

Honorable Mention
Division II - Writing

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“Euthanasia: The Killing of The Innocent” (Research Writing)

Our Lady of The Elms

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Between the years of 1939 and 1945 over 200,000 people were killed. These people were all killed due to Hitler's Euthanasia Program. But what exactly is the Euthanasia Program? To understand, we must start at the beginning of it. It was the year 1939, when Adolf Hitler initiated a program known as the Euthanasia [T4] program (“Beginning of The Euthanasia [T4] program”). This program would go on for around six years before it was finally stopped (“T4 Program”). But why exactly was it put in place? In simplest terms, the Euthanasia program was the killing of people whose only crime was having a mental or physical disability. It was gruesome and many people were ignorant about it.

The word euthanasia means the practice of killing of people who are hopelessly sick or injured (“Euthanasia”). This is supposed to be done in a way that is relatively painless. But in reality, this is not what the Euthanasia program was. Adolf Hitler wanted a pure country full of pure blood Germans. So he started with individuals who had mental or physical disabilities. People who were deemed “unworthy of life” and ‘Lebensunwertes Leben’ [life unworthy of life]. This program started two years before the Jews were systematically killed and would continue for another four years before it was officially stopped. Hitler put Philipp Bouhler and Karl Brandt in charge of the program. People who worked in healthcare were told to report when they found a person that had a disability. If it was a child, the family would receive a letter telling them to admit their child to a clinic that would supposedly help them. Once in these clinics, families lost contact and believed everything was probably okay. Then families would receive a letter telling them that their child had died. Those families believed their child

had died from their mental or physical disability. But this was not the case. People who were admitted into those clinics would be killed either by gassing, lethal overdosing of medication, or starvation (“Beginning of the [T4] Program”).

The ignorance of humankind was shown through the Euthanasia program. But while many said nothing, there were some who spoke. Among the ones who spoke out was Friedrich von Bodelschwingh and Paul Gerhard Braune. Both Friedrich and Paul were ministers in the Confessing Church and also were heads of institutions for adults with disabilities. Euthanasia program relied on questionnaires that were filled out by medical professionals and the administrators. These questionnaires were filled out at such institutions and would identify targets for medical killing. Once Friedrich and Paul found out what these questionnaires were really being used for, they refused to fill them out. The two men did not take a public stand because they were afraid of what would happen to their patients if they did. So instead they decided to work behind the scenes. It was July in the year of 1940 when Paul sent a long report to top Nazi officials. One month later he was imprisoned. The Nazis did not imprison Friedrich because he was a respected and well-known Protestant leader. Friedrich continued to help his patients throughout the war. Another man who spoke out against the Euthanasia program was Clemens August Graf von Galen, the Catholic Bishop of Munster. At first Galen had hoped that Hitler would restore Germany . But soon his hope was destroyed. Then on August 3 in the year 1941, Galen gave a sermon about how wrong the Euthanasia program was and how it goes against the Commandment of “Thou Shall Not Kill.” Copies of his sermon were handed out in secret. Galen did not die but instead was put under house arrest because the Nazis did not want to turn him into a martyr. Due to

Galen's sermon and people starting to question what was going on, Hitler said that the Euthanasia program had been stopped. But instead of this being true, the Euthanasia program continued on in secret.

In conclusion, the Euthanasia program was a grim and gruesome time in the history of humankind. Sadly there have been more genocides and euthanasia is legal in many states and countries. Even though this is truth, we need to learn about it. Because when we do not learn from history, we repeat it over and over again. And human ignorance and denial grows. For can you truly live in the present when you are doing things of the past?

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