

**„The way is open for the murder of all of us“**

*In St. Lambert's bishop Graf von Galen spoke his third sermon of these days on August 3rd, 1941. He spoke out against the Nazi euthanasia program targeting to kill disabled persons.*

To my regret I have to inform you that during the past week the Gestapo has continued its campaign of annihilation against Catholic orders. On Wednesday the 30th of July they occupied the administrative centre of the province of the Sisters of Our Lady in Mühlhausen (Kempen district), which formerly belonged to the diocese of Münster, and declared the convent to be dissolved. Most of the nuns, many of whom come from our diocese, were evicted and required to leave the district that very day. On Thursday the 31st of July, according to reliable accounts, the monastery of the missionary brothers of Hiltrup in Hamm was also occupied and confiscated by the Gestapo and the monks evicted.

Already on the 13th of July, referring to the expulsion of the Jesuits and the missionary sisters of St Clare from Münster, did I publicly make the following statement in this same church: None of the occupants of these convents were accused of any offence or crime, none have been brought before a court, none have been found guilty. I hear that rumours are now being spread in Münster that, after all, these religious, in particular the Jesuits, have been accused, or even convicted, of criminal offences, and even of treason. I declare: These are abject slanders of German citizens, our brothers and sisters, which we will not tolerate. I have already lodged a criminal charge with the Chief Prosecutor against a fellow who went so far as to make such allegations in front of witnesses. I express the expectation that the man will be brought to account swiftly and that our courts of justice still have the courage to punish slanderers who seek to destroy the honour of innocent German citizens whose property has already been taken from them. I call on all my listeners, indeed on all decent fellow-citizens, who in future hear accusations made against the religious expelled from Münster to get the name and address of the person making the accusations and of any witnesses. I hope that there are still men in Münster who have the courage to play their part in securing the judicial examination of such accusations, which poison the national community of our people, by coming forward in person, giving their name and if necessary their oath. I ask them, if such accusations against the religious are made in their presence, to report them at once to their parish priest or to the Episcopal Vicariate-General and have them recorded. I owe it to the honour of our religious orders, the honour of our Catholic Church and also the honour of our German people and our city of Münster to report such cases to the state prosecution service so that the facts may be established by a court and malicious slanderers of our religious punished.

[Following the Gospel reading for the 9th Sunday after Pentecost, Luke 19:41-47:]

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to

destroy him, And could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.

My dear diocesans! It is a deeply moving event that we read of in today's Gospel. Jesus weeps! The Son of God weeps! A man who weeps is suffering pain – pain either of the body or of the heart. Jesus did not suffer in the body; and yet he wept. How great must have been the sorrow of soul, the heartfelt pain of this most courageous of men to make him weep! Why did he weep? He wept for Jerusalem, for God's holy city that was so dear to him, the capital of his people. He wept for its inhabitants, his fellow-countrymen, because they refused to recognise the only thing that could avert the judgment foreseen by his omniscience and determined in advance by his divine justice: „If thou hadst known ... the things which belong unto thy peace!“ Why do the inhabitants of Jerusalem not know it? Not long before Jesus had given voice to it: „O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!“ (Luke 13,34).

Ye would not. I, your King, your God, I would. But ye would not! How safe, how sheltered is the chicken under the hen's wing: she warms it, she feeds it, she defends it. In the same way I desired to protect you, to keep you, to defend you against any ill. I would, but ye would not!

That is why Jesus weeps; that is why that strong man weeps; that is why God weeps. For the folly, the injustice, the crime of not being willing. And for the evil to which that gives rise – which his omniscience sees coming, which his justice must impose – if man sets his unwillingness against God's commands, in opposition to the admonitions of conscience, and all the loving invitations of the divine Friend, the best of Fathers: „If thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But thou wouldst not!“ It is something terrible, something incredibly wrong and fatal, when man sets his will against God's will. I would! Thou wouldst not! It is therefore that Jesus weeps for Jerusalem.

Dearly beloved Christians! The joint pastoral letter of the German bishops, which was read in all Catholic churches in Germany on the 26th of June 1941, includes the following words: „It is true that in Catholic ethics there are certain positive commandments which cease to be obligatory if their observance would, unduly, entail great difficulties; but there are also sacred obligations of conscience from which no one can release us, which we must carry out even if it should cost us our life. Never, under any circumstances, may a man, save in war or in legitimate self-defence, kill an innocent person.“ I had occasion on the 6th of July to add the following comments on this passage in the joint pastoral letter:

