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Editorial Comment

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Editorial Comment

In an editorial entitled "Dismantling a Narcotic Theory," *The Wall Street Journal* early in 1964 commented favorably on the recommendation of the President's Advisory Commission that the Federal Bureau of Narcotics be eliminated in its present form and that its functions be turned over to other agencies.¹ The Bureau, said the editorial, "has become a symbol of a single theory dealing with drug addiction. This theory rests on the premise that addiction is a crime and, for all practical purposes, little more than that." Observing that this theory has been followed by the Government for nearly a half century, *The Wall Street Journal* suggested that it be dismantled along with the Bureau of Narcotics. As presently organized the Bureau depends for its existence upon the status quo and it is therefore easy to understand that it has come to be a symbol of a punitive approach as distinguished from a medical solution to the problem of narcotics.

Indeed, for the last fifty years public authorities in the United States have been wrestling with the problem of controlling addiction to narcotic drugs and have relied primarily on punishment to achieve this end. Since the twenties, legislation and enforcement policies have aimed at total repression, with criminal sanctions of notable severity attaching to every transaction connected with the non-medical use of drugs. Drug-law enforcement has become a major police activity of federal, state and local governments; the threat of long

¹ Wall Street Journal, February 7, 1964, p. 8.

imprisonment, even of death penalties, hangs over not only the smuggler and the peddler, but the addict victim of the illicit traffic.

One of the problems in this area which is the subject of extensive debate is whether the accent should be continued on criminal law as the means of fighting this evil or whether the drug user should be given voluntary or compulsory access to the medical profession with the physician determining the mode of treatment in accordance with the specific case. Characteristically, this type of program almost invariably involves, whenever it is used, some sort of supervision and regulation of medical practice with regard to addicts by public health officials. Police measures enter the picture only infrequently when medical controls fail.

Addiction to narcotic substances has been recognized as a health and morals problem for a long time and in many different countries. It has also in our times and in our national community, emerged as a criminal law problem of distressing magnitude and persistency. The fields of medicine, law and morals are thus equally affected.

The Catholic Lawyer has therefore undertaken the publication of a symposium on this problem which appears in this issue. If it can contribute something towards mutual enlightenment and ultimate agreement between the medical and legal professions regarding the drug problem, it may help clear the way for desirable reforms.

There is uncertainty at present both in the ambiguous provisions of some of our narcotic drug statutes and in the court decisions through which they have been applied. There is also doubt as to whether the premises on which our present narcotic laws rest are sound and validly conceived. It is our hope therefore that the material provided by this symposium may help stimulate the formulation of better methods for dealing with the drug addict and more realistic and sound means for controlling the illicit drug traffic.

The erudite articles of Father John B. Murray, C.M. and Dr. Vincent De Paul Lynch on the area of drugs, addiction and the problems arising therefrom serve as a general introduction to the solution which recently has been enacted legislatively in New York State to meet the problem. New York State Assemblyman Joseph Corso, cosponsor of this New York State legislation on narcotics control discusses the new law plus other alternatives. New York Assistant District Attorney Irving Lang comments on the problems which law enforcement officials face both under the new law and under any other legislative attempts to solve the problem.

Elsewhere in this issue, Father George M. Regan, C.M. explains the need for renewal in Natural Law with respect to modern society. It is hoped that this article will set the stage for further articles from Father Regan dealing with specific applications of Natural Law principles to today's complex society and its needs. Dr. Miriam T. Rooney, in her article, joins with Father Regan in expressing the hope that a reexamination of Natural Law will result in a greater appreciation of the concrete actualities of existence in the outline of its scope and a more significant awareness of the human personality in its application.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward Regan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

EDITOR