There are holy duties of conscience from which no one can free us, and which we must fulfill even if it costs us our own lives: never under any condition may man blaspheme God; never may he hate his fellow man; never may he kill an innocent person outside justified self defense.

In 1937 the Holy Father’s encyclical, Mit Brennender Sorge, had to be printed outside of Germany, and secretly smuggled into the country. It was distributed clandestinely so that it might be read in all Churches on Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. The Nazis were furious. They confiscated copies of the encyclical and arrested those who sought to distribute it. In such a context, to ask why the Church didn’t protest more than she did, is a little like asking why a man whose tongue has been cut off can’t speak, or why one whose eyes have been gouged out can’t see. Some of the most impressive evidence for the real situation of the Church in Nazi Germany shows up in Gestapo surveillance records. SD (Sicherheitsdienst) reports are replete with lengthy excerpts from pastoral letters, sermons, and the Fulda Bishops conferences. Priests often asserted that National Socialism with its atheism, nihilism, brutality, and persecution of the Church was no better than Bolshevism. For almost five years Gestapo agents from all over Germany consistently reported a high incidence of clerical protest noticeably increasing in 1941. At Nuremberg one witness reckoned spies and informers among diocesan officials, in parishes and elsewhere at about 30,000. Virtually all eyewitness reports of the period witness to the unique vulnerability and persecution of the Church in the “losing battle” she was so valiantly fighting against both Stalinist and Nazi secular tyrannies. Other than its lack of attention to and respect for these and other facts, which undoubtedly had a major influence on the Stauffenberg’s Catholic mental and moral vision of things, Peter Hoffmann’s “family history” is rich with biographical detail and very helpful.

—Reverend Edward Krause
Gannon University, Erie, Pennsylvania


*Dehumanizing the Vulnerable: When Word Games Take Lives*, by William Brennan, is a book that merits being read by the widest possible audience. It is meticulously researched and well argued, and packs quite an emotional wallop to boot. In its discussion of such hot button moral topics as abortion, euthanasia, racism, sexism, and totalitarianism, this book will validate and fortify the beliefs of some (including those of the reviewer); infuriate others; and leave still others
discomforted and shaken. This is a book about which it is difficult if not impossi-
ble to remain indifferent.

Brennan’s basic thesis is that the great crimes against humanity (abortion, 
attacks on the vulnerable, dependent and disabled, the exploitation of one sex by the 
other, anti-Semitism, genocide under Nazism and Soviet totalitarianism, racism and 
the enslavement of non-whites, and the virtual annihilation of America’s indigenous 
peoples) share in common a rhetoric or language of dehumanization. This common 
way of speaking, Brennan argues, takes a variety of forms, ranging from viewing the 
unborn, the dependent, women, Jews, Native Americans, blacks either as “deficient 
humans,” “subhuman” or “nonhuman,” a “species of lower animals,” “repulsive par-
asitic creatures,” “diseased organisms,” “inanimate objects,” “waste products,” or 
“legal nonpersons.”

Brennan argues that pinning such labels on people facilitates greatly or makes 
possible denying them their basic and essential dignity as full-fledged human 
beings. It follows that a critically important part of the solution to human oppres-
sion is a semantic sea change to rhetoric that is life-affirming and that is capable of 
counteracting the “toxic” rhetoric of dehumanization. Brennan speaks of an “expan-
sive definition of humanity,” one that embraces all human persons regardless of their 
physical characteristics or stage of life. He points out rightfully that a shift in 
semantics will not in and of itself eradicate dehumanization. He recognizes that 
human institutions must change: laws ought to reflect an expansive definition of 
humanity, and social systems should not allow some people to dehumanize others 
for profit. However, the powerful role of semantic oppression, long neglected, is 
given its just due in this book.

Brennan addresses the critical issue of the grounds on which the ethic of 
expansiveness can be defended. He argues that an “expansive definition of 
humanity” can be based either on a humanistic or supernatural worldview. That is, 
its underpinning can be natural law (human beings regardless of characteristics or 
stage of life being entitled to inalienable rights to dignity and well-being) or divine 
law (human beings regardless of characteristics or stage of life being equally sacred 
and valuable in the eyes of God). Thus, Brennan clearly is not pitting secularists 
against those with an appreciation for the supernatural foundations of our existence; 
rather he is pitting those with an expansive view of humanity against those with an 
exclusionary or restrictive view of humanity.

I find myself in wholehearted sympathy with Brennan’s argument. It exem-
plifies a sociology that is morally grounded. A universal moral standard (an expan-
sive definition of humanity) is put forward as a societal ideal. The sociolo-
gical side of the analysis identifies those cultural elements (in this case linguistic 
symbols) that not only define how human beings are viewed but have implications 
for how various groups are treated differently. The sociological analysis helps us 
understand why the universal moral principle is not being realized and what steps
need to be taken to bring the reality closer in line with the ideal. Clearly the socio-
logical analysis constitutes an intellectual activity independent of the activity by
which the moral standard is delineated. However, the sociological analysis is
clearly subordinate to the moral mission which serves to frame that activity.
Brennan’s argument is not esoteric, given the fact that his book is meant to appeal
to a general audience and therefore a premium is placed on accessibility. However, the development of a morally-grounded sociology or a Catholic sociolo-
gy requires systematic efforts to integrate two autonomous yet cybernetically
linked intellectual activities—the development of universal moral principles upon
which society should be grounded, on the one hand, and the identification of
social and cultural forces that either support or impede the actualization of those
principles, on the other. In unpacking Brennan’s argument, we are able to infer
the outlines of such an integrated perspective. High on the agenda of those inter-
ested in developing, legitimizing, and institutionalizing a morally based sociology
or a Catholic sociology should be to present such a perspective in as explicit and
codified a form as possible.

—Anthony L. Haynor
Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey

John J. Mulloy - *Christianity and the Challenge of History*. Front Royal,

This book, the only one by John Mulloy, was published a few weeks before his
death on 9 October 1995 in Fayetteville, Arkansas. As he points out in his
Acknowledgements, it is made up mostly of articles published in “The Catholic
Tradition” column of the *Wanderer* during the late 1970s and 1980s, and in *The
Dawson Newsletter*, a quarterly devoted to the thought of Christopher Dawson
(1889-1970) which was founded in 1983, Mulloy being the editor.

Thus they were written in those fateful decades following Vatican II when a
wave of secular social idealism swept over the Catholic Church, and the leaders of
the Catholic revival in the earlier decades were dismissed as irrelevant or outdat-
ed. This historical condition explains the long quotations Mulloy uses to give the
reader a vivid impression of orthodox writers who should be their guides on the
great Christian theological themes in Part I and the various philosophers of history
in Part II.

Before describing its qualities let me mention three recommendations.
Dawson, in his review of Ronald Knox’s book *Enthusiasm* (*Dublin Review*, 1952)
said that a good book deserved a good bibliography. In the same way, Mulloy’s
book deserves a good index; not only an index of names but an index of cultures