulative manner in a human being's body," he said.

D'Agostino hopes that the attention given to the case can "create a kind of treatment protocol of children in situations similar to Ashley's."

"If this ideology gains force," D'Agostino explained, "all the mentally handicapped

run the risk of being sterilized as children to anticipate possible but often not probable or real future complications."

"Regardless of what the therapeutic possibilities might be for little Ashley," he stated, "there is a fundamental ethical principle of absolute respect for the human body."

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