

KILLER ANGEL

A BIOGRAPHY OF PLANNED PARENTHOOD'S
FOUNDER MARGARET SANGER



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*I am riding my pen on the shuffle and
it has a mouth of iron.*

—G. K. CHESTERTON ¹

Hilaire Belloc, perhaps the curmudgeon of this century, wrote “There is something odd book writers do in their prefaces, which is to introduce a mass of nincompoops of whom no one has ever heard, and say, *my thanks is due to such and such*, all in a litany, as though anyone cared a farthing for the rats.”²

Needless to say, Belloc did not place high stock in either gratitude or accountability. His fierce self-assurance and autonomy as an author was defiantly unflappable. I would hope that I know better.

A number of friends and fellow-laborers encouraged me to pursue this project—and at the same time helped to support the work of the King’s Meadow Study Center so that I could. David and Pam Ferriss, Mike and Debbie Grimnes, Jerry and Cindy Walton, Steve and Marijean Green, Bill and Robin Amos, Bill and Sharon Taylor, Jim and Gwen Smith, John and Marye Lou Mauldin, Steve and Karen Anderson, and Bill and Dawn Ruff have all been selfless supporters from the beginning. Dale and Ann Smith, Stephen and Trish Mansfield, Steve and Wendy Wilkins, Gene and Susan Hunt, Tom and Yo Clark, and David and Diane Vaughan guided me through many a rocky shoal with their wise counsel and friendship.

Mike Hyatt first suggested that I consider turning my writing proclivities toward biographies. Jan Dennis, David Dunham, Jim Bell, and Dean Andreola gave me my first opportunities to try my hand at this rather demanding

1. *Illustrated London News* (August 19, 1921).

2. Hilaire Belloc, *The Path to Rome* (London: Cassell’s, 1908), 4.

art. Randy Terry suggested this particular project. And Otto Scott pointed the way for me by providing the appropriate models from which to learn.

Michael Schwartz, Jim Sedlak, Patricia Bainbridge, and Doug Scott are among the finest thinkers, writers, and researchers in the area of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, and the abortion issue. Each has been amazingly gracious and kind to me in sharing their insights, resources, and information.

The soundtrack for this project was provided by Loreena McKennitt, Clannad, Mychael Danna, and Jeff Johnson while the midnight musings were provided by John Buchan, Colin Thubron, Samuel Johnson, and, of course, G.K. Chesterton.

To all these, I offer my sincerest thanks.

I probably ought to mention as well the Nine Muses, the Three Graces, and the Merry Band of Joyeuse Garde, but the fact is my greatest and best inspiration comes from my family. Karen is without a doubt a “help meet” for me. And Joel, Joanna, and Jesse are the pride of my life. Their love and unwavering faithfulness remain my greatest hope and richest resource. To them I owe my all in all.

King’s Meadow Farm, Eastertide 1995

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INTRODUCTION

*For all the apparent materialism and mass mechanism
of our present culture, we, far more than any of our
fathers, live in a world of shadows.*

—G. K. CHESTERTON³

On January 1, 1900, most Americans greeted the twentieth century with the proud and certain belief that the next hundred years would be the greatest, the most glorious, and the most glamorous in human history. They were infected with a sanguine spirit. Optimism was rampant. A brazen confidence colored their every activity.

Certainly there was nothing in their experience to make them think otherwise. Never had a century changed the lives of men and women more dramatically than the nineteenth one just past. The twentieth century has moved fast and furiously, so that those of us who have lived in it feel sometimes giddy, watching it spin; but the nineteenth moved faster and more furiously still. Railroads, telephones, the telegraph, electricity, mass production, forged steel, automobiles, and countless other modern discoveries had all come upon them at a dizzying pace, expanding their visions and expectations far beyond their grandfathers' wildest dreams.