„For some months we have been hearing reports that inmates of establishments for the care of the mentally ill who have been ill for a long period and perhaps appear incurable, have been forcibly removed from these establishments on orders from Berlin. Regularly, the relatives receive soon afterwards a notice that the patient is dead, that the patient's body has been cremated and that they can collect the ashes. There is a general suspicion, verging on certainty, that these numerous unexpected deaths of the mentally ill do not occur naturally but are intentionally brought about, in accordance with the doctrine that it is legitimate to destroy a so-called „worthless life“ – in other words to kill innocent men and women, if it is thought that their lives are of no further value to the people and the state. A terrible doctrine which seeks to justify the murder of innocent people, which legitimises the violent killing of disabled persons, cripples, the incurably ill and the aged and infirm who are no longer capable of work.“

I am reliably informed that in hospitals and homes in the province of Westphalia lists are being prepared of inmates who are classified as „unproductive members of the national community“ and are to be removed from these establishments and shortly thereafter killed. The first group of patients left the mental hospital at Marienthal, near Münster, in the course of this week.

German men and women! Article 211 of the German Penal Code is still in force, in these terms: „Whoever kills a man with deliberate intent is guilty of murder and punishable by death“. No doubt in order to protect those who kill these poor men and women with intent, members of our families, from this punishment laid down by law, the patients who have been selected for killing are removed from their home area to some distant place. Some illness or other is then given as the cause of death. Since the body is immediately cremated, the relatives and the criminal police are unable to establish whether the patient had in fact been ill or what the cause of death actually was. I have been assured, however, that in the Ministry of the Interior and the office of the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Conti, no secret is made of the fact that indeed a large number of mentally ill persons in Germany have already been killed with intent and that this will continue.

Article 139 of the Penal Code provides that „anyone who has knowledge of an intention to commit a crime against the life of any person ... and fails to inform the authorities or the person whose life is threatened in due time ... commits a punishable offence“. When I learned of the intention to remove patients from Marienthal I reported the matter on the 28th of July to the State Prosecutor of Münster Provincial Court and to the Münster chief of police by registered letter, in the following terms:

„According to information I have received it is planned in the course of this week (the date has been mentioned as the 31st of July) to move a large number of inmates of the provincial hospital at Marienthal, classified as ‘unproductive members of the national community’, to the mental hospital at Eichberg, where, as is generally believed to have happened in the case of patients removed from other establishments, they are to be killed with intent. Since such action is not only contrary to the divine and the natural moral law but under article 211 of the German Penal Code ranks as murder and attracts the death penalty, I hereby report the matter in accordance with my obligation under article 139 of the Penal Code and request that steps should at once be taken to protect the patients concerned by proceeding against the authorities planning their removal and murder, and that I may be informed of the action taken“.

I have received no information of any action by the State Prosecutor or the police.

I had already written on the 26th of July to the Westphalian provincial authorities, who are responsible for the running of the mental hospital and for the patients entrusted to them for care and for cure, protesting in the strongest terms. It had no effect. The first transport of the innocent victims under sentence of death has left Marienthal. And I am now told that 800 patients have already been removed from the hospital at Warstein.

We must expect, therefore, that the poor defenceless patients are, sooner or later, going to be killed. Why? Not because they have committed any offence justifying their death; not because, for example, they have attacked a nurse or attendant, who would be entitled in legitimate self-defence to meet violence with violence. In such a case the use of violence leading to death is permitted and may be called for, as it is in the case of killing an armed enemy.

No: These unfortunate patients are to die, not for some such reason as this but because in the judgment of some official body, on the decision of some committee, they have become „unworthy to live," because they are classed as „unproductive members of the national community“. The judgment is that they can no longer produce any goods: they are like an old piece of machinery which no longer works, like an old horse which has become incurably lame, like a cow which no longer gives any milk. What happens to an old piece of machinery? It is thrown on the scrapheap. What happens to a lame horse, an unproductive cow?

I will not pursue the comparison to the end - so fearful is its appropriateness and its illuminating power.

But we are not here concerned with pieces of machinery, we are not dealing with horses and cows, whose sole function is to serve mankind, to produce goods for mankind. They may be broken up, they may be slaughtered when they no longer perform this function. No: We are concerned with men and women, our fellow creatures, our brothers and sisters! Poor human beings, ill human beings, they are unproductive, if you will. But does that mean that they have lost the right to live? Have you, have I, the right to live only so long as we are productive, so long as we are recognised by others as productive?

If the principle that man is entitled to kill his unproductive fellow-man is established and applied, then woe betide all of us when we become aged and infirm! If it is legitimate to kill unproductive members of the community, woe betide the disabled who have sacrificed their health or their limbs in the productive process! If unproductive men and women can be disposed of by violent means, woe betide our brave soldiers who return home with major disabilities as cripples, as invalids!

