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DIALOGUE

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'The Snake Pit' and '1984'... Here and Now?

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Religion Editor

"The weird, offbeat types of religious sects are getting far too much attention," a Lutheran minister bemoaned. "Sensational-type groups don't deserve the publicity," a Methodist added.

And their outcry is common, even though much of the publicity might be harsh and critical. Such as this column's reporting of the Church of Scientology's local protest activities in 1971 against the federal offices here of the Food and Drug Administration. Cited were angry, shouting youths, including girls, dressed in clerics.

But since then, the Scientology people put together and circulated among the established, mainline, "respectable" denominations what they say is a massive report of Internal Revenue Service harassment of individuals, including clergy, critical of Administration policies.

And now they're spearheading a nationwide campaign to stop the federal funding of psychosurgery.

"Psychosurgery is essentially a throwback to the lobotomies of decades ago where some 50,000 victims were left dehumanized," asserts the Rev. Steven Heard, a leader of the downtown-based Church of Scientology here.

Adding that psychosurgery is "basically human experimentation . . . sophisticated methods of destroying parts of the brain to alter behavior," the young minister is anxious that the public be aroused. And again, mainline churches, which continue to regard Heard's group as a sect, have been given some

pretty heady material by the Scientologists. Material which may deserve better than any of the mainliners' wastebaskets.

Grisly Story Recalled

What with last week's news of eleven young girls sterilized involuntarily in Alabama, plus periodical discoveries of folks unknowingly being used as human guinea pigs, ought we be so certain that actress Olivia De Havilland's Academy Award performance in "The Snake Pit" recorded a grisly yesteryear that's gone forever?

Is author George Orwell's "1984" science fiction or forewarning, if surgeons in such places as Boston City Hospital are federally funded to perform brain operations "to control behavior?"

The Church of Scientology is enlisting public support for U.S. Senator J. Glenn Beall's resolution to call a halt and a two-year moratorium for study of these experimental operations.

The Church's (sect's?) current issue of "Freedom," its house journal, features a renowned American psychiatrist's warnings that "German psychiatry began to discuss the extermination of mental patients before Hitler had been heard from."

Dr. Peter Roger Breggin, director of the Project to Examine Psychiatric Technology at the Washington School of Psychiatry, Washington, D.C., in a documented report entitled, "The Killing of Mental Patients," draws the following conclusions:

"Psychiatry itself, in England, Canada and America alike, has at best tried to make believe that psychiatry had nothing whatsoever to do with the worst atrocity in the history of mankind."

Dr. Breggin, who calls for action against psychosurgery in the courts and state legislatures, reminds me of another Elle Weisel, whose deep-set, haunting eyes bespeak of his past. Having survived Auschwitz as a 13-year-old and writing novels out of that past,

Weisel in his Olympic Hotel room three years ago, half-whispered to me:

"Auschwitz is the pivotal point of the 20th century because it proves what man can do to his fellow man."

After an hour with such a person one can hardly take lightly arguments from history that says a country's inner resources and its immediate future can be seen in how it treats its elderly, its mentally sick and its children.

An Evil Tale

William L. Shirer, a correspondent in prewar Germany, on Nov. 25, 1940, made an entry in his "Berlin Diary," that began with: "I have at last got to the bottom of these 'mercy killings.' It's an evil tale . . ."

It's a tale of castrations, euthanasia, and "destruction of life devoid of value." It's a tale of psychiatrists determining what is of value and what is "normal," according to Shirer.

But lest we think it's all years and miles removed, one might recall Ken Kesey's best-selling "One Flew Over the Coo Coo Nest." It's an accounting of less-than-living of life in an Oregon mental hospital not so long ago.

Documented reports of operations to alter behavior in children as well as the behavior of prison inmates and mental patients, are appearing in such magazines as Mental Hygiene, Science News, and Ebony. The public is being aroused. Dr. Charles King, president of the American Ortho-Psychiatric Association, reacts with the following:

"If such experiments result in a nation of zombies, we might ask if the next step would be mass executive of 'undesirables.'"

Undesirables? The question suggests again the danger of certain persons in power having the power to remove anyone who might be termed an undesi-

ble — or a radical, or anti-American, or anti-God. Thus the thinking, "If anyone isn't thinking like me then he's abnormal and maybe even dangerous . . ."

And, back to where this column began, with "weird, offbeat types getting far too much attention."

Yet, current commentary on psychiatrists is that "when two of them get together you've got three opinions."

It's not unusual to hear the same commentary on politicians and clergymen as well as of other professionals.

But a common indictment on the German people at the Nuernberg Trials was that they heard and they smelled and they watched the freight trains into Auschwitz and Hadamar and other places. And they chose to mourn silently and show no opinion.

Life . . . Devoid of Value

Twenty years earlier, in 1920 and long before Adolf Hitler became known, a well known German psychiatrist, Alfred Hoche, co-authored the book, "The Destruction of Life Devoid of Value." The book, outlining genetic theories of mental illness and advocating "mercy killing," was widely praised and went into a second edition.

In June, 1933, the world-renowned medical journal Lancet of Great Britain, published a sympathetic review of Germany's growing interest in the sterilization of the "weak-minded," the "mentally-ill," a variety of criminals, and finally, "Jews, Negroes and Mongols."

It's not been that the public, meaning you and me, has been kept in the dark, so much as we've tried so hard not to have to make up our minds and take a stand against "the team."

Especially if it's the "weird" and "offbeat" types of the so-called "lunatic fringe" who are beginning to make sense.