It was more than unfounded imagination, then, that lay behind the *New York World's* New Year's prediction that the twentieth century would "meet and overcome all perils and prove to be the best that this steadily improving planet has ever seen."⁴

Most Americans were cheerfully assured that control of man and nature would soon lie entirely within their grasp and would bestow upon them the

3. *Illustrated London News* (December 23, 1933).

4. Harold Tribble Cole, *The Coming Terror* (New York: Languine, 1936), 23.

unfathomable millennial power to alter the destinies of societies, nations, and epochs. They were a people of manifold purpose. They were a people of manifest destiny.

What they did not know was that dark and malignant seeds were already germinating just beneath the surface of the new century's soil. Josef Stalin was a twenty-one-year-old seminary student in Tiflis, a pious and serene community at the crossroads of Georgia and Ukraine. Benito Mussolini was a seventeen-year-old student teacher in the quiet suburbs of Milan. Adolf Hitler was an eleven-year-old aspiring art student in the quaint upper Austrian village of Brannan. And Margaret Sanger was a twenty-year-old out-of-sorts nursing school dropout in White Plains, New York. Who could have ever guessed on that ebulliently auspicious New Year's Day that those four youngsters would, over the span of the next century, spill more innocent blood than all the murderers, warlords, and tyrants of past history combined? Who could have ever guessed that those four youngsters would together ensure that the hopes and dreams and aspirations of the twentieth century would be smothered under the weight of holocaust, genocide, and carnage?

As the champion of the proletariat, Stalin saw to the slaughter of at least fifteen million Russian and Ukrainian *kulaks*.⁵ As the popularly acclaimed *Il Duce*, Mussolini massacred as many as four million Ethiopians, two million Eritreans, and a million Serbs, Croats, and Albanians. As the wildly lionized *Führer*, Hitler exterminated more than six million Jews, two million Slavs, and a million Poles [and, reportedly, some 7.5 million Christians]. As the founder of Planned Parenthood and the impassioned heroine of various feminist causes célèbres, *Sanger was responsible for the brutal elimination of more than thirty million children in the United States and as many as two and a half billion worldwide.*

No one in his right mind would want to rehabilitate the reputations of Stalin, Mussolini, or Hitler. Their barbarism, treachery, and debauchery will make their names live in infamy forever. Amazingly though, Sanger has somehow escaped their wretched fate. In spite of the fact that her crimes against humanity were no less heinous than theirs, her place in history has effectively been sanitized and sanctified. In spite of the fact that she openly

5. *Kulaks* were relatively prosperous peasants in Russian history. At first they found favor with the Bolsheviks. However, Stalin redefined them as any peasant who opposed what he called socialism. He moved to "liquidate the Kulaks as a class" in order to collectivize farming. Numerous Kulaks resisted, slaughtering livestock and burning crops [and allegedly killing poor peasants and party workers]. By the mid 1930s, some 5 million peasant households had been eliminated. Many had been sent to forced labor camps in Siberia as slaves and famine caused the deaths of many others. (Cited from <<http://hammer.prohosting.com/~penz/encycl/k2encyc.htm>>)

identified herself in one way or another with their aims, intentions, ideologies, and movements—with Stalin’s *Sobornostic*⁶ *Collectivism*, with Hitler’s *Eugenic*⁷ *Racism*, and with Mussolini’s *Agathistic*⁸ *Facism*—her faithful minions have managed to manufacture an independent reputation for the perpetuation of her memory.

In life and death, the progenitor of the grisly abortion industry and the patron of the devastating sexual revolution has been lauded as a “radiant” and “courageous” reformer.⁹ She has been heralded by friend and foe alike as a “heroine,” a “champion,” a “saint,” and a “martyr.”¹⁰ Honored by men as different and divergent as H. G. Wells and Martin Luther King, George Bernard Shaw and Harry Truman, Bertrand Russell and John D. Rockefeller, Albert Einstein and Dwight Eisenhower, this remarkable “killer angel” was able to secret away her perverse atrocities, emerging in the annals of history practically vindicated and victorious.¹¹

That this could happen is a scandal of grotesque proportions.