If it is granted once that men have the right to kill „unproductive“ fellowmen – even though it is at present applied only to poor and defenceless mentally ill patients - then the way is open for the murder of all unproductive men and women: the incurably ill, the handicapped who are unable to work, those disabled in industry or war. The way is open, indeed, for the murder of all of us when we become old and infirm and therefore unproductive. Then it will require only a secret order to be issued that the procedure which has been tried and tested with the mentally ill should be extended to other „unproductive“ persons, that it should also be applied to those suffering from incurable tuberculosis, the aged and infirm, persons disabled in industry, soldiers with disabling injuries! Then no man will be safe: some committee or other will be able to put him on the list of „unproductive“ persons, who in their judgment have become „unworthy to live“. And there will be no police to protect him, no court to avenge his murder and bring his murderers to justice. Who could then have any confidence in a doctor? He might report a patient as unproductive and then be given instructions to kill him! It does not bear thinking of, the moral depravity, the universal mistrust which will spread even in the bosom of the family, if this terrible doctrine is tolerated, accepted and put into practice. Woe betide mankind, woe betide our German people, if the divine commandment, „Thou shalt not kill“, which the Lord proclaimed on Sinai amid thunder and lightning, which God our Creator wrote into man's conscience from the beginning, if this commandment is not merely violated but the violation is tolerated and remains unpunished!

I will give you an example of what is happening. One of the patients in Marienthal was a man of 55, a farmer from a country parish in the Münster region – I could give you his name – who has suffered for some years from a mental disturbance and was therefore admitted to Marienthal hospital. He was not mentally ill in the full sense: he could receive visits and was

always happy, when his relatives came to see him. Only a fortnight ago he was visited by his wife and one of his sons, a soldier home on leave from the front. The son is very attached to his father, and the parting was a sad one: No one can tell, whether the soldier will return and see his father again, since he may fall in battle for his country. The son, the soldier, will certainly never again see his father on earth, for he has since then been put on the list of the „unproductive“. A relative, who wanted to visit the father this week in Marienthal, was turned away with the information that the patient had been transferred elsewhere on the instructions of the Council of State for National Defence. No information could be given about where he had been sent, but the relatives would be informed within a few days.

What information will they be given? The same as in other cases of this kind? That the man has died, that his body has been cremated, that the ashes will be handed over on payment of a fee? Then the soldier, risking his life in the field for his fellow-countrymen, will not see his father again on earth, because fellowcountrymen at home have killed him.

The facts I have stated are firmly established. I can give the names of the patient, his wife and his son the soldier, and the place where they live. „Thou shalt not kill!“ God wrote this commandment in the conscience of man long before any penal code laid down the penalty for murder, long before there was any prosecutor or any court to investigate and avenge a murder. Cain, who killed his brother Abel, was a murderer long before there were any states or any courts of law. And he confessed his deed, driven by his accusing conscience: „My punishment is greater than I can bear ... and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me the murderer shall slay me“ (Genesis 4,13-14).

„Thou shalt not kill!“ This commandment from God, who alone has power to decide on life or death, was written in the hearts of men from the beginning, long before God gave the children of Israel on Mount Sinai his moral code in those lapidary sentences inscribed on stone which are recorded for us in Holy Scripture and which as children we learned by heart in the catechism.

„I am the Lord thy God!“ Thus begins this immutable law. „Thou shalt have not other gods before me.“ God – the only God, transcendent, almighty, omniscient, infinitely holy and just, our Creator and future Judge – has given us these commandments. Out of love for us he wrote these commandments in our heart and proclaimed them to us. For they meet the need of our God-created nature; they are the indispensable norms for all rational, godly, redeeming and holy individual and community life. With these commandments

God, our Father, seeks to gather us, His children, as the hen gathers her chickens under her wings. If we follow these commands, these invitations, this call from God, then we shall be guarded and protected and preserved from harm, defended against threatening death and destruction like the chickens under the hen's wings.

„O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!“ Is this to come about again in our country of Germany, in our province of Westphalia, in our city of Münster? To what extent are the divine commandments now obeyed in Germany, to what extent are they obeyed here in our community?

The eighth commandment: „Thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not lie.“ How often is it shamelessly and publicly broken!

The seventh commandment: „Thou shalt not steal“. Whose possessions are now secure since the arbitrary and ruthless confiscation of the property of our brothers and sisters, members of Catholic orders? Whose property is protected, if this illegally confiscated property is not returned?

