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H. P. Dunn

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# A New Oath for Physicians

by

H.P. Dunn, M.D.

*The author is a Corresponding Editor for The Linacre Quarterly in Auckland, New Zealand.*

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When my book, *Ethics for Doctors, Nurses and Patients* (Alba House, New York, 1994) came out, Cardinal O'Connor of New York described it as "a remarkable book . . . a very beautiful book" (I would be the last to use such terms!) and at the annual hospital Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral he read the complete text of my suggested Christian Oath for physicians. My point was that there is a pagan Oath (Hippocrates), a Jewish Oath (Maimonides) and a modern Islamic Oath but no Catholic or Christian Oath.

Fr. Anthony Zimmerman, SVD, of Nagoya, Japan, suggested that *The Linacre Quarterly* might reprint the new Oath in the hope that some Christian medical schools might use it for their graduating classes. I give the text here with some explanatory remarks in brackets. Schools are welcome to adapt it as they wish.

"O God, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (this is to replace Hippocrates' appeal to gods and goddesses), I pledge that in the practice of Medicine I shall with Your help adhere to the principles of love and justice. I shall make the service and welfare of my patient my first duty which will take precedence over the interests of society or the state.

"Anything which the patient tells me in confidence will be respected and will not be revealed during life or after death.

"I shall not participate in or facilitate artificial contraception, sterilization or induced abortion. (There may be something to be said for limiting this sentence to abortion, as Hippocrates did. But I include the other two facets of the current antinatalist triad because of the conviction that, once contraception is admitted, it is only a matter of time before medical practice progresses to the other two.) I shall not directly bring about the death of any patient, normal or abnormal, healthy or in a terminal illness.

"I shall gratefully accept any financial rewards which You grant to me but shall not allow the pursuit of wealth to dominate my practice or to influence my clinical decisions.

"I shall regard my teachers with gratitude and respect (I doubt if one need go

as far as Hippocrates in supporting them and their families as well!), and I shall foster among my colleagues an atmosphere of friendship and cooperation. In presenting scientific papers I shall repudiate any dishonesty, knowing that we have a duty to the truth in our elucidation of the mysteries of Your creation of the human body. (On second thought it would have been as well to include: "I shall not use my privileged position to seduce any patients, male or female." These temptations were recognised by Hippocrates.)

"In purity and holiness I shall pass my life and practice my profession. My soul will be strengthened by daily prayer, weekly Mass and frequent reception of Your sacraments.

"I ask the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph to bless my family life, and I pray that You will give me a share in the wisdom and courage of Our Lord Jesus Christ in undertaking this medical apostolate. Amen."

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