And recently the proportions have only grown—like a deleterious kudzu¹² or a rogue Topsy.¹³ Sanger has been the subject of adoring television dramas, hagiographical biographies, patronizing theatrical productions, and saccharine musical tributes. Though the facts of her life and work are anything but inspiring, millions of unwary moderns have been urged to find in them inspiration and hope. Myth is rarely dependent upon truth, after all.

Sanger’s rehabilitation has depended on writers, journalists, historians, social scientists, and sundry other media celebrities steadfastly obscuring or blithely ignoring what she did, what she said, and what she believed. It has thus depended upon a don’t-confuse-me-with-the-facts ideological tenacity unmatched by any but the most extreme of our modern secular cults.

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6. *Sobornost*—the Russian word for “unity” (*adj.*, sobornostic).
 7. *Eugenics*—a science that deals with the improvement (as by control of human mating) of hereditary qualities of a race or breed (*adj.*, eugenic).
 8. *Agathism*—the doctrine that all things tend towards ultimate good, as distinguished from optimism, which holds that all things are now for the best (*adj.*, agathistic).
 9. *Coronet Magazine* (March 1966).
 10. Abraham Stern, *The Margaret Sanger Story* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975).
 11. Madeline Gray, *Margaret Sanger: A Biography of the Champion of Birth Control* (New York: Richard Marek, 1979).
 12. “Kudzu” is a fast growing vine of the legume family.
 13. “Topsy” is a creeping evergreen succulent (such as a sedum or cactus) from the northern Mexico region of Matamoros; it is also known as a “Topsy-turvy.”

This brief monograph is an attempt to set the record straight. It is an attempt to rectify that shameful distortion of the social, cultural, and historical record. It has no other agenda than to replace fiction with fact.

Nevertheless, that agenda necessarily involves stripping away all too many layers of dense palimpsests¹⁴ of politically correct revisionism. But that ought to be the honest historian's central purpose anyway. Henry Cabot Lodge once asserted: "Nearly all the historical work worth doing at the present moment in the English language is the work of shoveling off heaps of rubbish inherited from the immediate past."¹⁵

That then is the task of this book.

Of course, many would question the relevance of any kind of biographical or historical work at all. I cannot even begin to recount how many times a Planned Parenthood staffer has tried to deflect the impact of Sanger's heinous record by dismissing it as "old news" or "ancient history" and thus irrelevant to any current issue or discussion. It is an argument that seems to sell well in the current marketplace of ideas. We have actually come to believe that matters and persons of present import are unaffected by matters and persons of past import.

We moderns hold to a strangely disjunctive view of the relationship between life and work—thus enabling us to nonchalantly separate a person's private character from his or her public accomplishments. But this novel divorce of root from fruit, however genteel, is a ribald denial of one of the most basic truths in life: what you are begets what you do; wrong-headed philosophies stem from wrong-headed philosophers; sin does not just happen—it is sinners that sin.

Thus, according to the English historian and journalist Hilaire Belloc, "Biography always affords the greatest insights into sociology. To comprehend the history of a thing is to unlock the mysteries of its present, and more, to discover the profundities of its future."¹⁶ Similarly, the inimitable Samuel Johnson quipped, "Almost all the miseries of life, almost all the wickedness that infects society, and almost all the distresses that afflict mankind, are the consequences of some defect in private duties."¹⁷ Or, as E. Michael Jones has asserted, "Biography is destiny."¹⁸

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14. *Palimpsests*—things having usually diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface; i.e., parchments or the like from which earlier writings have been partially or completely erased to make room for other texts.
 15. Zachary Keen, *The Art of History* (New York: Ball and Brothers, 1948), 34.
 16. Hilaire Belloc, *The Biographer's Art: Excerpts from Belloc's Horrid Pen* (London: Catholic Union, 1956), 33.
 17. Howard F. Pallin, ed., *Literary English and Scottish Sermons*, (London: Windus Etheridge, 1937), 101.