The sixth commandment: „Thou shalt not commit adultery.“ Think of the instructions and assurances on free sexual intercourse and unmarried motherhood in the notorious Open Letter by Rudolf Hess, who has disappeared since, which was published in all the newspapers. And how much shameless and disreputable conduct of this kind do we read about and observe and experience in our city of Münster! To what shamelessness in dress have our young people been forced to get accustomed to – the preparation for future adultery! For modesty, the bulwark of chastity, is about to be destroyed.

And now the fifth commandment: „Thou shalt not kill“, is set aside and broken under the eyes of the authorities whose function it should be to protect the rule of law and human life, when men presume to kill innocent fellow-men with intent merely because they are „unproductive“, because they can no longer produce any goods.

And how do matters stand with the observance of the fourth commandment, which enjoins us to honour and obey our parents and those in authority over us? The status and authority of parents is already much undermined and is increasingly shaken by all the obligations imposed on children against the will of their parents. Can anyone believe that sincere respect and conscientious obedience to the state authorities can be maintained when men continue to violate the commandments of the supreme authority, the Commandments of God, when they even combat and seek to stamp out faith in the only true transcendent God, the Lord of heaven and earth?

The observance of the first three commandments has in reality been largely suspended for many years among the public in Germany and in Münster. By how many people are Sundays and feast days profaned and withheld from the service of God! How the name of God is abused, dishonoured and blasphemed!

And the first commandment: „Thou shalt have no other gods before me.“ In place of the only true eternal God men set up their own idols at will and worship them: Nature, or the state, or the people, or the race. And how many are there whose God, in Paul's word, „is their belly“ (Philippians 3,19) – their own well-being, for which they sacrifice all else, even honour and conscience – the pleasures of the senses, the lust for money, the lust for power! In accordance with all this men may indeed seek to arrogate to themselves divine attributes, to make themselves lords over the life and death of their fellow-men.

When Jesus came near to Jerusalem and beheld the city He wept over it, saying: „If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the day shall come upon thee, that thine enemies... shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.“

Looking with His bodily eyes, Jesus saw only the walls and towers of the city of Jerusalem, but the divine omniscience looked deeper and saw how matters stood within the city and its inhabitants: „O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings - and ye would not!“ That is the great sorrow that oppresses Jesus's heart, that brings tears to His eyes. I wanted to act for your

good, but ye would not! Jesus saw how sinful, how terrible, how criminal, how disastrous this unwillingness is. Little man, that frail creature, sets his created will against the will of God! Jerusalem and its inhabitants, His chosen and favoured people, set their will against God's will! Foolishly and criminally, they defy the will of God! And so Jesus weeps over the heinous sin and the inevitable punishment. God is not mocked!

Christians of Münster! Did the Son of God in his omniscience in that day see only Jerusalem and its people? Did He weep only over Jerusalem? Is the people of Israel the only people whom God has encompassed and protected with a father's care and mother's love, has drawn to Himself? Is it the only people that would not? The only one that rejected God's truth, that threw off God's law and so condemned itself to ruin? Did Jesus, the omniscient God, also see in that day our German people, our land of Westphalia, our region of Münster, the Lower Rhineland? Did He also weep over us? Over Münster? For a thousand years He has instructed our forefathers and us in His truth, guided us with His law, nourished us with His grace, gathered us together as the hen gathers her chickens under her wings. Did the omniscient Son of God see in that day that in our time He must also pronounce this judgment on us: „Ye would not: see, your house will be laid waste!“ How terrible that would be!

My Christians! I hope there is still time; but then indeed it is high time: That we may realise, in this our day, the things that belong unto our peace! That we may realise what alone can save us, can preserve us from the divine judgment: that we should take, without reservation, the divine commandments as the guiding rule of our lives and act in sober earnest according to the words: „Rather die than sin“. That in prayer and sincere penitence we should beg that God's forgiveness and mercy may descend upon us, upon our city, our country and our beloved German people. But with those who continue to provoke God's judgment, who blaspheme our faith, who scorn God's commandments, who make common cause with those who alienate our young people from Christianity, who rob and banish our religious, who bring about the death of innocent men and women, our brothers and sisters - with all those we will avoid any confidential relationship, we will keep ourselves and our families out of reach of their influence, lest we become infected with their godless ways of thinking and acting, lest we become partakers in their guilt and thus liable to the judgment which a just God must and will inflict on all those who, like the ungrateful city of Jerusalem, do not will what God wills. O God, make us all know, in this our day, before it is too late, the things which belong to our peace! O most sacred heart of Jesus, grieved to tears at the blindness and iniquities of men, help us through Thy grace, that we may always strive after that which is pleasing to Thee and renounce that which displeases Thee, that we may remain in Thy love and find peace for our souls! Amen.

Text source: Bischöfliches Generalvikariat Münster (The Episcopal Vicariate-General of Münster), slightly improved