This is particularly true in the case of Margaret Sanger. The organization she founded, Planned Parenthood, is the oldest, largest, and best-organized provider of abortion and birth control services in the world.¹⁹ From its ignoble beginnings around the turn of the century, the entire shoestring operation consisted of an illegal back alley clinic in a shabby Brooklyn neighborhood staffed by a shadowy clutch of firebrand activists and anarchists.²⁰ It has expanded dramatically into a multibillion-dollar international conglomerate with programs and activities in 134 nations on every inhabited continent. In the United States alone, it has mobilized more than 20,000 staff personnel and volunteers along the front lines of an increasingly confrontational and vitriolic culture war. Today they handle the organization's 167 affiliates and its 922 clinics in virtually every major metropolitan area, coast to coast.²¹ Boasting an opulent national headquarters in New York, a sedulous legislative center in Washington, opprobrious²² regional command posts in Atlanta, Chicago, Miami, and San Francisco, and officious international centers in London, Nairobi, Bangkok, and New Dehli, the Federation showed \$23.5 million in earnings during fiscal year 1992, with \$192.9 million in cash reserves and another \$108.2 million in capital assets.²³ With an estimated combined annual budget—including all regional and international service affiliates—of more than a billion dollars, Planned Parenthood may well be the largest and most profitable nonprofit organization in history.²⁴

The organization has used its considerable political, institutional, and financial clout to mainstream old-school left-wing extremism. It has weighed in with sophisticated lobbying, advertising, and back room strong-arming to virtually remove the millennium-long stigma against child-killing abortion procedures and family-sundering socialization programs. Planned Parenthood thus looms like a Goliath over the increasingly tragic culture war.

Despite its leviathan proportions it is impossible to entirely understand Planned Parenthood's policies, programs, and priorities apart from Marga-

18. E. Michael Jones, *Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 9.

19. Planned Parenthood Federation of America, "1992 Annual Report," 21.

20. Gray, *Margaret Sanger*.

21. PPFA, "Annual Report," 21.

22. *Opprobrious*—deserving public disgrace or ill fame due to conduct considered grossly wrong or vicious.

23. *Ibid.*, 19.

24. *Ibid.*; Also see, International Planned Parenthood Federation, "1991 Annual Report," 22; Also see, *National STOPP News* (November 30, 1993).

ret Sanger's life and work. It was, after all, originally established to be little more than an extension of her life and worldview.²⁵

Most of the material from this project has been drawn from research that I originally conducted for two comprehensive exposés of that vast institutional cash cow. Entitled *Grand Illusions: The Legacy of Planned Parenthood*, the first book has gone through twelve printings and two editions since it was first published in 1988.²⁶ The second book, entitled *Immaculate Deception: The Shifting Agenda of Planned Parenthood*, details the remarkable changes the organization has made over the last decade.²⁷ They gave wide exposure to the tragic proportions of Sanger's saga. From the beginning of those massive projects, though, I felt that a shorter and more carefully focused biographical treatment was warranted. Little has changed in the interim—except that the monolithic reputations of Sanger and her frighteningly dystopic²⁸ organization have only been further enhanced.

It is therefore long overdue that the truth be told. It is long overdue that the proper standing of Margaret Sanger in the sordid history of this bloody century be secured. To that end, this book is written.

You cannot help but notice, however, that it is a deliberately abbreviated tome—especially when it is compared to the breadth and depth of its well-spring, *Grand Illusions* and *Immaculate Deception*. Unpleasantries need to be accurately portrayed, but they need not be belabored. Caveats ought to be precise and to the point. Corrective counter blasts ought to be painstakingly careful, never crossing the all too fine line between informing and defiling the minds of readers.

Just as brevity and purpose are the heart and soul of wit, so they are the crux and culmination of true understanding. In light of this, it is my sincere prayer that true understanding will indeed be the end result of this brief but passionate effort.

Deus Vult.

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25. Douglas R. Scott, *Bad Choices: A Look Inside Planned Parenthood* (Franklin, TN: Legacy Communications, 1992), 29.
 26. George Grant, *Grand Illusions: The Legacy of Planned Parenthood* (Franklin, TN: Legacy 1988, 1992).
 27. George Grant, *Immaculate Deception: The Shifting Agenda of Planned Parenthood*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996).
 28. *Dystopia*—an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives; *adj.*, dystopian, dystopic.

1

ROOT OF BITTERNESS

*Happy is he who not only knows the causes of things,
but who has not lost touch with their beginnings.*

—G. K. CHESTERTON³⁰

Margaret Sanger was born on September 14, 1879, in the small industrial community of Corning in upstate New York, the sixth of eleven children. The circumstances of her home life were never happy—a fact to which she later attributed much of her agitated activism and bitter bombast. If it is true that “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,” it is equally true that “The hand that wrecks the cradle ruins the world.”³¹

Her father, Michael Higgins, was an Irish Catholic immigrant who fancied himself a radical freethinker and a free-wheeling skeptic. As a youngster he had enlisted in General William Sherman’s notorious Twelfth New York Cavalry and proudly participated in the nefarious campaign that ravaged and ravished the South, across Tennessee, through Atlanta, and to the sea. He achieved notable infamy among his peers when he was honored by his commander for special treachery in fiercely subduing the recalcitrant captive population. Not surprisingly, that cruel and inhuman experience apparently hardened and embittered him. Triage and genocide are not easily forgotten by either victims or perpetrators. His criminal inhumanity consti-

30. *Illustrated London News*, (September 26, 1908).

31. James Killarney, *Fulcrum of Vision* (New York: Jamison, Talmidge, and Yeates, 1956), 458.

tuted a kind of spiritual calamity from which he, like so many others of his region, never fully recovered. Forever afterward he was pathetically stunted, unable to maintain even a modicum of normalcy in his life or relations.

He worked sporadically as a stone mason and a tombstone carver but was either unwilling or unable to provide adequately for his large family. Margaret's mother, Anne Purcell, was a second-generation American from a strict Irish Catholic family. She was frail and tubercular but utterly devoted to her unstable and unpredictable husband—as well as to their ever-growing brood of children.

The family suffered bitterly from cold, privation, and hunger. That was the common lot of thousands of other families in nineteenth-century America. But the Higginases also suffered grievously from scorn, shame, and isolation because of Michael's sullen improvidence.³² And like many a man who is proudly progressive in public, he was repressively remonstrant at home. He regularly thrashed his sons "to make men of them."³³ And he treated his wife and daughters as "virtual slaves."³⁴ And when he drank—which was whenever he could afford it—his volatile presence was even more oppressive than normal.

That is the paradox of dogmatic liberalism: though it loudly declares itself a champion of the weak, it is actually an unrelenting truncheon of the strong. Ideology inevitably resolves itself in some form of tyranny.

Sanger later described her family's existence under the unenlightened and inhuman hand of Michael's enlightened humanism as "joyless and filled with drudgery and fear."³⁵ Even as an adult, whenever she was on a train that merely rode through Corning, she got a sharp pain in the pit of her stomach. She suffered, she said, from "Corningitis."³⁶

Clearly, the Higginases had an impoverished and isolated life; but, not only did they have to endure grave social and material lack, they were spiritually deprived as well. As a confirmed skeptic, Michael mocked the sincere religious devotion of most of his neighbors. He openly embraced radicalism, socialism, and atheism. And he had little toleration for the modicum of morality that his poor wife tried to instill in the lives of their hapless children.

32. *Improvident*—not foreseeing and providing for the future; *noun*, improvidence: the quality or state of being improvident.

33. Gray, 19.

34. *Ibid.*, 21.

35. *Ibid.*, 16.

36. *Ibid.*, 18.

One day, for example, when Margaret was on her knees saying the Lord's Prayer, she came to the phrase "Give us this day our daily bread," and her father snidely cut her off.

"Who were you talking to?" he demanded.

"To God," she replied innocently.

"Well, tell me, is God a baker?"

With no little consternation, she said, "No, of course not. But He makes the rain, the sunshine, and all the things that make the wheat, which makes the bread."

After a thoughtful pause her father rejoined, "Well, well, so that's the idea. Then why didn't you just say so? Always say what you mean, my daughter, it is much better."³⁷

In spite of Michael's concerted efforts to undermine Margaret's young and fragile faith, her mother had her baptized in St. Mary's Catholic Church on March 23, 1893. The following year, on July 8, 1894, she was confirmed. Both ceremonies were held in secret—her father would have been furious had he known. For some time afterward she displayed a zealous devotion to spiritual things. She regularly attended services and observed the disciplines of the liturgical year. She demonstrated a budding and apparently authentic hunger for truth.

But gradually the smothering effects of Michael's cynicism took their toll. When her mother died under the strain of her unhappy privation, Margaret was more vulnerable than ever before his fierce undermining. Bitter, lonely, and grief-stricken, by the time she was seventeen her passion for Christ had collapsed into a bitter hatred of the church. This malignant malevolence would forever after be her spiritual hallmark.

Anxious to move away from home as soon as she could, Margaret was willing to go anywhere and try anything—as long as it was far from Corn- ing. After a quick, almost frantic search, she settled on Claverack College. A small and inexpensive coeducational boarding school attached to the famed Hudson River Institute, Claverack was a Methodist high school housed in an imposing wooden building on twenty picturesque acres overlooking the Hudson Valley. Not known for its academic rigors, the school was essentially a finishing school for protean³⁸ youth.

There at Claverack Margaret got her first taste of freedom. And what a wild and intoxicating freedom it was. She plunged into radical politics, suffragette feminism, and unfettered sex. Despite her relatively light academic load, she quickly fell behind in her work. She rarely attended her classes.

37. Ibid.

38. *Protean*—of or resembling Proteus in having a varied nature or ability to assume different forms; Proteus was a sea god who could change his shape at will.

And she almost never completed her assignments. Worse, she neglected her part-time job—necessary to pay for the nominal tuition.

It is said that we become most like those whom we are bitter against. Despite her now obvious animosity toward him, Margaret began to unconsciously emulate her father's erratic personality. The stronger her resistance to his influence grew, the greater her imitation of his improvidence became.

Character has consequences. When she could no longer afford the tuition at Claverack, she was forced to return home—but only long enough to gather her belongings and set her affairs in order. She had drunk from the cup of concupiscence and would never again be satisfied with the quiet responsibilities and virtues of domesticity. And so, as soon as she could, she moved in with her older sister in White Plains, taking a job as a kindergarten teacher.

A youth corrupted became a youth corruptor. Since she herself was now a high school dropout, she was assigned to a class made up primarily of the children of new immigrants. Much to her dismay, she found that her pupils could not understand a word that she said. She quickly grew tired of the laborious routine of teaching day in and day out. Gratefully, she quit after just two short terms.

Next, she applied for a job as a nurse-probationer at a small local hospital. Again, though, Margaret's careless and nomadic rootlessness was telling. Hospital work proved to be even more vexing and taxing than teaching. She never finished her training. In later years, however, she would claim to be a trained and practiced nurse. Nearly forty pages of her *Autobiography* were devoted to her varied, often heroic, experiences as a seasoned veteran in professional health care.³⁹ But they were little more than Margaret's well-realized fantasies.

In fact, her actual exposure to medicine was almost nonexistent: she never got beyond running errands, changing sheets, and emptying bedpans. Like so much else in the mythic fable of her rise to prominence, her career as a nurse was little more than perpetrated fraud.

Determined to escape from the harsh bondage of labor and industry, she once again began to cast about for some viable alternative. She finally resorted to the only viable course open to a poor girl in those seemingly unenlightened days when the Puritan work ethic was still ethical: she married into money.

39. Margaret Sanger, *An Autobiography* (New York: Dover, 1938).